

Making Space for Myth: Worldbuilding and Interconnected Narratives in *Mythspace*

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Abstract

The comics medium has long proven to be fertile ground for worldbuilding, spawning not only imaginary worlds but multiverses that have become international transmedial franchises. In the Philippines, komiks (as it is called locally) has provided the Filipino popular imagination with worlds populated by superheroes, super spies, supernatural detectives, and creatures from different Philippine mythologies. The komiks series *Mythspace*, written by Paolo Chikiamco and illustrated by several artist-collaborators, takes the latter concept, and launches it into outer space. Classified by its own writer as a “Filipino space opera” consisting of six loosely interconnected stories, *Mythspace* presents a storyworld where the creatures of Philippine lower mythologies are based on various alien species that visited the Philippines long ago. The article will examine the use of interconnected narratives as a strategy for worldbuilding in *Mythspace*. Drawing from both subcreation and comic studies, this article posits that interconnected narratives is a worldbuilding technique particularly well-suited to comics, and that the collaborative nature of the medium allows for a diversity of genres and visual styles that can be used by future komiks creators to develop more expansive storyworlds.

Keywords: comics studies, subcreation studies, storyworlds, *Mythspace*, the Philippines

The comics medium has long proven to be fertile ground for worldbuilding. It has spawned not only storyworlds in the pages of comic books and graphic novels but given birth to multiverses of storytelling across several media. At the forefront are American comics giants Marvel and DC Comics, whose storyworlds have been generating stories collectively for almost 90 years, both on the comics pages and in other mediums such as movies, television shows, books, video games, and podcasts. In 2019 alone, DC and Marvel Comics properties were adapted into 20 television shows and 8 movies. This does not count the fact that the global box office was dominated by the comics-inspired movies *Avengers: Endgame*, *Spider-Man: Far from Home*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Joker*, which collectively earned over 6 billion dollars worldwide (“2019 Worldwide Box Office”).

Other comics traditions around the world have similarly been generative of popular storyworlds. The Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* has, for example, the galaxy-spanning series *Valérian and Laureline* and the post-apocalyptic dystopian thriller *Snowpiercer*. British comics has the popular *3000 A.D.* storyworld where the character Judge Dredd comes from. Meanwhile, Japanese *manga* has produced so many storyworlds of note, like those of *Attack on Titan* and *One Piece*, that have captured the imagination of readers all over the world.

In the Philippines, *komiks* (as the local form of the medium is called) has likewise provided the Filipino imagination with storyworlds – populated by superheroes, super spies, supernatural detectives, and folkloric creatures from different Philippine mythologies – since the medium emerged in the 1920s. Like its other counterpart traditions around the world, Filipino *komiks* stories and characters became popular with mass audiences and adapted into different forms of media. In fact, from the 1950s to the late 1980s, *komiks*, in the form of weekly *komiks* magazine anthologies, were the most popular reading material in the country. Writing in 1986, writer Cloualdo del Mundo, Jr. called the *komiks* magazines the “national ‘book’” and estimated that the volume of titles being published at the time had the potential to reach a third of the Philippines’ population (471). But while some of stories and characters from *komiks* remain popular to this day and are still being adapted for movies and television programmes, the storyworlds of *komiks* have not been given attention by readers and academics alike.

That said, it is notable that more contemporary titles like Budjette Tan and KaJo Baldesimo’s *Trese*, Mervin Malonzo’s *Tabi Po*, and Paolo Fabregas’s *The Filipino Heroes League* have been paying more attention to the aspect of worldbuilding by focusing on series-long plots and character arcs, as well as using extended flashbacks to flesh out the storyworld. But perhaps no recent *komiks* title has paid more attention to worldbuilding than writer Paolo Chikiamco’s space opera, *Mythspace*.

This article will examine worldbuilding in Chikiamco’s *Mythspace*, particularly its use of interconnected narratives as a strategy for worldbuilding in contemporary *komiks*. Drawing from both subcreation and comic studies, this essay posits that interconnected narratives is a worldbuilding technique particularly well-suited to comics, and that the collaborative nature of the medium allows for a diversity of genres and visual styles that expand and enrich the storyworld. The essay will first examine subcreation theory and how this applies to comics studies. Then it will survey the storyworlds of specific *komiks* narratives, as well as the techniques of worldbuilding employed by *komiks* creators. It will then look at the series *Mythspace* and how it employs its narrative structure, not only to tell a story but also build its intergalactic storyworld. Finally, the essay will

examine how the use of interconnected narratives can be used by future komiks creators to develop more expansive storyworlds.

Worldbuilding and Comics

The term “storyworld,” in its simplest sense, refers to the imaginary world which is the setting of a narrative. However, storyworlds are not just backdrops behind characters but complex “mediated entities.” Unlike the traditional conception of a fictional setting, storyworlds can extend beyond a single narrative, a single medium, and a single author (Wolf, “Introduction”). While storyworlds are present in all fictional narratives, they become most prominent in speculative fiction narratives – such as science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror – that broadly deviate from what we understand to be real. Thus, storyworlds are often featured in popular titles such as the *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Ring* trilogy, and the multiverses of both DC and Marvel Entertainment, which began from their comics titles.

In *Building Imaginary Worlds*, Mark J.P. Wolf makes the case for the study of storyworlds. According to him, works of fiction have been examined closely for their narratives, characters, psychological dimension, among others, but little attention has been paid to the worlds where these fictions take place. He contends that the study of storyworlds is timely given that “entertainment in general, is moving more and more in the direction of subcreational worldbuilding” (“Introduction”). Because of the transmedial nature of storyworlds, in general, the study of storyworlds, or subcreation studies, is necessarily interdisciplinary in nature and draws from a variety of fields including film and literary studies, cognitive science, and philosophy. Similarly, comics studies requires an interdisciplinary “toolbox” (Kukkonen and Haberkorn 239) given the medium’s complex nature. While comics has been the object of study for far longer than storyworlds, one aspect of the medium that remains relatively unexplored is how comics enables meaning-making. One of the earliest attempts at this was done by Scott McCloud, a practitioner and advocate of the comics medium, who proposed that readers going through a comics strip or page enact continuous “closure” between individual, sequential panels (62-68).

In *The System of Comics*, academic Thierry Groensteen applies a semiotic approach to the task. Unlike McCloud, who breaks down comics into its constituent elements for analysis, Groensteen believes that meaning-making in the comics medium is facilitated by the spatial relationships of images on the comics page, or what he

calls the “hyperframe” (30), as well as the sequence of images found inside it. Karin Kukkonen, on the other hand, proposes the use of cognitive approaches in comics studies. In *Contemporary Comics Storytelling*, she incorporates cognitive semantics, discourse psychology, and cognitive narrative studies in crafting a new way of understanding how readers engage with comics. According to Kukkonen :

[This approach] offers a new reading [...] based on clues and gaps in the comics text rather than on semiotic codes. Clues and gaps elicit cognitive processes such as establishing a generic frame of reference within whose parameters we read the story, positing a mental model of the storyworld within which we imagine the events of the story, and projecting fictional minds, their moral judgments, and learning processes. (8)

Kukkonen’s approach is of particular interest because it touches on the creation of the comic’s storyworld. In her cognitive approach, the comics storyworld, as with its narrative, is built on the clues and gaps in the comics which lead the reader to infer the “mental model” of the storyworld.

By this, Kukkonen means that while the reader does not fully grasp the entirety of the storyworld, the clues and gaps in the narrative allow the reader to infer what the world might look like inside their head. These clues and gaps might be from within the comics, such as a snippet of dialogue or a background detail, or from paratextual materials like cover images, interviews, and promotional materials.

Komiks Storyworlds

The komiks tradition in the Philippines dates back to the 1920s, with komiks strips first appearing in magazines. The first popular komiks strip, *Kenkoy*, was first published in 1929 in the pages of *Liwayway* magazine. Set in the real world, the strip followed the funny, light-hearted misadventures of the titular character, though others saw the strip as making fun of Filipinos who aspired to be like their then American colonial masters (Lent 37). This is not surprising given that, at the time, Filipino cartoon and comic art was largely found in news publications in the form of editorial cartoons.

The popularity of *Kenkoy* led to other magazine publishers commissioning komiks strips for their publication. These strips were marked by their resemblance to popular American comics strips and characters of the time such as *Popeye* and *Bringing Up Father*. These included Jose Zabala-Santos’s *Lukas Malakas* (Popeye),

Procopio Borromeo's *Goyo at Kikay* (Bringing Up Father) and *Kulafu*, written by Pedrito Reyes and drawn by Francisco Reyes (Lent 188).

First published in 1933, *Kulafu* was clearly inspired by the pulp hero *Tarzan* created by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Like *Tarzan*, the titular hero of *Kulafu* was raised by great apes in the jungle after the young *Kulafu* was kidnapped by a giant bird as a child and almost eaten by his captor. Instead of Africa, *Kulafu* was set in the jungles of the Southern Philippines before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers (Villegas). The series appeared in *Liwayway* magazine and ran until the start of World War II in the Pacific. It was the first komiks strip to be published in a two-page spread and in colour. *Kulafu* is said to have rivalled *Kenkoy* in popularity, but the strip was not revived immediately after the war (Villegas).

Kulafu is notable because this is the first instance of a fantastic setting in komiks. Where other contemporary strips such as *Kenkoy* are set in the "real world," *Kulafu*'s distant past is a completely different world from the real jungles of the Southern Philippines. This jungle is a fantastic place filled with forgotten tribes and mythical creatures such as sirena (merfolk) and dragons (Villegas). Wolf calls *Kulafu*'s storyworld a "secondary world" ("Ch. 4"), one that is separated by some kind of border from the "Primary World" which is a facsimile of reality. In the case of *Kulafu*, by setting it in the distant past, time separates the two storyworlds.

Sadly, a complete accounting of the fantastic elements in *Kulafu* is impossible, given that most of the original text is either in the hands of private collectors, the creators' families, or lost to time. The same is true for most of the komiks magazines published before the 2000s, as a comprehensive archive of komiks magazines in the Philippines does not exist. The character *Kulafu*, in fact, is now more known for the liquor named after him, than the komiks serial in which he appeared (Villegas).

Soledad S. Reyes, who sees *Kulafu* as an expression of the folk epic in komiks (396-397), has noted that there are several komiks stories, especially after the war, that are set in the country's distant past. For example, National Artist Francisco V. Coching created the *Kulafu*-inspired female warrior character named Mira-bini for an eponymous strip before the war. Later, after the war, Coching would create another *Kulafu*-inspired character, Hagibis, as well as masked heroes like El Indio and anti-heroes like Sabas, Ang Barbaro, and Ang Berdugo. The latter two characters' komiks stories are set during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines.

Prolific komiks writer Clodualdo del Mundo, Sr., meanwhile, made his name with his retelling of local legends, as well as medieval romances in titles such as *Babaing Mandirigma* (Female Warrior, 1952), *Escrimador* (Swordsman, 1954-1955), and *Anak ni Principe Amante* (The Child of Prince Amante, 1964-1965). The latter

was adapted for radio and movies, and both these versions were considered blockbusters of their time. According to Reyes, the “need to return to an irretrievable past” (399) is a reaction to the trauma of the World War II in the Pacific, when the City of Manila was levelled to the ground. Reyes sees these turns to the distant past as an escape for both readers and writers from the misery and despair of the postwar years (403).

After World War II, komiks magazines emerged and soon became ubiquitous in the country. The first issue of *Halakhak*, the first komiks magazine, was published in November 1946 and quickly became a sensation. However, because of mismanagement, the title ran for only 10 issues (Lent, 55). But it was enough to demonstrate to other publishers that there was a market for a purely komiks publication. From 1947 to 1953, several komiks magazine titles came out to varying success including *Hiwaga Komiks* (1950) and *Marte* (1952). These two titles are notable because they are dedicated to speculative fiction: *Hiwaga* focusing on horror, fantasy, and mystery stories; and *Marte*, which was dedicated to science fiction stories (Villegas).

Like the early American comic books, komiks magazines featured both short, self-contained stories as well as long, serialized stories called “komiks nobelas.” Coching and Del Mundo’s aforementioned stories were all serialized komiks nobelas, with instalments coming out on a weekly basis. The komiks nobelas were fertile ground for developing komiks characters because of their length. Enduring komiks characters such as the mermaid Dyesebel, the super spy D-13, and the superheroes Darna, Captain Barbell, and Lastikman were all from komiks nobelas. Some of these characters have even had multiple komiks nobelas over the decades, with each komiks nobela either building on the previous one or restarting the narrative of the character for a new audience, a practice common in American superhero comics titles.

The density of narratives of these popular characters, including their transmedial adaptations, makes these characters’ storyworlds the most elaborate in komiks. For example, the storyworld of *Darna*, about an intergalactic warrior who inhabits the body of a human girl and switches places with her when summoned, was developed over almost five decades of komiks, movies, television episodes, and stage productions. Created by Mars Ravelo and Nestor Redondo in the early 1950s, the *Darna* storyworld has expanded from its initial small-town setting to the big city, and finally to alien worlds.

The *Darna* storyworld is a good example of what Wolf calls an “overlaid world” (“Ch.1”), a storyworld that is close enough to the “primary world” but contains aspects that make it slightly different. In the case of the *Darna* storyworld, it was initially the magical meteor fragment that, once swallowed, imbued a human girl with

the ability to summon a superpowered being, as well as the villain Valentina, who was born with a Gorgon-like head wrapped in snakes.

The same kind of storyworld is used in a lot of the superhero, supernatural, and horror stories and nobela in komiks magazines like Ravelo's own *Captain Barbell* (1963), about a scrawny man who transforms into a superhero using an enchanted barbell, and Jim Fernandez's *Aztec* (1972), which posits that an Aztec-like civilization lived in the pre-historic Philippines and entombed an immortal monster called Zuma in one of their temples. Perhaps the appeal of this kind of storyworld is in how it is able to draw in readers with the familiar setting much easier than with a completely alien, secondary world.

Many of the popular contemporary komiks titles, such as the supernatural detective thriller *Trese* (2005-present) by Budjette Tan and KaJo Baldisimo and the Spanish-era horror *aswang* tale *Tabi Po* (2014-present) by Mervin Malonzo also utilize an overlaid world that resembles Metro Manila but is also home to creatures of Philippine lower mythologies. But these komiks series also goes into other dimensions or layers of reality (*Trese*) or the imaginary distant past (*Tabi Po*), which falls into the category of secondary worlds.

Space for Myths

Mythspace initially appeared as individual issues in ashcan format between 2012 and 2013. Written by Paolo Chikiamco and illustrated by several artist-collaborators, the series consists of six interconnected stories set in a storyworld where the creatures of Philippine lower mythologies are based on ancient aliens that visited the Philippine islands long ago. Chikiamco classifies the series as a "Filipino space opera", highlighting the rarity of the subgenre in the local context. Chikiamco had intended that the six issues they had released constituted "a first wave" and more would follow. However, there has been no news of new *Mythspace* stories from its creators (Chikiamco). In 2018, the existing issues were collected in a single volume by Visprint Publishing, Inc. and published under the title *Mythspace Vol. 1*. Once again, there is an implied continuation of the series, which has yet to happen. In this article, I will be referring to the 2018 collected edition, as this is the only edition of the series that is available commercially.

While Chikiamco wrote all six stories, each one is drawn by a different artist which lends to the distinct atmosphere of each story. The first story and, by far, the longest is titled "Lift-Off," which was drawn by artist Koi Carreon. Told in three parts, "Lift-Off" tells the story of a human teenager named Ambrosio Magkalas, or

Bros as he is called by his playmates. Bros is an orphan raised by his grandmother, who used to tell him stories about interstellar creatures bearing passing resemblance to the creatures of Philippine lower mythology. Bros is bullied because of his odd beliefs and grows up as an outsider.

Following the death of his grandmother, from whom he was eventually estranged, Bros is abducted by a spaceship. His abductors, who are alien versions of a *nuno*, a dwarven creature (Nuno), and a *manananggal*, a viscera eater who can split their bodies in two, leaving behind their lower half (Tan'gal), intend to offer him as a tribute to a retiring Laho warlord (the Laho is an alien version of the *bakunawa*, a serpent that devours the sun). En route to their destination, Bros meets another captive, Winter, a Tkbng shapeshifter (a *tikbalang* is a creature who has the head of a horse and the body of a human being), who becomes his ally. Bros defiantly takes a stand against the warlord – who offers to keep Bros as a pet instead of throwing him into slavery, which is the fate of humans in this storyworld – and is seemingly killed.

Unbeknownst to everyone, a Kapre soldier named Jrakan has been watching over Bros, trying to keep him safe (a *kapre* is usually described as tall, lurking atop trees, and smoking a cigar). Bros survives the fatal wound because his body merges with The Legacy, a mystical artifact that imbues him with superhuman powers. Bros and Jrakan escape the vessel along with Winter and their kidnappers who were double-crossed by the Laho. The story ends with the group defeating the Laho warlord and deciding to stick together to go on adventures, including finding Bros' parents who turn out to be somewhere in the galaxy.

As a stand-alone story, “Lift-Off” is a serviceable starting point for a continuing series. There is the simple, self-contained plot that also serves the function of introducing us to the characters we will be following in the story, there is an unmotivated villain, and a good amount of action. At the same time, the story also functions as a foundation for the worldbuilding of the *Mythspace* storyworld. It establishes the relationship between the primary world and, in this case, the “secondary worlds” of *Mythspace*. Bros' Earth at first appears to be an overlaid world, where the creatures of folklore and myth turn out to be real and living alongside human beings. But by making them alien beings, it opens the narrative to secondary worlds separate from our reality, but still connected to Philippine myth and folklore.

Narrative Threads and Implications

The worldbuilding in “Lift-Off” is filtered mostly through the point-of-view of the character Bros, who has no direct experience of the larger storyworld but a somewhat limited knowledge of it through his grandmother’s stories. Through Bros, we see the recognizable creatures from folk stories in their true, alien form, and thus confirming the stories his grandmother told him.

Wolf uses the term “narrative thread” to describe “a chain of events” that “revolve around a particular character, place, or even an inanimate object, giving a sense of what happens to it over time” (“Ch. 4”). He adds that readers expect that narrative threads culminate in some way to provide a sense of closure, be that in the form of a transformation or a sense of change (“Ch. 4”). Narratives are “the most common structures in a storyworld” (Wolf, “Ch.4”), because the storyworld would not exist without it. Bros’ narrative thread takes him from Earth as a young outsider and into outer space as the de facto leader of a group of adventurers. The quick transformation he undergoes in “Lift-Off” is aided by The Legacy, a piece of ancient technology that is a mystery even to Bros’ captors. The nature of The Legacy, and its creators, the ancient race called the Lewen’ri, are some of the many narrative implications found in Bros’ narrative thread. There is also the mystery of the fate of his parents, as well as Jrakan’s role in it. According to Gregory Steirer, narrative implications occur when “the details of a single, self-contained story gesture to additional histories, events, characters, or locations not fully developed within the story itself” (qtd in Scolari et al 8). Narrative implications serve as the clues and gaps from which we infer the larger storyworld of *Mythspace*.

While some of the narrative implications in “Lift-Off” are character-focused, most of them have to do with the larger storyworld of *Mythspace*, which we do not see in this story. There is a sense in “Lift-Off” that worldbuilding was of equal import to the writer as the storytelling. For example, in the opening page of the second part of “Lift-Off,” there is an omniscient narrator, through the captions, that explains why Bros and Winter are being offered as tributes to the Laho. This is a break in the pattern established in the first part, where the point-of-view character was solely Bros. It serves worldbuilding, but not so much the story, as it is more interested in explaining the event the characters are embroiled in, rather than how the characters themselves feel or think about their predicament.

“Lift-Off” is followed by five stories: “Black Mark” drawn by Paul Quiroga, “Devourers of Light” drawn by Jules Gregorio, “Uncommon Ground” drawn by Marco Dimagiba, “Humanity” drawn by Cristina Rose Chua, and “Unfurling of Wings” drawn by Borg Sinaban. Unlike “Lift-Off,” these stories appear to be self-contained

stories rather than as being part of a longer, ongoing story, as each story ends definitively without the promise of more adventures to come.

Interconnected Narratives

This kind of storytelling in comics is nothing new. A lot of contemporary comics titles vary between one-shot stories and multi-part arcs that eventually come together at the end of the series. *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman famously alternates between multi-part stories and a series of self-contained stories that feature the character Dream. Some of the self-contained stories serve the purpose of introducing characters or plot points that will later figure into the larger story, while other stories serve as thematic parallels that have little to do with plot.

This technique, which we might call “interconnected narratives,” is used in *Mythspace* primarily for worldbuilding more than storytelling, as the constituent stories do not connect in any functional narrative sense. For instance, the second story, “Black Mark,” is set entirely on Dinde, the home-planet of the Nunos, where cities are built underground because of the uninhabitable surface. The story is focused on Mang, a social outcast, who is recruited by a secret organization called The Black to save an underground city from collapsing. In exchange for his services, which might lead to his death, The Black will bring to justice the politician who killed Mang’s wife and child and had him stripped of his titles and cast out of Nuno society. There is no indication when Mang’s narrative takes place in the general timeline established by the first story, nor is there any character or plot point in the story that connects to “Lift-Off.”

What it does offer is an extended look at the Nuno and their social and political system. It explains that though technologically superior, their home planet has forced them to live underground and work in personal mobile suits. The third story, “Devourers of Light” provides a temporal marker for the reader relative to the events of the first story. Set in the distant past, “Devourers of Light” focuses on a crucial historical moment in the *Mythspace* storyworld: the ascendancy of the Laho race as rulers of the galaxy, and the destruction of the Kapre homeworld of Oslrin.

Like “Black Mark,” there is no direct narrative connection between “Devourers of Light” and “Lift-Off.” It does, however, illuminate the power structures of the *Mythspace* storyworld, as well as clarify the social, cultural, and political connection between the creatures that constitute the United Second Races. One might even argue that “Devourers of Light” isn’t so much a story, but an extended piece of exposition aimed at worldbuilding more

than anything else. Even the supposed protagonist of the story, Barkarilkarilmon, does not have a character arc, and he does not need one.

The next story in the series, “Uncommon Ground,” is a detective story featuring Haskra, a Kapre consulting detective working on a case for a Laho client. Haskra is hired to solve the murder of a diplomat and the theft of a religious relic that is key to a peace negotiation being hosted by the Laho. Unlike the second and third stories, where the point-of-view is largely omniscient, “Uncommon Ground” grounds its story by picking Haskra as the point-of-view character. The story also immediately plays off the historical background provided by the previous story by forcing Laho and Kapre to work together despite their races’ historical relationship. “Uncommon Ground” also breaks the pattern established by the last two stories. While self-contained narratively, the character of Haskra as well as his narrative thread implies that he can come back in another story. This is not the case with Mang, who dies at the end of “Black Mark,” and Barkarilkarilmon, from “Devourers of Light,” whose entire narrative thread seems to have been exhausted in the story.

But perhaps the biggest change is the introduction to the storyworld of another genre, that of detective fiction. While the setting of the story is still in the intergalactic storyworld introduced in “Lift-Off,” the tone, artwork, and the characters evoke a genre that is not native to science fiction. While it does not necessarily add to the storyworld in terms of details such as history and social background of races the way the first three stories did, “Uncommon Ground” expands the storyworld in terms of the fiction genres that can occupy it. It demonstrates that other genres outside of space opera such as horror, comedy, or romance, can be told within the *Mythspace* storyworld without breaking any narrative rules set by the earlier stories.

The penultimate story of the series, “Humanity,” focuses on Marta and Danny, two humans born into slavery, who work on an asteroid as miners. Strong-willed Marta believes that the mythical ship Nalandangan, a spaceship of humans saved by the ancient race Lewen’ri, will come someday to save them. When their mining colony is seemingly abandoned by their Kataw (merfolk) slavers to die, Danny sends out a signal into space and the two are eventually picked up by the mythical ship. However, Marta soon discovers that the humans aboard the Nalandangan are no better than their alien captors. Obsessed with purity, the Nalandangan crew leaves behind the rest of the colony because they are either sick or impure. Marta chooses to go back to the colony, opting to help them out instead of living out the rest of her life in comfort, knowing she had left people behind to die.

“Humanity” functions on multiple levels in terms of worldbuilding. It expands on the narrative implication in “Lift-Off,” that humans exist among the races of the United Second Races as slaves. It explains how these

humans came to be there and relates the story of the ancient Lewen'ri giving the ship Nalandangan to the humans who now occupy it. In terms of storytelling, Martha's story is a straightforward coming of age tale, another fiction genre that is introduced into the storyworld and used once again in the final *Mythspace* story.

“Unfurling of Wings” focuses on Ri-En, a young orphaned Tan'gal living on a space station called Tangent. Ri-En and her two best friends, Books, a human boy, and Zu, a young Nuno, eke out a living by committing petty crimes in order to support the orphanage that took them in, as well as its ailing owner, who also happens to be a Tan'gal in the throes of a final transformation, after which he will become part of the Tan'gal hive mind and lose his independence. During one of their jobs, the trio of friends stumble onto a possible lucrative score involving Lewen'ri technology, the same technology as *The Legacy*. However, things do not go as planned and a showdown between Ri-En and her friends against a fellow Tan'gal leads to a shocking discovery about her own race, that joining the Tan'gal hive mind is not the end of individuality that Ri-En fears it to be.

Like most of the stories in the series, we are introduced again to a new set of characters and a new setting, this time a space station. Once again, there is no temporal or spatial marker that connects “Unfurling of Wings” to “Lift-Off” or to any of the other stories in the series. What it does tell us is that there are not only inhabited planets in the *Mythspace* storyworld, but inhabited space stations where people of different races can live in relative harmony with one another. This is quite different from most of the stories in the series, where race is an issue amongst them. It is also the first story in the series to speculate not only the culture, but the biology of one of the races in the storyworld. The narrative implications of the story focus largely on the nature of the Tan'gal race, but also touch on the ground level of the *Mythspace* storyworld, where the ordinary citizens of the United Second Races live. Ending the series on “Unfurling of Wings” brings the series to a full circle thematically, as like “Lift-Off” it is a story about a young person discovering that there is something larger out there in the vast world for them. And like “Lift-Off” and “Uncommon Ground,” Ri-En and her gang's story leaves room for more adventures to come.

Individually, the six stories that comprise *Mythspace* work for different reasons. They explore different themes and occupy different genres and use different modes. Some are more successful than others as stories, while others work better as expository scenes. But because they are, by design, interconnected narratives within the same series, and the clues and gaps in each story, each narrative implication tells us that these stories share the same storyworld, they inform each other whether directly or indirectly. In turn, the stories build, not an

overarching narrative for the series, but a very diverse storyworld that all six stories occupy, storyworlds that can sustain more stories.

Conclusion

While *Mythspace* as a series may be in a state of narrative stasis, with its implied larger narratives left untold, it is still a success in terms of worldbuilding. As we have seen, narrative implications or clues and gaps in a story, lead the reader to create in their minds a model, not of the larger narrative of the series, but of the storyworld itself. By utilizing interconnected narratives, Chikiamco and his collaborators have created an open-ended storyworld that is not tied to any one character or narrative thread in the series and yet is distinct enough that one wishes the creators would do more stories in it. For aspiring komiks creators and speculative fiction authors, *Mythspace* is an example of how to do complex worldbuilding using interconnected narratives. By focusing on individual stories rather than a larger narrative, the seemingly difficult task of creating an imaginary world becomes more manageable.

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