Design Notes: Fantasy, Verisimilitude, and Two Ways of ‘Grounding’ Fantastical Fiction

While it’s a truism to say that designing a city around a giant, magical, dinosaur monster is utterly fantastic, I think the real failure of imagination would be to suggest that simply having a wondrous setting absolves a writer of considering verisimilitude or otherwise divorcing the work from issues of the real world/real people (even if those issues are refracted through an odd lens of magic.) There’s two primary ways I ensure that some ‘real world’ considerations echo through Salt in Wounds and help make it ‘believable.’

Every Character Wants Something: Ultimately, you can create a crazy-weird-bizarre worlds by grounding it into understandable characters. And, the most important way to make characters (even inhuman characters in a fantastical setting) is to make it clear what they want. Every character I write for Salt in Wounds –at their core- wants something and the tangle of cross purposes is where the story comes from. Magic, even titanic, reality warping magic can still feel ‘real’ is wielded by or effecting characters who have an exceptionally clear vision of what they want and what they’re willing (or not willing) to do to get it.

Every Problem was a Solution to Some Other Problem: One of the design philosophies I use in a lot of my work (and I lean on \*heavily\* in Salt in Wounds) is that every problem was the solution to some other problem. The rampaging Tarrasque was a problem ‘solved’ by binding it in place and slaughtering it endlessly. Which caused the Tarrasque’s magical blood to begin destabilizing the environment which was ‘solved’ by the creation of the Heartsblood Marsh, which –ultimately- might end up being a bigger problem than the Tarrasque ever was. People mutating horribly from eating improperly processed Tarrasque Flesh is a problem caused by people looking for a solution to the problem of famine. And so on and so forth. I’m not so cynical as to suggest or design that there aren’t ‘real’ solutions (by which I mean simply solutions that solve more problems than they create) but I do enjoy writing under the assumptions that: real solutions are rare, these solutions are generally hard/expensive, and that without actual heroism these real/difficult solutions will usually be ignored in favor of the easy\false solutions (which end up costing so much more ultimately).

That’s the biggest things I try to design into Salt in Wounds, and my post next week will be about how I try to refer to some real world issues/fears when I write about Salt in Wounds. See you then!