



What Wikipedia Doesn't Know Can Hurt You: Writer Research Skills

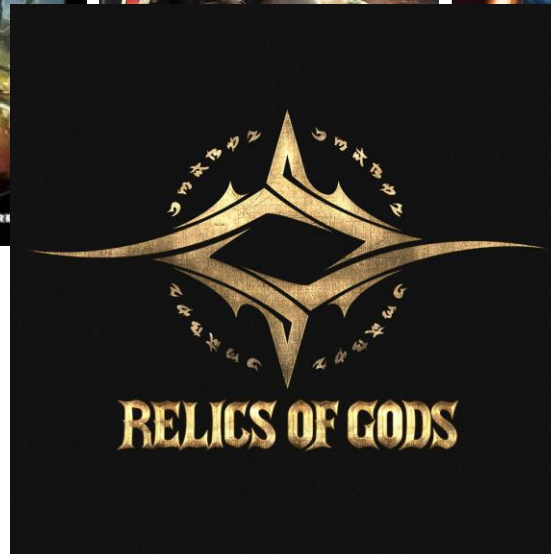
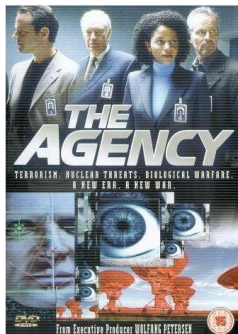
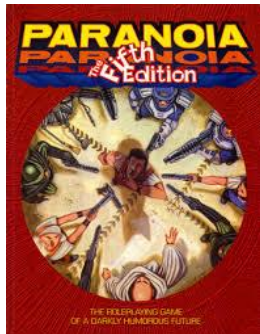
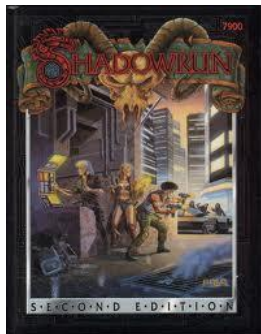
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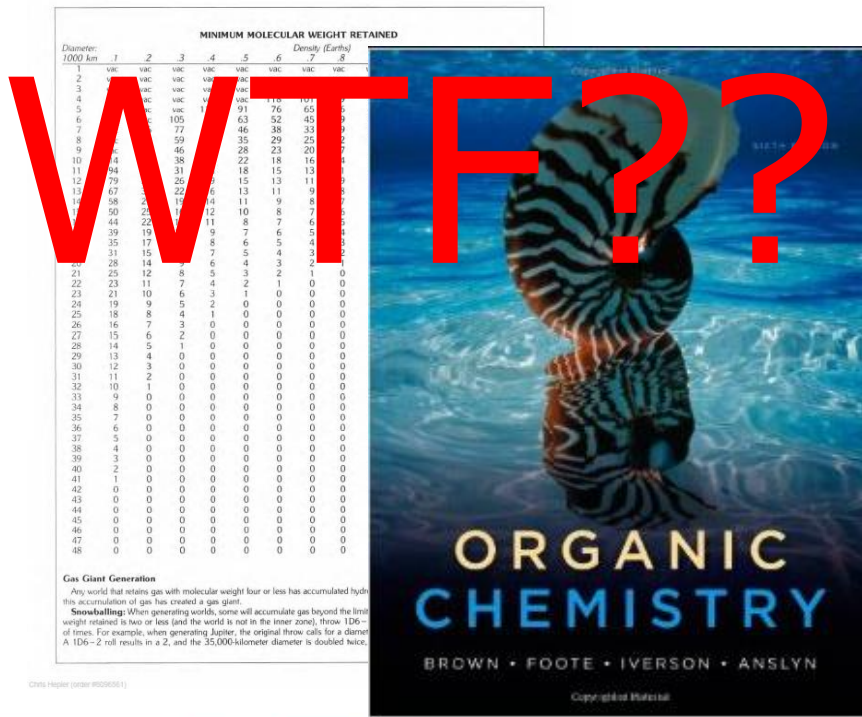
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Who Am I?

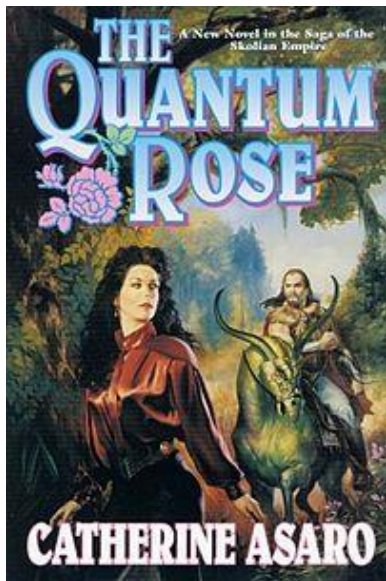


Why do you need research skills?

- Because one day you might be handed materials like THIS:



First-Hand Knowledge



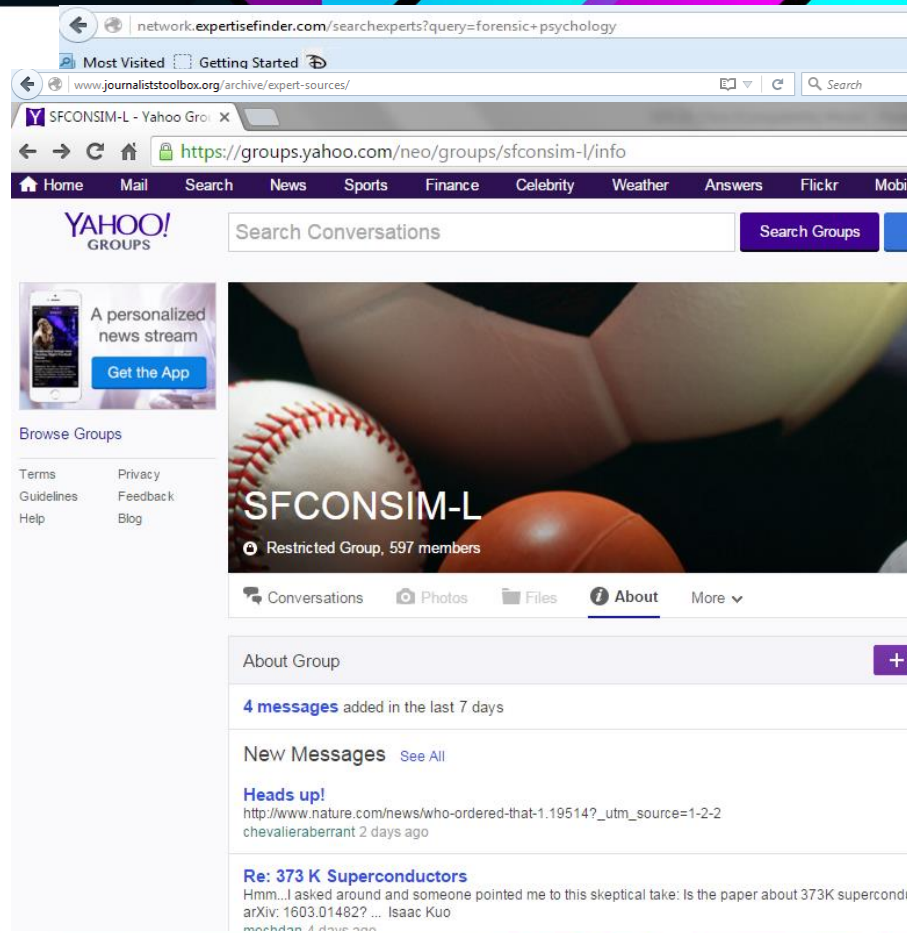
- Got a degree in astrophysics? Great!
- Traveled the world?
Driven a tank?
Practicing Druid?
- Or are you a homebody
humanities major
with an ear for dialogue?

First-Hand Knowledge: Pro & Con

- Helps create original stories w/great detail
- Winning card in many arguments
- Gives perspective and context to facts
- 24-hour access to your own expert
- Platform to build your career
- Can only be an expert in so many subjects
- Knowledge isn't foolproof
- Can be expensive (student loans, travel)
- Time-consuming
- **Pre-production only**

Finding an Expert

- Academic – Expertise Finder
- Journalist's Toolbox – links (some paid, some free)
- Mailing lists, hobbyist forums



Finding an Expert: Pro & Con

- Minimum due diligence for most productions taken seriously
- Often free
- Can find critical holes in your material
- Sometimes unavailable
- Multiple experts can disagree
- Need accurate information for good results
- Sometimes (rarely) have their own agenda

Electronic Sources

- Two independent sources, preferably accredited
 - University pages, news, actual academic/scientific journals
 - LexisNexis for archived legal cases, journalism
 - Oh, all right, wikis, but at least check the citations
 - Yahoo Answers is frequently answered by yahoos



Electronic Sources: Pros

- Rule of the internet: if it's a good idea, someone's probably got a site devoted to it already
- Can be incredibly fast
- I said FAST!



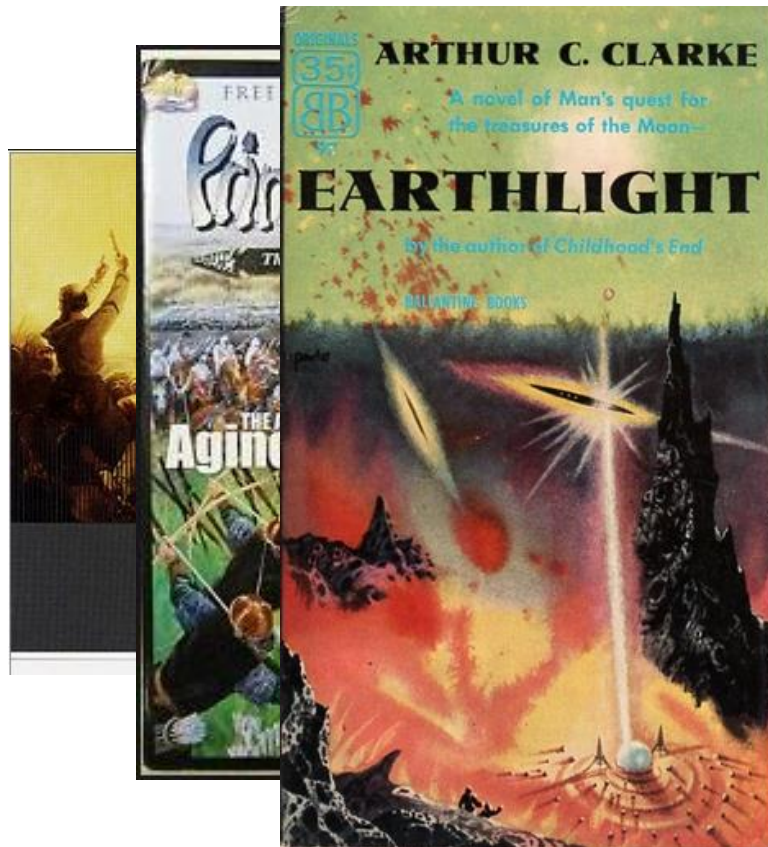
Electronic Sources: Cons

- Can waste lots of time
- False sense of security: can miss perspective entirely
- Creates habit of searching for answers instead of creating them
- Wiki information and your memory create uncertainty
- And then there's Google Image Search



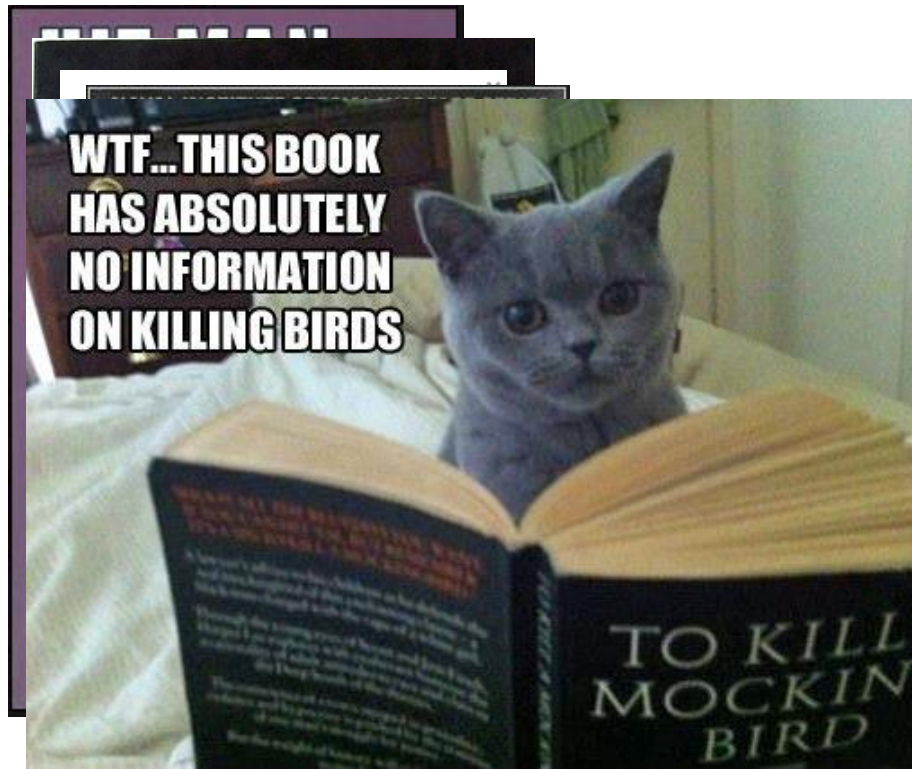
Print Sources

- Nonfiction sources are great at informing your electronic searches
- Stealing from printed fiction will often be forgiven more than stealing from television, movies, or games.



Print Sources: Pros and Cons

- Fiction and nonfiction's value can't be underestimated
- They can also be
 - Slow to search
 - Fiction disguised as nonfiction
 - Cherry-picked pseudoscience
 - Omitting half the story



Techniques: Front-Loaded Research vs. As-Needed

Two schools of thought on *when* to research:

- 1) Research all you can; write a ton of lore; then plot and design individual game levels.
- 2) Start with high-concept mission pitches for game levels, then once they sound entertaining, do the research to make the fun ideas hang together.

Both approaches work.

- The first is more of an uphill climb.
- It invites less collaboration with other departments.
- The second gets more team input.
- It's also faster.
- Lore is frequently thrown out during production anyway.
- But consistency requires a lot of handwaves and team discipline.

Techniques: Fudging It

"My god! What happened to Jay?"

"He died of ingesting alien cuisine... the liver of a guph fish."

"But I've eaten alien food, it isn't toxic."

"No, the fish is similar to fugu. Humans and aliens can both eat most of the fish, it's a delicacy. But the fish's poison builds up in its liver. No alien establishment will serve it... unless they're a party to murder."

"My god! What happened to Jay?"

"You know how you're always saying we should try alien food? Jay tried a little too hard."

"Was he poisoned?"

"You mean intentionally, or did the keeling over not clue you in?"

"Ensign, most humans would call this a terrible time for jokes."

"The fish he ate has toxic parts. You're not supposed to eat all of it. Are you going to launch an investigation yet?"

Techniques: “One Slice” method

- Focus on imparting a single fact to the player.
- Give the job of explaining this fact to your expert character.
- Non-expert characters can doubt the fact, but the fact is true.
- This fact focuses your research so you don't have to fish for more.



One Slice: Concept to Dialogue

- Story calls for robbers w/military experience
- Narrow down to one fact for the scene
- Factoid: guard with neck cut “the right way” characterizes your expert
- Goal is to entertain, not educate
- Fact in dialogue is there to *advance plot*



Common Pitfalls: Contradicting the Team

- Content creators work in parallel.
- Every rule you make will have to be enforced by you or others; new hires need to be indoctrinated.
- Otherwise...



Exclusive vs. Inclusive Universes

- If you say “our universe has no X because Y,” someone will try to put X in. They may succeed.
- If you say “anything goes,” you will periodically have to clean out the franchise.



Common Pitfalls: The Unrelateable Expert and the Two Enthusiasts Effect

- Your research may blind you. The average user won't care that you've done your homework.
- Prepare *in case* a player has done homework, never *expect* them to do homework.



Unrelateable Expert: The Chamber of Science



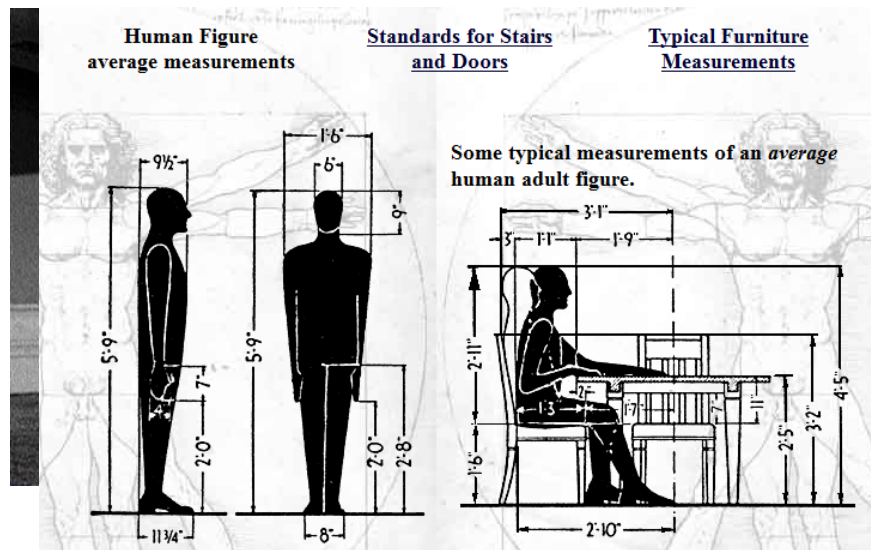
Common Pitfalls: Imprisoned by the Real World

- Just because you find a wealth of factoids doesn't mean you should use them as a basis.
- Example: in 2016 warfare, melee weapons are obsolete. (Sorry!)
- But we're making video games! Melee in shooters is how you have fun without ammo!



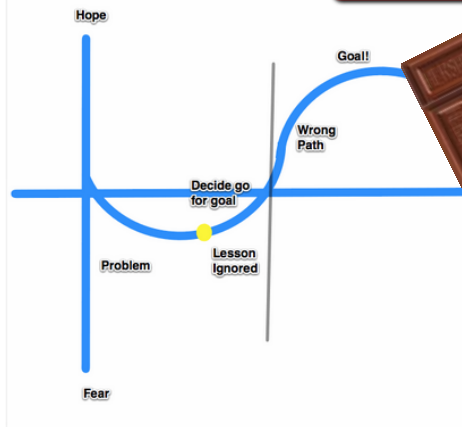
Getting It Wrong

- This will happen to you.
- Details can ground a story, but the longer your franchise goes on, the more mistakes will appear.
- So what can you do?
 - 1) Stay silent so you don't shoot your mouth off about co-workers?
 - 2) Engage and own up to your mistakes [forums, wikis, conventions]?
 - 3) Hide under the bed thinking you're a human garbage person?



So... a last bit of

STORY STRUCTURE



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