

THE 35TH INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS CONGRESS
KUALA LUMPUR · JULY 6, 2026

AI is No Longer a Toy

The “golly gee whiz” era of AI has passed
For better, and for worse

Thad McIlroy

The Future of Publishing
San Francisco

I started in bookselling...

- First job: bookstore clerk in Toronto, Canada
- Ran three (small) publishing companies
- Book author (Canadian history books)
- Moved to San Francisco
- Technologist (DTP, ebooks, metadata, online commerce)
- AI shill, apologist... educator?

Recent affiliations

- Contributing editor, *Publishers Weekly*
- Founding partner in Publishing Technology Partners (Bill Kasdorf, Ken Brooks, Lettie Conrad)
- Advisory board of Johns Hopkins University Press
- Visiting scholar at George Washington University
- Senior Member of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)

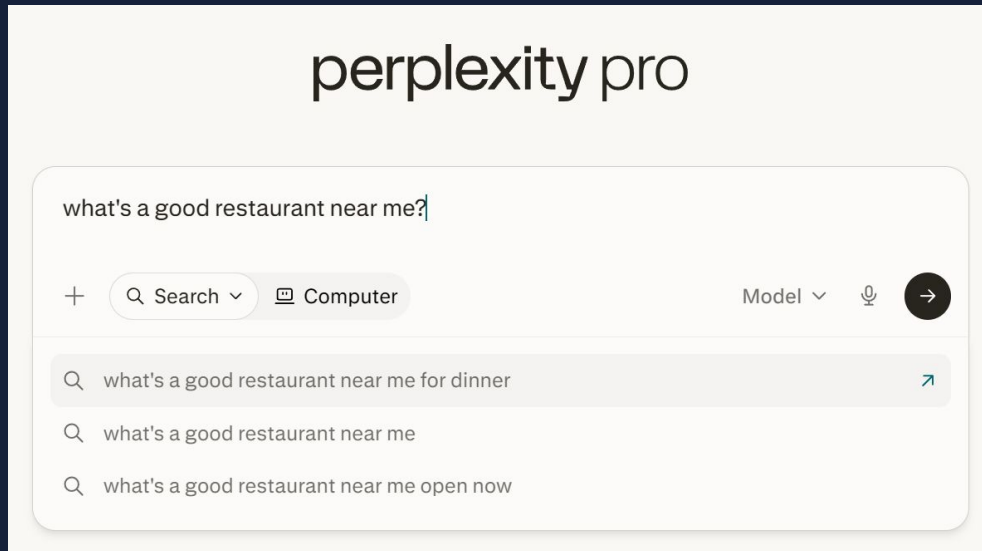
AI is dazzling!







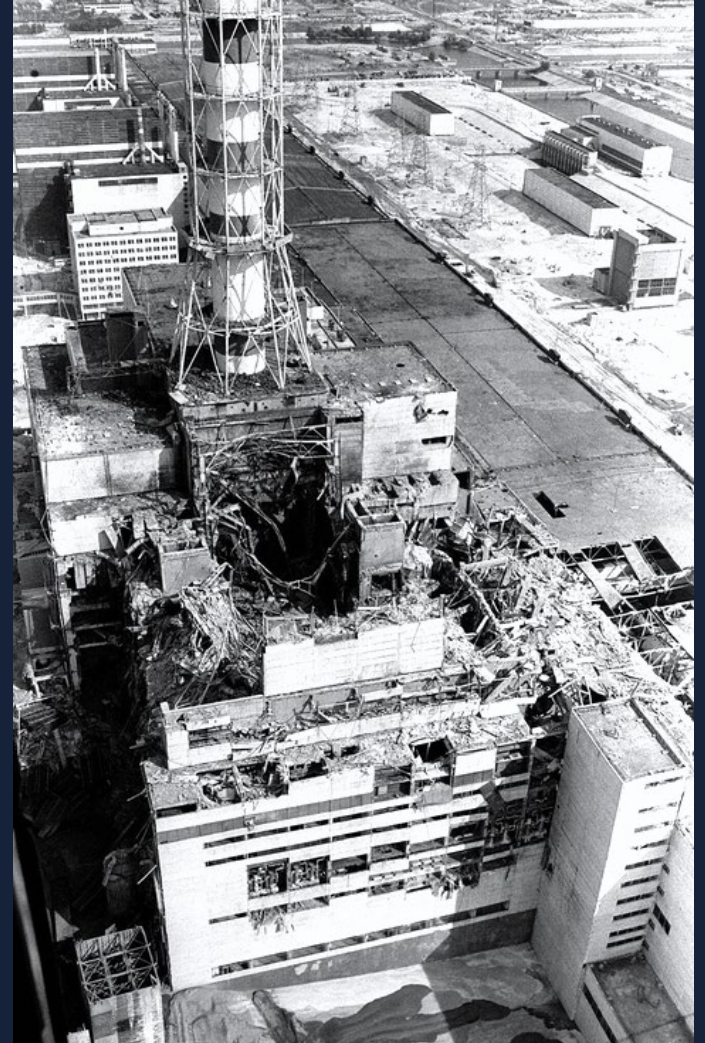
If you're not impressed by what AI can do, you're using it wrong



Yet the risks surrounding AI are severe

“One thing that almost everyone in AI can agree on right now is that AI doesn't need a Chernobyl moment.”

— Stephen Casper, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School



The warnings are many...



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WORLD

AI Warfare Is at the Point of No Return. What Now?

Between a new executive order, a clash with Anthropic and high-tech wars, the U.S. is stumbling into an AI arms race that the world is struggling to control

Inc.
TECHNOLOGY

Erin Brockovich Is Taking on AI Data Centers, and 1 Word Keeps Surfacing in Her Investigation

The famous consumer advocate has launched a new website about data centers. She's getting flooded with responses.

nature

COMMENT | 02 February 2026

Does AI already have human-level intelligence? The evidence is clear

The vision of human-level machine intelligence laid out by Alan Turing in the 1950s is now reality. Even though it's been decades, we're still trying to figure out what comes next.



FORTUNE

COMMENTARY

Dizzying deal delirium: How the AI bubble bursts

By Jeffrey Sonnenfeld and Stephen Henriques



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US forces Anthropic to shut down latest AI models, citing national security concerns

By Jack Aldane on 16/06/2026 | Updated on 17/06/2026

What is a publisher to do?

Copyright law stood us in good stead...

...for a long time (revised 1976 & 1998)

We've successfully prosecuted:

- Counterfeiters
- Internet Archive
- Ebooks in libraries
- Pirate websites
 - (Even when enforcement can be problematic)

But no one had prepared us...

... for the wholesale theft of nearly everything ever published (some 9.7 trillion words!)

“The AI companies broke into our homes and kidnapped our children”



We like to think Anthropic was a victory

- But the penalty was for piracy; it was not about fair use
- Judge Alsop said that training models to generate new text outputs was “exceedingly transformative.”



Anthropic agrees to pay \$1.5 billion to settle author class action

By Blake Brittain and Mike Scarcella

September 6, 2025 4:50 AM GMT+8 · Updated September 6, 2025

AI



Announcements

Anthropic raises \$13B Series F at \$183B post-money valuation

Sep 2, 2025

\$965 billion, as of May 2026

Theft was essential to the launch of AI

- There was no practical way to negotiate, to get publishers to agree (c.f. Google Books)
- Now they've got everything
- And, in the short term, they don't need much more
- They can get what they want with RAG, basically a library card to access specialized content

They're playing a winner-takes-all game

- The goal is to disrupt labor and add sufficient top line value so that every organization and individual will have to pay a tithe
- Our intellectual property is just collateral damage

AGI — Artificial General Intelligence

- AGI is our promised future, our new light and hope
- “....the cognitive abilities of a human, allowing it to understand, learn, and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks and domains.”
- But is AGI just brains without knowledge?
- How much information do you need to be truly authoritative?
 - **All of it.**

Hence licensing

- Paywalls are the best protection against theft
- “Darn, they put up a fence; I guess we’ll have to pay”

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The internet's
version of a paywall

Publishing has two distinct cultures

“I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups ... Literary intellectuals at one pole, at the other scientists... Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension.”

— C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959)

Scholarly publishers (mostly) get it

AI sentiment at research institutions over the past four years:

- 2023: Panic, fear, and confusion
- 2024: Skepticism mixed with cautious experimentation
- 2025: Curious exploration and selective adoption
- 2026: "How do we integrate AI into our workflows while maintaining quality, integrity, and good research practices?"

Trade publishers (mostly) don't get it

AI sentiment at trade publishers over the past four years:

- 2023: Panic, fear, and confusion
- 2024: Panic, fear, and confusion
- 2025: Panic, fear, and confusion
- 2026: "How do we make this thing go away"
(while cautiously experimenting to see if it's as good as everyone says)

What if it really does work?

nature

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Article | [Open access](#) | Published: 25 March 2026

Towards end-to-end automation of AI research

[Chris Lu](#), [Cong Lu](#), [Robert Tjarko Lange](#), [Yutaro Yamada](#) ✉, [Shengran Hu](#), [Jakob Foerster](#)

[Nature](#) **651**, 914–919 (2026) | [Cite this article](#)

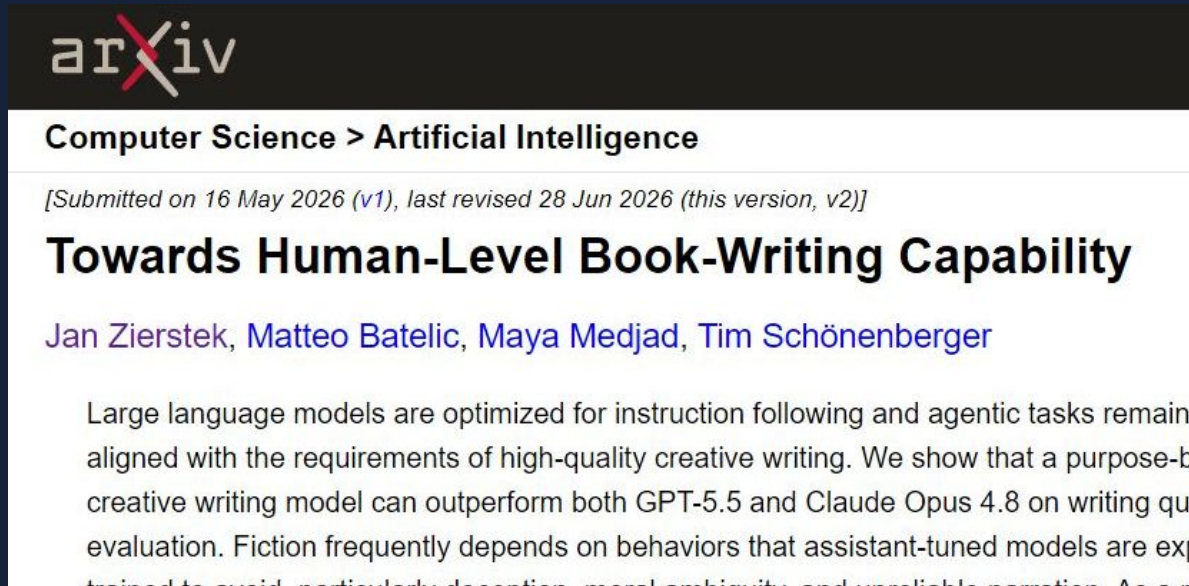
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323k Accesses | **50** Citations | **841** Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-026-10265-5>

“...Here we present a pipeline for automating the entire scientific process end to end. We present The AI Scientist, which creates research ideas, writes code, runs experiments, plots and analyses data, writes the entire scientific manuscript, and performs its own peer review.”

What if it really does work?



<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2605.17064>

“We train a long-context language model on prompt-to-book trajectories and show that this shifts generation away from assistant-style prose and toward human literary writing..”

And what about us?

- The old doesn't have to die for the new to flourish... it's possible to carry on as is
- Can we rethink what it means to be a publisher, where we truly add value?

Let me know if I can help out.

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