



# Realism in Speculative Fiction:

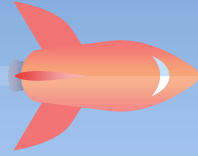
What is it?

Why is it Important?

How do you achieve it?

By Donald Fire Smith

# He llo !



**I'm Donald Firesmith .**

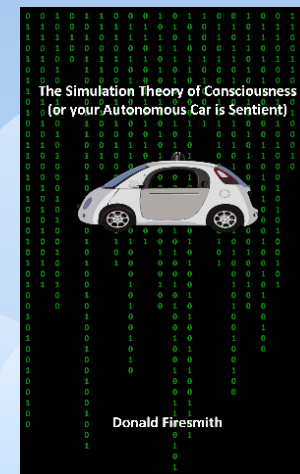
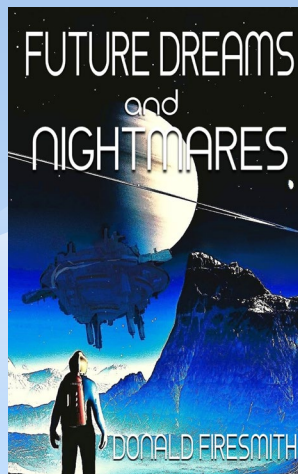
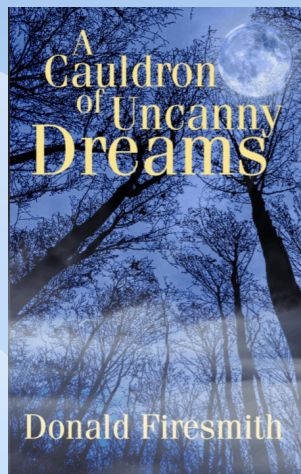
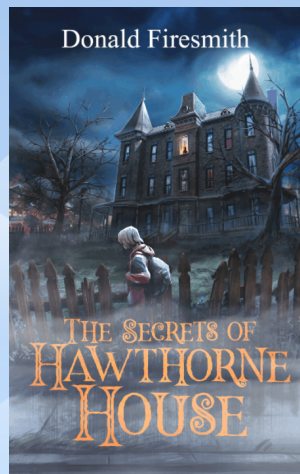
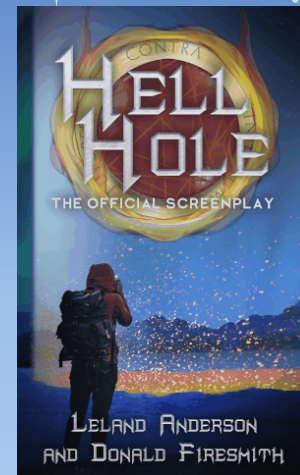
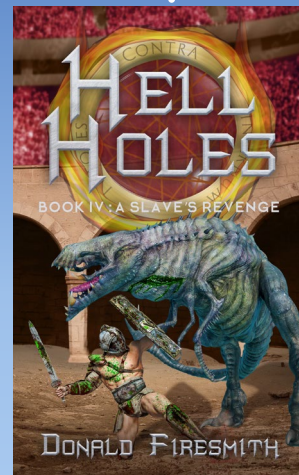
I write speculative fiction novels & short stories.

I have an engineering background with over 40 years of experience developing large complex, software-intensive systems.

➤ I'm an ACM Distinguished Engineer

Hobby: I make hand-crafted magic wands.







# Some of my Book Awards





# What is Realism?

A person, thing, setting, or situation that accurately conforms to the real world (as it is or as it could be)

➤ A defining characteristic of hard science fiction



# What is Speculative Fiction?

A genre in which the setting is **NOT** the real world:

- Science fiction, fantasy, paranormal, and *some* horror
- Future, alternate past, alternate universe, space, magic, monsters, mythology (gods and creatures)

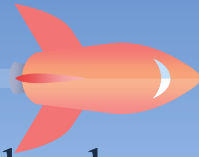


# Realism in Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction requires readers to “suspend disbelief.”

Ensure realism of non-speculative parts of your story.

Useful for all types of speculative fiction.



Have you ever watched a science fiction or disaster movie and seen something so ridiculous that you immediately thought:

- That's impossible [not the way "X" works].
- Didn't they have a scientific or engineering advisor?"

Especially Bad Examples: Independence Day (alien computer virus), The Matrix (humans as batteries), Waterworld (amount of water), Angels and Demons (antimatter), and Moonfall (gravity on the atmosphere).

The same potential problem applies to books.



# Benefits of Realism in Speculative Fiction



Helps reader “suspend disbelief,” enter author’s speculative reality, and avoid jarring mistakes

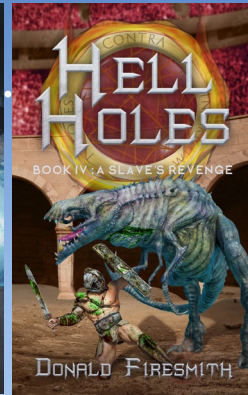
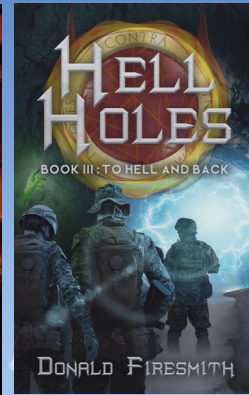
Makes speculative parts more believable



# How do you Achieve Realism?

- 1) Search the Internet
- 2) Read Books and Magazine Articles
- 3) Watch Movies, TV, and Other Videos
- 4) Use or Gain Personal Experience
- 5) Use Subject Matter Experts

# Examples



From my *Hell Holes* series of science fiction novels:

- Is based on the mysterious holes in Siberian permafrost
- Demons are aliens, and Hell is a planet.
- Hard science fiction
- Alien invasion, military, and dystopian science fiction

# 1) Search the Internet

- Google topics (text and images):
  - Trans-Alaska Pipeline pump station
  - Coldfoot Café (pictures)
  - Eielson AFB, military vehicles, nuclear bomb, UAV
  - Hell's star and sky, Alaskan sunrise/sunset times
  - White House and medal ceremonies
- Google Maps including Street View:
  - Dalton Highway
- Wikipedia:
  - Military vehicles (e.g., aircraft and Strykers)
  - Military uniforms and insignia



## 2) Read Books and Magazine Articles

- History:
  - Slavery
  - Roman gladiatorial combat
  - NAZI extermination/labor camps
- Popular Science:
  - Siberian holes
  - Permafrost
  - Climate crisis



### 3) Watch Movies, TV, and Other Videos

- Realistic movies (e.g., certain war movies)
- Documentaries e.g., (e.g., History Channel, YouTube):
  - Slavery
  - Roman gladiatorial combat
  - NAZI extermination/labor camps
- Popular science shows (e.g., Curiosity)
- Online educational classes
- YouTube how-to videos (e.g., picking cotton)



## 4) Use or Gain Personal Experience

- Past Personal Experiences:
  - SCA medieval fighting for gladiatorial combat
  - Military topics: base access, DoD meetings, military IDs
- Visit Locations:
  - University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)
  - Dalton Highway to the site of a major battle
  - Permafrost tunnel (e.g., smell and dust)
  - Eielson AFB (relevant buildings and rooms)

## 5) Use Subject Matter Experts

- UAF geology professor:
  - Alaska wilderness, petroleum geology, permafrost, summer fieldwork
- Military (current and former) advisors:
  - Military vehicles
  - Military terminology, ranks, protocols
- Relatives:
  - Mother picked cotton as a child.
- Beta Readers (they might surprise you)



# Conclusion

Realism is valuable in speculative fiction.

Research takes time and effort (and may cost money).

Research can be interesting, educational, and fun.

Research can generate story ideas.

Research is far easier today than in the past.

# Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at:

- Author website: <http://donaldfiresmith.com>
- Email: [donfiresmith@gmail.com](mailto:donfiresmith@gmail.com)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/don.firesmith>