



## Forge Your Imagination, Episode 3, Environmental Planning

### ***Transcript:***

00;00;08;05 - 00;00;49;07

Tom

[TOM] Greetings, adventurer. Welcome to the Ocean County Library's third episode of Forge Your Imagination: A Guide to Immersive World Building podcast, a series that will point creative individuals in the right direction when attempting to create your own world. I'm your host, Tom, a worldbuilding enthusiast and professional dungeon master with over 13 years of experience. In today's episode, I will be discussing how to create an environment. This will cover how to create biomes and general fun and wacky climate ideas based on your specific genre. Now, without further ado, let's get this quest on a roll.

00;00;49;09 - 00;07;53;21

Tom

[TOM] Question one: why are environments important? Well, the climate and environment of the planet are some of the most crucial steps if you plan on making it unique. Most of the worlds that I could think of have some type of unique environment that really makes the world around them pop. The purpose of the climate is to really draw in your target audience with a beautiful, fun, or sometimes even harsh environment and biome. For an example, one such that stuck out to me was the idea of floating islands. These floating islands were covered with luscious plant life and had an abundance of flying creatures on them. This could be considered both beautiful and dangerous, especially if you're trying to pilot a ship and navigate past them. Now, because of the scenery alone, I was more invested and able to better retain memories of the movie series Avatar. Another great example would be if I showed a sci fi fan a picture of a desert planet that has twin sons. Most fans would probably immediately tell you it's a photo of Tatooine. But what if I told you to close your eyes and think of that desert planet? But just change a slight little detail and tell you that you know there's an abundance of spice on this planet that would immediately change the planet from Tatooine to Arrakis, from the Dune trilogy. You could even go more in depth with iconic, specific locations. If you're a fan of low fantasy and I asked you what character lives in the cupboard under the stairs, most people would be able to tell me that it's Harry Potter. I'd also like you to keep in mind that all of the titles mentioned in today's episode are available to borrow at the Ocean County Library. The point I'm trying to make is that an engaging climate, biome, and location are just as important to the story that you plan on writing. Of course, you should try to draw on the readers attention with a good plot and likable characters, but before even that, you should be setting the scene

properly with an iconic environment. I think there are a bunch of different elements to take into consideration when building an iconic environment. Remember to focus on using details to describe the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of the place. Let me lay out some of the most important details that could help a place become iconic. The first key detail would have to be color. What I mean by that is that a novel that usually uses like a normal green classic forest, that's not really something that stands out. It's not unique or iconic. Instead, we could try to breathe some life into the world around us by adding a dash of color. We could change the classic boring green to a darker gray or black if we wanted the scene to be more ominous and eerie. Or we could do the exact opposite and make it neon and fluorescent. Make it fun and engaging. I'm personally a sucker for a book or movie with some cool looking glowing mushrooms in it. Or maybe we want to foreshadow a war. In this case, we could use the color crimson to assist us. See, this color is often interpreted as, you know, danger, anger, revenge. So if you describe an ominous forest that has red leaves, this can be considered a possible war zone from the past. Or it could even be foreshadowing for the future. People can subconsciously catch on to that, and this way it could help us tie in emotions and invoke ideas from the readers themselves. Even something simple like color changing could be a huge boon to new adventures making their first attempt at creating an iconic environment. Our second important detail would have to be temperature. Deciding on a temperature can change the theme and vibe of a location. For example, if you saw a snow-covered frozen biome that chills you to the bone, that's exactly what you would expect of it. There's nothing wrong with an environment like this, especially if what you want is a harsh and unforgiving land. But if you were writing something you know, low fantasy or just fantasy in general, and you wanted to make it really interesting, something that no one else would do, you know, maybe for some magical reason, the winters of this nation is warm. The snow, which should have been cold, it should have melted. But for some reason, this type of snow didn't. You know, this would really make things more unique and get your mind working. And anyone listening to it or reading it would really try to figure out how that works. Not to mention it would change how the native people would act, and it would change what the native people would wear. They wouldn't have to wear like heavy coats and big boots if it was warm itself. So it just really changes up the natural theme. A third detail to think of would be weather. Is this a location that's constantly snowed in? Or is this a specific location that's only ever cloudy and foggy, where barely any sunlight shines down upon their citizens? In that case, it could be more ominous. It could be shady with a lot of alleyways and dark corners. Or maybe you decide that it's like that because the city's inhabitants are all actually vampires who thrive in the night. Or is this a specific location that constantly receives torrential downpours? See, rain could be really useful to work with, but try to build upon it and ask yourself why. Maybe if it's a fantasy setting, the rain is just caused by angry water spirits who are angered by fishermen overfishing the lake or river. You could always add reasons to why the weather is like that. Adventurers could even use sounds to tie in their environment, like if someone was in a swamp, a natural sound to tie in would be the croak or ribbit of a frog, and the sound of flowing water. Or if you want to be more ominous, it could be the sound of a screeching barn owl. Possibly you even hear something disturbing the flow of the water, swimming against it. Environments could be elevated even further through these means. Or maybe you decide to make use of smells. The smells that accompany a swamp could be the classic rotten eggs. Or if you decide to spice things up, maybe the swamp tries to keep people from leaving, and it gives off with the slight scent of a delicious, warm apple pie. Trying to draw people in for nefarious reasons. It's up to you to make an environment as chaotic and memorable as possible.

00;07;53;23 - 00;09;06;21

Tom

[TOM] Wow, adventurer! It appears we have stumbled upon a treasure trove of knowledge. Let's take a moment to review what we found. The Ocean County Library offers adult writers groups for creative writing at multiple different branches like the Brick, Jackson, Manchester, Point Pleasant Borough and Waretown Library. If this is something you're interested in, adventurer, please keep an eye out for a group near you. More information on exact dates could be found on our website, [theoceancountylibrary.org](http://theoceancountylibrary.org), under Calendar of Events. Additionally, I'd like to mention that this month, March 13th, 2025, the Jackson Library will have an event called "Pens and Pages: Teen Writing and Book Club." This is where you could bring your latest masterpiece or a little scribble and share it if you're feeling brave. This is for anyone ages 12 to 18, and registration for this event is required. I think it would be a great program to attend for younger adventurers. Now, adventurer, Grab your anvil and hammer because it's time to return to forging your imagination.

00;09;06;24 - 00;11;26;14

Tom

[TOM] There's no shortage of ideas on how to spice up your environment to make it considered iconic. It doesn't even always have to make much sense, especially if you're writing a fantasy story. As a dungeon master, my favorite thing is to rationalize the decisions I make with the rule of cool. Basically, what that means is that even something that's irrational and causes typical disbelief, as long as it's cool, you could just write it off as the effect of magic and find a way around the written rules. For example, in my fantasy universe, there are other dimensions that connect to it. One such realm is the realm of the abyss, which is a really similar concept to Tartarus, if you know from Greek and Roman mythology. It's a scary dimension filled with monsters and has no possibility for escape. However, when my D&D players showed interest in such a place, I decided that if they ever visited there, there would be an escape room, you know, one that's really complicated and complex, at least for them it was. But, you know, as long as they put their minds to it, they'd be able to find their way out. And eventually they did visit such a place, and just as expected, they struggled with it, but they did manage to find the answers and escape through a portal, which then crumbled because it was only a one-time use. I explained to them that escaping the world that had no escape was actually a tear in the fabric of reality that was created through quote-unquote "magic." It's something that made them feel accomplished and cool. So I thought in this case, it was a huge success. Now I decided to help you all a little different today. We're going to do some brainstorming. To do this, I'm going to try a slightly different approach. I'm going to ask you a question, and I'd like you to pause the podcast and think about your answer. These questions will be based around the subject of environment building. There's no need to worry about your answers. After all, there are no answers in world building that are wrong. I'm going to give you a second to prepare yourself for adventure, and then I'm going to ask my first question.

00;11;26;16 - 00;12;38;27

Tom

[TOM] Question number one: let's say we're creating our own world and decided that the world in question had multiple moons. You, as the creator could build upon that in a bunch of different ways. What is one way that you would use to build upon it and make it your own? I'm sure you all did great. There's nothing but right answers out there. One idea that came to my mind was that if this was a sci fi

world, maybe the second moon is simply disguised as such, but in reality, it's a large mechanical military base. Or perhaps if this was a fantasy world, maybe having multiple moons is what makes the ocean so chaotic. Maybe that's why there's a bunch of magical creatures living in there, because the waves are so rough and turbulent that it's a more hospitable area for them and not for humanity. Or you could even use multiple moons to extend the nights and explain why nighttime lasts for 16 out of 24 hours in the day. That being said, let's give another question a shot.

00;12;39;00 - 00;12;54;07

Tom

[TOM] Question number two: if I said the world had very little sunlight, and we decided to come up with a reason of why the world is like that, what would you decide?

00;12;54;09 - 00;13;37;08

Tom

[TOM] Once again, I'm sure you did a great job, adventurer. A few ideas that came to my mind would be maybe the world has multiple moons, like I said before, and only one sun in the rotation. So the light on the planet is very scarce. Or maybe the locals are nocturnal and night dwellers. So they chose this planet, knowing it receives less sunlight. You know, specific groups of people, like vampires or demons this would work wonderfully for. Or maybe the sun is being blocked by a powerful type of magic, or for some more sinister purpose. With that being said, let's move on to our next question.

00;13;37;10 - 00;14;13;26

Tom

[TOM] Question number three. This time, let's set the scene a little bit different. For this environment, I want you to think of the history behind the land. Let's say the scene is a large city with big walls to keep out any dangers. Then over the whole city is the skeleton of a gargantuan dragon. The biome itself is desert-like wasteland, but the city itself seems to flourish like an oasis. What kind of history do you think would accompany such a unique land?

00;14;13;28 - 00;15;22;13

Tom

[TOM] Okay, so let's see if your answers line up with any of my own. One idea I had was that the skeleton of the fallen dragon could have been a great guardian beast of the city that had been hunted while protecting them. This would allow the city and its people to have a positive disposition to dragons in the future, as well as dragons thinking positively about them. The second idea that I had was that the city was created when they found the dragon's skeleton in the desert. They built their city there so that they could avoid the harsh sunlight. Or the third option that I thought of was that they could have founded the city around the dragon after they hunted it down, because they made their money by mining the bones and the scales of the dragon and selling them for a good price to uphold their fancy lifestyle in this oasis city. There are a bunch of different ways to create lore around the city, using history and deciding the morals and beliefs of its people. This will bring us over to our last question of the day.

00;15;22;16 - 00;15;40;25

Tom

[TOM] Question number four: if I said I wanted a fun environment for a mermaid to live in that was safely hidden away from the human eyes, where would you think this city should be created?

00;15;40;28 - 00;17;11;17

Tom

[TOM] If you're anything like me, then naturally the first thing that came to your mind was the lost city of Atlantis, an island that is said to have sunk to the bottom of the ocean where the mermaids would now reside. Or maybe you thought of a bright, fluorescent looking Coral City, you know, right in the coral reefs. Or another idea I had was a village that was off the coast of the sea, one that had been created by carving into the side of a mountain. To get to this city, you would have had to navigate a series of complex tunnels, and unless you knew the secret way to find them, it would be almost impossible. Especially since this is a cave full of water. It would be impossible for you to know where to go, as well as to fight the current and get an oxygen tank large enough to make this journey. But knowing their secret, you could find your way by following a luminescent algae that shines only under blue light. I just want you to remember that there are no limits when making an iconic environment. Feel free to let your creativity flow and do your best to tie in one or more topics we've discussed today to elevate your climates and environments. But today, that's everything I had to discuss. Tune in on our next episode to officially dive into ideas on how to create your world's very own map.

00;17;11;20 - 00;17;43;15

Tom

[TOM] If you were hearing this message, you've officially listened to the entire episode. And for that, I'd like to thank you. I hope you enjoyed this episode, and if you did, please take a look over some of our other OCL Sound Waves podcasts. Feel free to leave us a rating on Spotify, RadioPublic, and Pocket Casts. Most importantly, safe travels, adventurers.

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Voiceover

[VOICEOVER] Are you a student in 8th through 12th grade? Are you looking for a dress for your junior or senior prom? Or perhaps a spring formal or 8th grade dance? Then keep these dates in mind: the Ocean County Library is returning with the 17th annual Prom Dress Giveaway. The Prom Dress Giveaway allows you to take home the dress of your dreams for free. Simply come to one of our participating branches, find a dress, and take it home. The giveaways will be from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Toms River Branch on Monday, March 17th, Tuesday, March 18th and Wednesday, March 19th. The Little Egg Harbor Branch on Tuesday, March 25th and Wednesday, March 26th. And finally the Jackson Branch on Tuesday, April 1st and Wednesday, April 2nd. For more details, check out our website at [theoceancountylibrary.org](http://theoceancountylibrary.org), visit your local branch, or call us at 732-349-6200. We look forward to seeing you back.