

Information Dumps

By Azalea Dabill

“Information dump” refers to necessary information given to the reader willy nilly: shoved down their throat in dialogue or in description. Information works best given *as your character sees it, or feels it, or needs to know it*. Through the character’s present senses in the moment. Characters besides your main character can help give the reader this knowledge by what they say and how they react to the main character, or to details within the setting.

Information dumps can be hard to avoid at the beginning of stories, where we authors sometimes feel much background information is necessary. If it is, try sprinkling sparingly, or if a large amount is essential, (say a key motivating event for your main character, or a glimpse of your fantasy world’s social order), consider adding a prologue. (See the prologue flyer.)

Finding the right viewpoint character to ask questions of the world, from their world-view, may be helpful. The eyes of the innocent traveler, the child, the Hobbit, or the warrior: all see the world differently and pick out curious things of interest to them, and things to strive for.

The Ranger’s Apprentice, Book one: The Ruins of Gorlan, despite some less than desirable grammar habits, uses the omniscient viewpoint and tells a wonderful story. (I read all nine books in the series, and vastly enjoyed them.)

John Flanagan puts his necessary information in a short prologue from the villain’s point of view and then begins Will’s story. Notice how Flanagan packs in bits of information, sandwiched with intriguing words and actions.

Morgarath, Lord of the Mountains of Rain and Night, former Baron of Gorlan in the Kingdom of Araluen, looked out over his bleak, rainswept domain, and, for perhaps the thousandth time, cursed.

This was all that was left to him now—a jumble of rugged granite cliffs, tumbled boulders and icy mountains. Of sheer gorges and steep narrow passes. Of gravel and rock, with never a tree or a sign of green to break the monotony.

Even though it had been fifteen years since he had been driven back into this forbidding realm that had become his prison, he could still remember the pleasant green glades and thickly forested hills of his former fief. The streams filled with fish and the fields rich with crops and game. Gorlan had been a beautiful, living place. The Mountains of Rain and Night were dead and desolate.

A platoon of Wargals was drilling in the castle yard below him. Morgarath watched them for a few seconds, listening to the guttural, rhythmic chant that accompanied all their movements. They were stocky, misshapen beings, with features that were halfway human, but with a long, brutish muzzle and fangs like a bear or a large dog.

Avoiding all contact with humans, the Wargals had lived and bred in these remote mountains since ancient times. No one in living memory had ever set eyes upon one, but

rumors and legends had persisted of a savage tribe of semi-intelligent beasts in the mountains. Morgarath, planning a revolt against the Kingdom of Araluen, had left Gorlan Fief to seek them out. If such creatures existed, they would give him an edge in the war that was to come.

It took him months, but he eventually found them. . . .

In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.