

**Research Space**  
Conference paper

**Reading Obsidian Portal wikis as literature**

**ARNAUD, J.**

# Reading Obsidian Portal as Literature

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## My research

- An autoethnographic analysis of my own creative practice, focused on looking at TRPG as literature. Working to place my experience in the context of a wider community of play and theoretical frameworks.

## Method for this project

- Interviewing wiki contributors and analysing existing wikis in the context of different literary approaches.



# What Kind of Literature is it?

**Ergodic Literature** - In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text.

**Hypertext** - Move from Node to Node via reader decision.

**Cybertext** - The reader as participant, the 'cyborg author'

Aarseth, Espen J. (1997). *Cybertext—Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*.

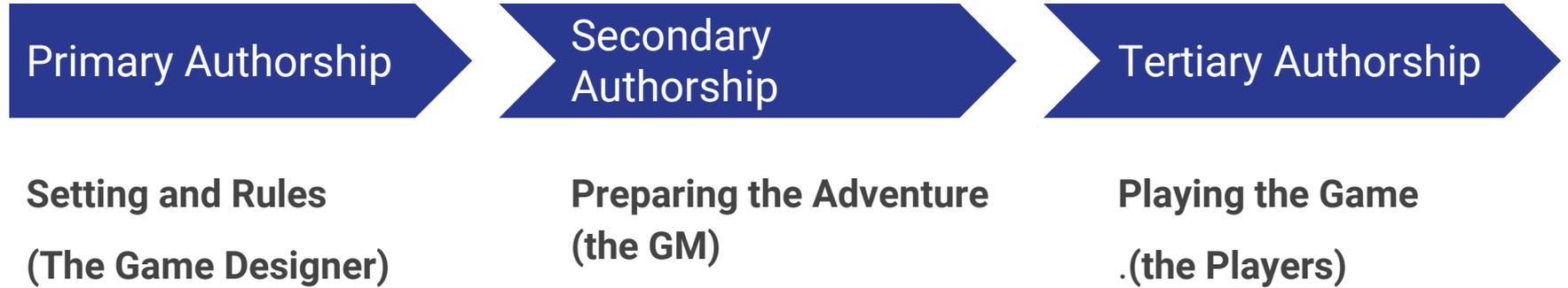
**Digital Fiction** - Fiction written to be read through the computer screen that would lose something of its aesthetic function if moved to a different medium.

Bell, Alice et al. *Analyzing Digital Fiction*. (2016.)

**Paratext** - In literary interpretation, paratext is material that surrounds a published main text.

Gennete, Gérard, and Marie Maclean, (1991) 'Introduction to the Paratext.'

# Who is the Author?



Hammer, Jessica. "Agency and Authority in Role-Playing' Texts." A new literacies sampler (2007)

## **Quaternary Authorship?**

The journey of the storyworld beyond the tabletop. Has a strong intertextual relationship between the new work and the storyworld of the played game.

# What is Obsidian Portal?

Obsidian Portal is a wiki hosting site specialising in TRPG campaigns.

Preformatted to support TTRPG

Premium service allows CSS and additional capacity

Many of these wikis are built to be public facing.

Strawpoll indicates that wiki authors expect to be read by those outside their gaming groups

## Campaign of the Month

Signs and Portents  
updated June 01, 2022  
GM: ketherian  
ketherian.blogspot.com/

HÄRNMASTER 23 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

Baldur's Gate  
public  
D&D 5E | updated June 16, 2022  
10 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

See Past Months

## Campaigns

Filter Campaigns by:  
Popularity

Looking for Players - In Person

All Systems

GAMING MUSIC  
Gaming Music  
public  
updated April 16, 2019  
1367 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

Pursuit of Destiny  
public  
D&D 4E | updated April 18, 2012  
719 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

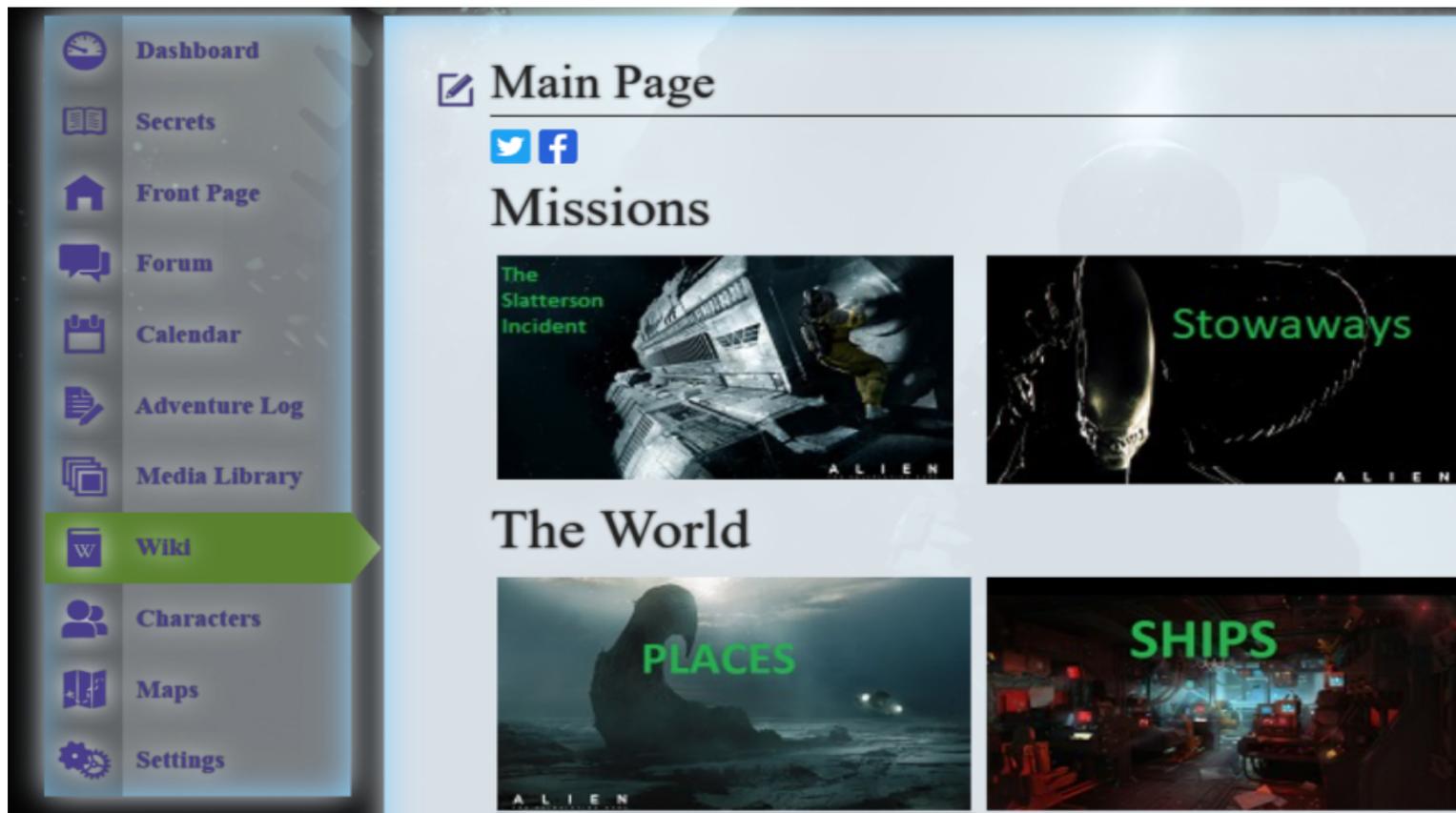
AGE OF LEGENDS  
CAMPAIGN SETTING  
Age of Legends  
public  
Pathfinder RPG | updated September 06, 2012  
534 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

A God...Rebuilt  
PALLADIUM FANTASY  
public  
Palladium Fantasy | updated July 10, 2019  
419 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

SHADOWS OVER NEW YORK  
A Dresden Files Campaign  
public  
The Dresden Files | updated 3 days ago  
388 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

DRESDEN FILES DALLAS  
public  
The Dresden Files | updated May 27, 2018  
331 FANS  
★ Become a Fan

# Obsidian portal layout



## A play aid

An adjunct to the tabletop

Creates a framing device  
for play.

Jara, David, *A Closer Look at the (Rule-)  
Books: Framings and Paratexts in  
Tabletop Role-playing Games.* (2013).

## As a literary game

Building a wiki can be seen  
as a collaborative literary  
game.

Rules of the game are a  
product of both the wiki  
systems and the  
agreement of contributors.

Ensslin, Astrid. *Literary Gaming.* MIT  
Press, 2014.

## A work of fiction

As an outside viewer you  
are primarily a reader not  
an author.

Classic hypertext

Only a cybertext to its  
contributors, where their  
play affects what they  
read.

# Wikis as framing devices

<https://shadows-over-new-york.obsidianportal.com>

Campaign framed as a TV show. With seasons and episodes, trailers and credits

Not actually streamed, episodes and campaign are written up in text form

Includes original fiction from players



Play All



Languages



Episode Index



Subtitles

*Shadows Over New York: The First Season*

# Wiki writing as a game

Wiki participation is often an incentivised activity.

This is especially true in more complex or detailed wikis

Wiki maintenance is work as well as art creating a game helps it get done

This example is from <https://ptolus-city-by-the-spire-by-bryan.obsidianportal.com/>

Player	Current Hero Points
Aendir Meliamne	6
Chesh Briarthorn	6
Mosquilius Kito	10
Nethwen Nagel	6
Thorzin Oakwood	2
Yona Note	4

When deeds of true heroism are called for and nothing short of a cinematic performance will do, it is time to draw upon hero points. What are hero points? In short, they are acquired points that your PC can spend for a variety of purposes to gain abilities that affect game play. Some of these effects are temporary in duration, such as Round and Encounter Abilities, while other abilities are Permanent in effect. How do you gain hero points? Simple. By contributing to the creation of our campaign site. Exactly what this contribution consists in will vary. However the typical way of earning points is to keep an updated character journal.

Activity	Points Earned
Create an in-character Adventure Log entry	4
Update a campaign wiki page with new information	Up to 2 per page
Your character does something Awesome in-game (GM discretion)	1
Attendance (just show up to game)	1

# Play reworked into diegetic fiction

<https://swtwc.obsidianportal.com/>

A harnmaster campaign, where the GM has summarized the story as the lyrics of a folksong to accompany more conventional play accounts.

The coldfall sanction

<https://thecoldfallsanction.obsidianportal.com/adventure-log>

A Night's Black Agents campaign, where each log is an 'in game' report, letter or first person account.

## The song

The following is a song heard throughout the realm about the adventure. While the Good Abbey Folk are not named, many know of whom the song is sung. The Saint mentioned is Saint Setara; the patron saint of **Sir Kjarri of Setara**, and the resident Saint of **Temple of Saint Ranuth and Saint Chelrik**, in **Selvos**.

The abbey did dream of a saint's bones  
And Laramas visions guided them there  
Twixed villagers determined to keep their saint  
In Gebasath was true.

The party was placed in murder most foul  
When a farmer died for his creed.  
The village thought the murderer caught  
Told by an arrow's fletchings

Twas the young lad who seeks his daughter's hand  
Though a foreigner and stranger be  
But the abbey's good folk saw the stranger's heart  
And knew no taint was there.

Twas the young lad who seek his daughter's hand  
Though she loves the stranger true  
But the abbey's good folk saw the local lad's heart  
And knew the trick he pulled.

An arrow did not kill the old farmer man  
But was placed there after his fall

# Written play accounts

Even straight forward play accounts are edited and stripped of social and often ludic information.

Blood and Bourbon

Discord based game.

Adventure logs are based on the chat logs of discord and roll20. They are still edited and recontextualised.



This page contains links to all of Blood & Bourbon's posted adventure logs. Newcomers to the site often want to know: **where should they start reading?**

**For readers who want a taste of what the chronicle is like**, the GM recommends beginning with [Story 10](#), which chronicles the journey of Celia Flores from sheltered college student to ruthless vampire. The GM considers Story 10 to have some of the game's best, tightest writing, and considers Celia to be one of the game's most compelling PCs. Story 10 includes characters and references events from previous adventure logs, but reading those isn't necessary to understand Story 10.

For readers who then want to continue Celia's story, you can read the rest in numeric order—Celia Story 11, Celia Story 12, etc. The GM does **not** recommend (immediately) reading the logs of other PCs in Stories 11, 12, etc. It will be an inferior reading experience without the context of their preceding story arcs.

For readers who want to continue reading Emmett's story after the taste they get in Story 10, the GM recommends reading them in the following order: Emmett Story 3, Emmett Story 8, Emmett Story 9, Emmett Story 12. As with Celia, the GM recommends **not** reading the logs of the other PCs in Stories 3, 8, 9, etc.

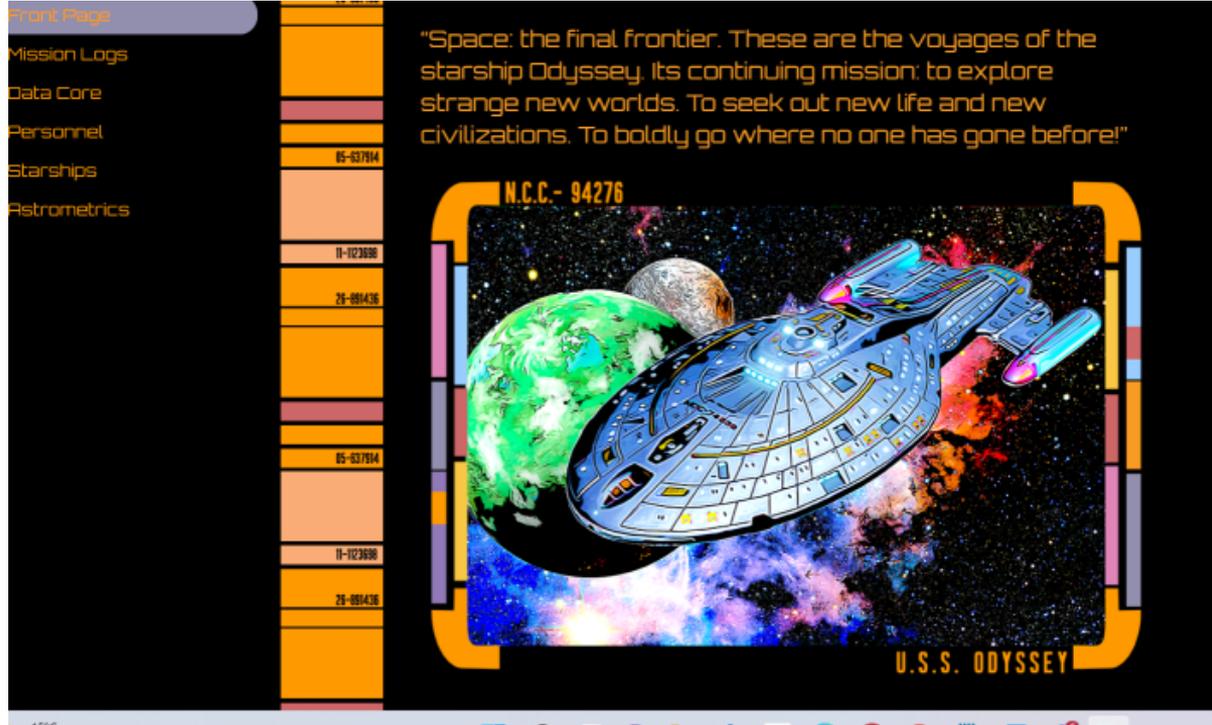
**For readers who want to catch up on the entire chronicle**, the GM recommends reading the logs in their posted chronological order, starting with Story 1. This order gives the fullest and most complete

# Fan Fiction

Many games are set in storyworlds from a wider media landscape, rather than just homebrew and RPG specific settings

<https://startrekadventureslaurelsofvictory.obsidianportal.com/>

A trek familiar reader who didn't know wikis or RPGs could still recognise it.





Thank you