
On Becoming a Research Geek

Paula Schumacher

Paula Schumacher has been writing since she was taught to hold a crayon. First she learned her name (which is how her father knew who was writing on the walls in the closet upstairs), then sentences, short stories laden with angst, and poems filled with the quiet wonder of winter in Northern Michigan (the UP). In college, Paula studied engineering, journalism and languages. After she earned an MBA, she found her best fit (IT business analysis) and settled into a work/life balance that included a semidisciplined writing routine. Today she is finishing up a speculative historical bildungsroman novel set in ancient Mesopotamia, listening to music and enjoying art more, and spending a wonderful amount of time with her partner, Linda, and extended family.

After I had written my first novel, *Hero's Quest Betrayed* (a fantasy) in 2001, two events sowed the seeds for a transformation of my writing habit. The first was going to WisCon (a science-fiction convention with a feminist/social justice focus held in Madison, WI) and not only hearing Ursula Le Guin speak on writing but also having her answer my question “Was so much research really necessary?” with an emphatic yes.

The second event was being given Diana Wynne Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* by my dear friend Virginia Ashlock (avid book reader, science editor, gardener, near miss on becoming my mother-in-law, and direct hit on being a great mentor in all areas). The book was an easy read and provided me feedback on writing fantasy in a nonthreatening, sarcastic yet humorous, manner.

Before these events, I relied solely on my own creativity and memory for world building. I didn't want to take the time for research I didn't believe was needed for a world I made up all by myself. As the *Tough Guide* indicated, I, like many fantasy writers, subconsciously relied on having read J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as the research for my worlds without figuring out much of the cultural, economic, or even environmental elements needed to bring a world to life.

As far as my memory, I was forever flipping back through my manuscript to find out how many gold pieces I said a tankard of ale, a bowl of stew, or a room at the inn cost. I also had a hard time keeping track of what I actually called things (because nothing tells a reader they're in a different world like calling boots “striders”). I wasn't consistent with terms and had to do a lot of cleanup. Virginia had drilled into me the need to be consistent. She often quoted Emerson's “Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” She was an editor—so consistency in writing was never foolish to her way of thinking. (The full quote is “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.”)



ABSTRACT

This article describes the research process involved in writing novels that provide historical contexts, materials, and characters. Writers will find this piece both humorous and helpful when considering all the planning needed to map out a novel.

KEYWORDS

research, beat sheet, novel writing

My second book, *Beginner's Guide to Office Boxing*, was a foray into the realm of self-help. I did an extraordinary amount of research for it, mostly because psychology was not a world known to me—and also because I needed to be accurate.

The Glass Road, my third novel, was on its way to being a lawless mess when I remembered Le Guin's comment—and Virginia was giving me a hard time about flying by the seat of my pants. So, I dug in. That is what saved me from catastrophe.

This novel was going to be different, I told myself. To begin with, instead of writing what I wanted, I decided to take into consideration what the market wanted. I was playing a lot of bridge at the time, and I wanted to have card play as an element. There are many books on how to play bridge, but few have bridge as a plot device. I'm not an expert at the game; therefore, nobody would take seriously any book I wrote on playing bridge (and rightly so): I would write fiction. Genre wise, romance is not a good fit for serious bridge players. Neither, really, is science fiction, fantasy, or horror.

Mystery seemed to make the most sense—especially since bridge players like to work things out (like how to win nine tricks when only seven seem possible). I know bridge players don't make for a huge market, but they are dedicated (and, I hoped, starved for light reading).

Once I decided on a mystery, I began to research requirements (such as word count). I learned that both the mystery and romance genres have set formulas. If you don't follow the formula, the odds of an agent or publisher accepting your manuscript are reduced. Obviously I wanted to be published, sell millions of copies, have a movie made, and maybe even get cool bling like coffee mugs with my sleuth on them. I searched the internet and found a great spreadsheet: *Mystery Story Planning for Pantsers*.

This breakdown of the mystery made everything possible! All I had to do was stuff all my ideas for the story into twelve chapters and edit to sixty-five thousand—like writing a sonnet (which I had tried my third year of college and have not wrestled into completion to this day).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Mystery Story Planning for Pantsers						
2	Working Project Title:		Story Title here				
3	Basic Logline or Premise:		Logline goes here				
4	Word Count (update this & rest will auto-calculate):		65,000				
5	Page Count (assumes Times New Roman):		236				
6	ACTS & BEATS	DESCRIPTION	PAGE (approx.)		WORD COUNT		
7	Act 1	Introduce murder and sleuth. Hook the reader.	1	59	1	16,250	
8	Chapter 1	Start with drama. Provide crime. Introduce sleuth. Start dropping clues. Ground reader in time & place.	1	20	1	5,417	
9	Chapter 2	Put sleuth on path to solve murder. Introduce suspects. Add something that indicates this has complexities.	21	41	5,418	10,835	
10	Chapter 3	Introduce subplot: sleuth's life issue (growth could be related to theme of the crime).	42	59	10,836	16,250	
11	Act 2	Investigation follows a Red Herring.	60	118	16,250	32,500	
12	Chapter 4	Interview suspects and reveal facts. A suspect flees or disappears. Sense of urgency (terrible consequences if not solved soon).	60.1	79	16,250	21,667	
13	Chapter 5	Find more suspects. Clues seem to point to a solution, but their relevance is not clear.	80	100	21,668	27,084	
14	Chapter 6	Subplot: what haunts or is lacking for the sleuth? Sleuth's personal stake in outcome. Something life threatening, revelation strikes a personal chord or is emotionally disturbing to sleuth.	101	118	27,085	32,500	
15	Act 3	Investigation gets back on the right path.	119	177	32,500	48,750	
16	Chapter 7	Reveal suspects' hidden motives and secrets. Expose what was hinted at before. Clarify the significance of clues.	119	139	32,500	37,917	
17	Chapter 8	Sleuth reveals results of investigation for all to ponder. Solving seems impossible. Consider past stymied and wrong turns. Use logic to see things in new light.	140	159	37,918	43,334	
18	Chapter 9	Sleuth review to see what went wrong. Reveal chain of events that provoked the crime. Realize crucial significance of clue sleuth has. Sleuth realizes error from before, but doesn't disclose it.	160	177	43,335	48,750	
19	Act 4	Mystery is solved.	178	236	48,750	65,000	
20	Chapter 10	Sleuth weighs all evidence. Based on error only Sleuth knows, seek positive evidence to back up still undisclosed conclusion.	178	198	48,750	54,167	
21	Chapter 11	Resolve subplot. Protagonist, having been tested or having grown, is stronger for it and ready for final action.	199	218	54,168	59,584	
22	Chapter 12	Climax. Dramatic confrontation sleuth/perpetrator. Resolution: explain clues and deductive process to the solution. Case solved. Justice served.	219	236	59,585	65,000	

Next, I discovered NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) and improved my writing habit. A spreadsheet and headphones pumping club music over my internal critic's voice helped me write every day for a month.

Personal Information and Goals			Current Status					Quick Stats				
1	Title of Novel	Table Talk						Word Count Reached	57,418			
2	Your Name	Paula Schumacher						Total Hours Spent Writing	16.0			
3	Total Word Count Goal	71000						Avg Words Per Hour	3,589			
4	Daily Word Count Goal	500						Avg Words Per Day	1,980			
5	NaNoWriMo Word Goal	71000						Avg Hours Spent Writing Per Day	0.6			
6	Your NaNoWriMo Health							Words Remaining To Goal	13,582			
7	You're doing great - at this rate, you should finish ahead of schedule!		Days Remaining	4				Avg Time Per Writing Session		1.1		
8	Total Word Count		Hours You Wrote Today	Number of Writing Sessions	Primary Writing Location	Your Morale (optional)	Comments (optional)	Number of Scenes Complete (optional)	Number of Words Written Today	Words Per Hour	Words You Have Left to Reach Your Goal	
9	Count	Date	Enter Your Answers Here									
10	52,012											
11	52,182	Thu 8/21/2014	170	0.50	1.0	Den	6 Getting into Marie's thoughts.	1	170	340	18,818	
12	52,417	Fri 8/22/2014	405	0.75	1	Den	6 Langham, Robert Wilson	1	235	540	18,583	
13	52,843	Sat 8/23/2014	831	1.00	1	Den	7 Robert Wilson	1	426	831	18,157	
14	53,430	Sun 8/24/2014	1,418	2.00	1	Den	6 Smythe siblings	3	587	709	17,570	
15	53,691	Mon 8/25/2014	1,679	1.00	1	Den	5 Smythe, Houghton	2	261	1679	17,309	
16	53,833	Tue 8/26/2014	1,821	1.00	1	Den	5 Smythe, Houghton	2	142	1821	17,167	
17	54,565	Wed 8/27/2014	2,553	2.00	2	Den/HyVee	7 Smythe, Houghton	2	732	1276.5	16,435	
18	54,713	Thu 8/28/2014	2,701	0.50	1	Den	6 Houghton, mom/xmas	1	148	5402	16,287	

The beauty of NaNoWriMo for me is that there are no rules besides *count every word*. I gave myself permission to use the month to brainstorm characters and plot lines, to discover backstory, and to document all my research—everything. It's all one hot mess at the end of the month, but it's all there, and there is nothing several rounds of edits and rewrites won't fix.

Here's a sample from an early draft. I often lay down dialogue first, then come back in with tags, punctuation, the rest of the scene, etc., later. I also put in "notes to self" and highlight them. In the navigation pane you can see I created ad hoc chapters depending on what I wanted to write about that day.

Another change I made was to include friends and experts in my process. They helped me with ideas for character development, problems with plot, etc.

Once I decided to make my Sunday bridge group my card-playing plot device, I asked the Sunday players if they wanted to be portrayed as themselves or have a different life. The housewife wanted to be an international concert pianist but still have all her kids. The retired teacher wanted to be a piano bar/lounge performer. The gay scientist wanted a husband. The fourth player became the sleuth, so she didn't get to change her life but instead

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document titled "Bridge Sleuth v8 Nanowrimo - Compatibilit...". The navigation pane on the left lists several headings: "Roland (Rolly) Bascu...", "X Broderick (Buddy)...", "X Robert Johnson, Su...", "X JoAnne Johnson, Vi...", "X Ryan Miller, GA, Su...", "X Mina Thompson, G...", "Shupar, King of King...", "Wu, Emporer in Jin D...", "Shupar's servant Raz...", "Shupar's trade amba...", "Walter: worker at Cor...", "Victim's House", "Victim & Killer's Alm...", "Where Buddy got his...", "Climate, time of year...", "Senses: hearing, smel...", "Persian Glassware", "X Buddy's safe", "Things that must happen", "Timeline", "Outline", and "Table Talk". The main text area contains several paragraphs of dialogue and description, including: "Yeah. Not much damage from that. Maybe the killer ran out of steam.", "Marie scanned the room. She went bookcase by bookcase, shelf by shelf around the room. She noted Buddy was relatively organized. Reference material within reach of the desk. Books categorized for the most part.", "He taught medieval history?", "Yeah.", "She nodded. She scanned the walls. Most of the pieces were copies of famous works. Some seemed to be sketches. There were a few small paintings either with a knight figure or a castle or both. The photos were current scenes of ancient sites. There was a picture of what would have been his family on the desk. Probably put there by JoAnne to remind him he had a family.", "Kids?", "No.", "She looked again at the shelves and walls. Almost all pictures were slightly askew. Most of the shelves had paper stuck in among the books. Books were on the floor, fallen or pulled from the shelves. She looked to the desk.", "<Barb Watkin's Desk>", "There was a computer screen hidden by a mound of piles of paper. The body of a pen or post it note could be seen here and there.", "She turned to John. May I open the drawers?", "Sure, he said. He was over by the closet. The door had been removed and it now housed two grey metal filing cabinets.", "She pulled open the desk drawer. <LISA'S DRAWER>. Small paper clips, black paperclip binders (the expensive ones), dull pencils, rubber bands, calculator that looks like it came free in the mail from a bank... She took a pencil and moved a folded envelop aside. A row of staples. A few loose keys. Half a movie ticket. Push pins. A check book.", "A check book. She lifted it out and opened it. A pen was crammed into the spine. A check was written to Kansas Power and Light, for the electric bill, and signed but not torn out. She

got peppered with my questions about her elegant style, etiquette, and eating habits. This made extra work for me, but the excitement it generated was worth it.

At a friend’s afternoon party, I complained about defects in sleuths (all crime solvers must have inner demons). Alcoholism was overdone. OCD was getting to that point. Did anyone have an idea? We started brainstorming, and as soon as I heard about CAIS (complete androgen insensitivity syndrome), I knew it fit. Briefly, CAIS is where a person is male but his body is insensitive to testosterone, so his body develops with an outwardly female appearance. The condition is rare and is not usually figured out until either the “girl” doesn’t start her menses or has severe pain thought to be a hernia (which is actually the testicles trying to descend). Historically, doctors performed an operation and told parents their little girl’s ovaries were cancerous and had to be removed. As a writer, I thought, “What a tormented person this would be if they ever found out the truth!” I researched the medical condition, contacted a CAIS support group, and watched documentaries.

Worried about writing a story in today’s world (circa 2013), I started interviewing subject-matter experts like a museum curator, a detective, and a person with CAIS. Although I have a journalism degree and have interviewed people for news articles, I was worried that interviewing someone for a novel might seem frivolous. What I found is that if you are polite and explain yourself well, people are very willing to talk to you. The museum curator was hesitant to discuss theft, but once I explained the theft in my story occurred forty years ago and the items were being returned, she let go the fear that I was secretly casing the joint and shared her knowledge. Of course I had to keep track of my interviews in a spreadsheet.

POLICE Q&A EXCERPT

	A	B
10	1. original theft	
11	If the art is in a warehouse in the basement of a dorm, who all do the police interview? Warehouse workers? Dorm staff? Students who live in the dorm?	Goes out from center. Keep adding to list, prioritize who to interview, then keep interviewing if no leads are uncovered.
12	How much of a report would you expect on the art theft?	A full box. Especially if was big news.
13	Will delaware let insurance company or KS police see the report?	Yes. Will be paper.
14	Will it most probably be a paper copy? Maybe PDF?	
15	Would university or local police handle the investigation?	University would have the lead, but would welcome help.
16	Museum needs police report for insurance?	Yes.
17	What kind of rap sheet would you expect for a small time bully like Rolly? Disorderly conduct? Intimidation. Possible small theft.	
18	Who has jurisdiction? Art from China, on loan from NY. Stolen from Delaware university museum (on campus). Even if it isn't your jurisdiction, do you lend manpower to the entity that does?	Would FBI lend support? Staff? Labs? Do you readily accept help? Yes, accept help.
19	How do you determine jurisdiction? (Laws) Can another police entity come in and take over? Why? (because it's international issue? Level of the crime?)	Where it occurs. And how (crosses country, etc.)
20	2. murder of Gus	
21	If the killer travels from AZ to KS to confront the victim, then tempers rise during the confrontation and the killer kills the victim in rage (hit with statue, then suffocates), will that be voluntary manslaughter or murder?	one or the other.
22	Call comes in around 0900 Monday morning in October. Grad student has found professor dead in house. Deceased is face up in den, pillow over face. Some signs on struggle (things in disarray). Possibly cuts, blood, on victim. Who responds?	Police respond. Call in report. Do initial interview. Get control of the house. Detectives show up. Police proceed.
23	Interview neighbors, co-workers, G.A.s, family?	Yes.
24	Verify these suspects are valid: family (siblings, brother in law), finder, grad student, odd ICE?	Yes.
25	How do Lawrence Police interview a suspect in another state?	Call. Or go there. Going there is ok.
26	What does it take to get extradition? How long?	depends on urgency. 0-3 days?
27	What does it take to get a warrant for arrest? How long?	depends on urgency. 0-3 days?

The mystery quickly got out of hand. Whereas with fantasies I worried about names and costs of things, now I had clues and answers and timelines and many, many more people. I had to get organized.

I tracked my clues: who found the clue, who gave the information to the sleuth (directly or indirectly), how the clue implicated someone or shed light on something, and where it was found (since I would probably have to refer to it later).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Number	Day	Clue	Finder	Xfer to Sleuth	Suspect	Comment
2	c001		2 Gus found murdered	Mina	Adel (mom)	NA	Adel calls Marie: murder at work
3	c002		2 <u>Mina a suspect</u>	Adel	Adel (mom)	Mina	Adel tells Marie over dinner
4	c003		3 Gus is from money	John	John	NA	Elevator conversation
5	c004		3 Police determined it is murder	John	John	NA	Elevator conversation
6	c005		7 JoAnne from middle class	Ruby	Ruby	NA	Bridge Game 1
7	c006		7 <u>Safe in basement</u>	Renato	Renato	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
8	c007		7 JoAnne died of cancer	Heather	Heather	Robert	Bridge Game 1
9	c008		7 Gus said safe was for guns, but he didn't hunt	Renato	Renato	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
10	c009		7 Gus & JoAnne had a dog	Renato	Renato	Mina	Bridge Game 1
11	c010		7 JoAnne was a master gardener	Heather	Heather	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
12	c011		10 <u>JoAnne's gardening area in the basement</u>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
13	c012		10 <u>Safe in basement</u>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
14	c013		10 Gus had red 1965 Jaguar in mint condition	John	John	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
15	c014		10 <u>Wood fragment and straw in safe</u>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
16	c015		10 <u>Police suspect killer is family member</u>	Police	John	Robert	Smythe house visit 1
17	c016		11 <u>Rolly listed as Gus' ICE</u>	Police	John	Rolly	Phone call at work
18	c017		11 <u>Rolly knew Gus in college (undergrad)</u>	Police	John	Rolly	Phone call at work
19	c018		12 Attack started in the living room	Police	John	NA	Smythe house visit 2
20	c019		12 Smythe house has security system	Police	John	NA	Smythe house visit 2
21	c020		12 <u>Victim knew the killer</u>	Police	John		Smythe house visit 2
22	c021		12 Killer hit victim several times: weak person	Police	John		Smythe house visit 2
23	c022		12 <u>Kill: passionate argument gone awry</u>	Police	John	Robert	Smythe house visit 2
24	c023		13 <u>Suspect Mina. Low possibility. Love relationship?</u>	Police	Police report	Mina	Report in case file
25	c024		13 <u>Suspect Ryan. Low possibility. Old break in.</u>	Police	Police report	Ryan	Report in case file

I had a "to do" list for my sleuth. Each item had a start (question is first asked) and stop (answer found). This helped me minimize "loose ends." The spreadsheet record helped me make sure my sleuth didn't complete a task before it actually started in the manuscript.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	#	Item	Start	Stop	Comments			
2	0	<u>Who killed Professor Smythe?</u>	Day 00					
3	1	Find safe	Day 07	Day 10	Works with John Tyler			
4	2	<u>What was in the safe?</u>	Day 07		d20 google Art returned.			
5	3	Get financials: Mina	Day 14	Day 16				
6	4	Get financials: Ryan	Day 14	Day 18				
7	5	Get financials: Rolly	Day 14	Day 18				
8	6	Get financials: Robert	Day 14	Day 17				
9	7	Get financials: Smythe family	Day 14	Day 17				
10	8	Find out if JoAnne's cancer treatment was top of the line or budget	Day 12	Day 16				
11	9	Get police report on Ryan's break in attempt	Day 14	Day 18	what was he looking to steal?			
12	10	ask KU History staff and Mina Thompson what happened in February that might have changed Professor Smythe's regard toward Thompson from normal to preferential	Day 16	Day 16				
13	11	Ask Ann to find out from Grad Asst's what kind of taskmaster Smythe was.	Day 16	Day 16				
14	12	Ask if Mina taking care of Gus' dog was reason for romantic rumor at KU	Day 16	Day 16				
15	13	Thank Smythe family for hotel recommendation: Langham Hotel	Day 17	Day 17				
16	14	<u>In the will, letter to Rolly. What does it say?</u>	Day 17	d22 partial	17:ask trimble for copy. Trimble says get a warrant. 19:police trying.			
17	15	Financial packets from William, Noble, and Annie.	Day 17	Day 18				
18	16	William's schedule, was he invited to Gus & JoAnne's wedding? Funeral?	Day 17	Day 18				
19	17	Ask Mina about the gargoyles.	Day 17	Day 18	find out during Smythe interviews. Ask Ann to ask police to ask Mina			
20	18	Get Annie Anheuser's alibi info (newspaper clipping) forwarded from Trimble. Verify.	Day 17	Day 18				
21	19	Get William Smythe's alibi contacts from Trimble. Verify	Day 17	Day 18	d18:Marie gives Ann List. Verified			
22	20	Get Noble Smythe's alibi contacts from Trimble. Verify.	Day 17	Day 18	d18:Marie gives Ann List. Verified			
23	21	Ask Robert if he knows anything about the gargoyles	Day 18	Day 20	d18:Marie asks lawyers.			
24	22	Ask Robert if he (JoAnne) knew Rolly was listed as the ICE.	Day 18	Day 20				
25	23	Ask Annie what her coming of age gift was. Ask Trimble	Day 18	Day 18				

All of these tools were helpful, but I found I was still not organized enough. My story covered about forty years and five states. I purchased Aeon Timeline software to help sort things out, but in the end it was easier for me to stick to spreadsheets than learn new software. (I do really want to learn Aeon sometime . . .) Later, I found having a timeline was helpful during rewrites. This was my timeline spreadsheet.

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q		
1	Murder Time Line (Oct/Nov 2013)											Primary	Museums	Police	Sleuth	Secondary	CAIS	
2	Weekday +/- DAY											State	Area	Event				
3	10/16/13	Wed	-4	KS	actors	Gus goes to Chicago, mails box (next day air), returns.												
4	10/16/13	Wed	-4	KS	actors	Gus sends letter to Rolly: it is over, I returned it.												
5	10/17/13	Thu	-3	KS	actors	Gus google search for art return story												
6	10/17/13	Thu	-3	DE	Museum	UD-Museum opens box												
7	10/17/13	Thu	-3	DE	Museum	UD-Museum contacts NY-Met. Insurance company contacted.												
8	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus calls lawyer to set meeting to change will.												
9	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus calls security to set meeting to change security level.												
10	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus google search for art return story.												
11	10/18/13	Fri	-2	AZ	actors	Rolly gets letter from Gus												
12	10/18/13	Fri	-2	NY	Museum	NYMet contacts China about box												
13	10/18/13	Fri	-2	DE	Museum	Delaware story of art returned.												
14	10/19/13	Sat	-1	AZ	actors	Rolly takes trip to Gus												
15	10/20/13	Sun	0	KS	actors	Rolly kills Gus												
16	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	actors	Smythe ask insurance to get involved.												
17	10/21/13	Mon	1	DE-NY	Museum	Museums closed												
18	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	actors	Mina finds Gus' body												
19	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police begin murder investigation												
20	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police suspect: Mina, Smythe family												
21	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police contact Smythe family, notify of the death												
22	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Am Heritage sends agent to house												
23	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Adel tells Marie of murder												
24	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie asks at work if there is a case. NO WORD.												
25	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie at mom's house, is an imperfect copy of her mother.												
26	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie at mom's house, Trying not to think what she got from her father												
27	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie talking to mom, sees her own angular features												
28	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie tells Marie of murder												
29	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	bridge	JC dies the murder weapon												
30	10/21/13	Mon	1	IL	actors	Smythe family contacts Gus' Executor, Trimble, about death.												
31	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	UDM & NY-met discuss plan of verification												
32	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	Museums contact insurance company, it looks for policy												
33	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	NYMet contacts China about box.												
34	10/22/13	Tue	2	KS	Police	Police gather clues												
35	10/22/13	Tue	2	KS	Police	Police suspect: Mina, Smythe family, Ryan.												

Maybe I should have said this earlier, but I'm not anal retentive. I was just drowning in data and didn't want to get anything wrong (mystery readers have a high standard). And, I work with spreadsheets in my day job. For me, they are a great tool.

After I had a good draft (version 14), I sent it to the chief of police (I played bridge with his mother) for review. He put a tremendous amount of energy into the review, but his feedback was difficult to take. He said my story was more like TV mysteries (where police share information with people) than real-world crime solving (where everyone gives information to the police and they never share what they know). I made myself think of his feedback as research—how the detective process really works. I decided to rewrite the story to make it more realistic.

Another piece of beta-reader feedback that threw me for a loop was the fact that the museum pieces my thieves had stolen were from a China exhibit touring the United States during Mao's cultural revolution. There is no way Mao would have allowed valuable artifacts to leave the country—especially to go to the United States. It took a day for my subconscious to grind out the solution: the exhibit was touring in other countries, and when the Cultural Revolution hit, the world protected the art by keeping it on tour.

Oh. I forgot about ZimWiki. You see, I *am* scatterbrained. ZimWiki is software that lets you create your own version of *Wikipedia* (a very basic version). I first used it for *Glass Road* and now I use it for each book. After NaNoWriMo, I copied all backstory and research to ZimWiki and then added content as needed. Both word documents and spreadsheets seemed clumsy for the task. Here are a couple screenshots of controlled chaos.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

The screenshot shows a ZimWiki interface with a sidebar on the left containing a navigation menu with items like '265AD in Persia', 'Bookbasics', 'Characters', 'Don't Forget', 'Forensic Accounting', 'Education and Pay', 'Information used', 'Investigation steps', 'Personal Qualities', 'Questioning techniques', 'Types of cases', 'When someone is lying', 'Home', 'Places', 'Police', 'Things', 'Timeline', and 'To Do List'. The main content area displays the page title 'Questioning techniques' in green, followed by the creation date 'Created Wednesday 01 July 2015'. Below the title is a section header 'Psychologist tips' in green, followed by a list of bullet points:

- Build rapport. Think of it as just "good cop." Researchers have found that coming across as empathetic causes interrogation targets to open up more than when the interrogator is cold and accusatory. Many of the other techniques described in the journal depend on having a cooperative target, making this step all the more important. "The first thing you have to do is develop cooperation, rapport," Meissner says. "Once you have a cooperative person, the question is, How do I get all the info from them that I can?"
- Fill in the blank. To get that info, instead of asking direct questions, tell your target a story about what he or she did, leading the person to believe you already know what happened. As you provide the narrative, the guilty party will then supply details and corrections. This is called the Scharff technique, named for its developer, Hanns Scharff, a German interrogator during World War II. The technique was shown to elicit more information than direct questioning in a 2014 study. People interrogated using this method also tend to underestimate how much they are sharing.
- Surprise them. People who are interrogated often know they are under suspicion, so they practice their answers ahead of time. In addition, liars are under high cognitive strain as they try to keep their story straight and at the same time act calm and collected. If you ask them something unexpected, they often stumble when put on the spot—enabling you to catch them in a lie.
- Ask for the story backward. In contrast to what most people believe, truth tellers are more likely to add details and revise their stories over time, whereas liars tend to keep their stories the same. "Inconsistency is really just a fundamental

The Origin of Things, Such as How the Items That Were Stolen Fit into Persia/China Relations and the History of the Silk Road:

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a document titled "Persia". The browser's address bar shows the URL http://www.ancient.eu.com/Silk_Road/. The document content is as follows:

Persia
Created Wednesday 23 April 2014

The history of the Silk Road pre-dates the Han Dynasty in practice, however, as the Persian Royal Road, which would come to serve as one of the main arteries of the Silk Road, was established during the **Achaemenid Empire (500-330 BCE)**. The **Persian Royal Road** ran from Susa, in north Persia (modern day Iran) to the Mediterranean Sea in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and featured postal stations along the route with fresh horses for envoys to quickly deliver messages throughout the empire. Herodotus, writing of the speed and efficiency of the Persian messengers, stated that "There is nothing in the world that travels faster than these Persian couriers. Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor darkness of night prevents these couriers from completing their designated stages with utmost speed" (these lines, from his Histories, 8.98, would centuries later form the creed of the United States of America's post office). The Persians maintained the Royal Road carefully and, in time, expanded it through smaller side roads. These paths eventually crossed down into the Indian sub-continent, across Mesopotamia, and over into Egypt.

After Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, he established the city of Alexandria Eschate in 339 BCE in the Fergana Valley of Neb (modern Tajikistan). Leaving behind his wounded veterans in the city, Alexander moved on. In time, these Macedonian warriors intermarried with the indigenous populace creating the Greco-Bactrian culture which flourished under the Seleucid Empire following Alexander's death. Under the Greco-Bactrian king Euthydemus I (260-195 BCE) the Greco-Bactrians had extended their holdings. According to the Greek historian Strabo (63-24 CE) the Greeks "extended their empire as far as the Seres" (xi.ii.i). "Seres" was the name by which the Greeks and Romans knew China, meaning "the land where silk came from". It is thought, then, that the first contact between China and the west came around the year 200 BCE.

The Han Dynasty of China (202 BCE – 220 CE) was regularly harassed by the nomadic tribes of the Xiongnu on their northern and western borders. In 138 BCE, **Emperor Wu sent his emissary Zhang Qian to the west to negotiate with the Yuezhi people for help in defeating the Xiongnu**. Zhang Qian's expedition led him into contact with many different cultures and civilizations in central Asia and, among them, those whom he designated the 'Dayuan', the 'Great Ionians', who were the Greco-Bactrians descended from Alexander the Great's army. The Dayuan had mighty horses, Zhang Qian reported back to Wu, and these could be employed effectively against the marauding Xiongnu. **The consequences of Zhang Qian's journey was not only further contact between China and the west but an organized and efficient horse breeding program throughout the land in order to equip a cavalry**. The horse had long been known in China and had been used in warfare for cavalry and chariots as early as the Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1046 BCE) but the Chinese admired the western horse for its size and speed. With the western horse of the Dayuan, the Han Dynasty defeated the Xiongnu. This success inspired the Emperor Wu to speculate on what else might be gained through trade with the west and the Silk Road was opened in 130 BCE.

While many different kinds of merchandise traveled along the Silk Road, the name comes from the popularity of Chinese silk with the west, especially with Rome. The Silk Road routes stretched from China through India, Asia Minor, up throughout Mesopotamia, to Egypt, the African continent, Greece, Rome, and Britain. **The northern Mesopotamian region (present day Iran) became China's closest partner in trade, as part of the Parthian Empire, initiating important cultural exchanges**. Paper, which had been invented by the Chinese during the Han Dynasty, and gunpowder, also a Chinese invention, had a much greater impact on culture than did silk. The rich spices of the east, also, contributed more than the fashion which grew up from the silk industry. Even so, by the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE) trade between China and the west was firmly established and silk was the most sought after commodity in Egypt, Greece, and,

The extra time researching and organizing has added to my writing process has been worth it. I'm much more confident in the consistency and accuracy of my writing. I've also found I can create more depth. In *The Glass Road*, I didn't default to "some guys stole some art glass and it changed their lives." No. I knew that one-percenter beef baron's boy and the opportunistic bully stole Persia's marketing sampler—glass as it had never been worked before—and took it to China in 200 BCE to entice her emperors to establish the Silk Road that Persia's economy desperately needed. The theft of the glass changed the murder victim's course of study, his treatment of his graduate assistants, added millions of dollars in donations to universities, and returned artifacts to their rightful owners.

These days, people in my writing group accuse me of being a research junkie. I think I'd get no complaints from Ursula or Virginia.

Resources:

Aeon Timeline software. <https://www.aeontimeline.com/users/creative-writers/>.

Mystery Planning for Pantsers. My source is this link <http://ticket2write.tripod.com/mysplot.html>, but the original spreadsheet is from Jami Gold (www.jamigold.com).

NaNoWriMo Template. Simplified version: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OqvsamQzjVPfyzHW51QCgcYnto84nsn8/view>.

ZimWiki. <https://zim-wiki.org/>.