



It starts with Mark Helprin whining about his poor estate and why it may suffer at the hands of a capricious copyright system:

Were I tomorrow to write the great American novel (again?), 70 years after my death the rights to it, though taxed at inheritance, would be stripped from my children and grandchildren. To the claim that this provision strikes malefactors of great wealth, one might ask, first, where the heirs of Sylvia Plath berth their 200-foot yachts. And, second, why, when such a stiff penalty is not applied to the owners of Rockefeller Center or Wal-Mart, it is brought to bear against legions of harmless drudges who, other than a handful of literary plutocrats (manufacturers, really), are destined by the nature of things to be no more financially secure than a seal in the Central Park Zoo.

[A Great Idea Lives Forever. Shouldn't Its Copyright? - New York Times](#)

And then proceeds to the hyperbolic and hyperventilating wiki-blogosphere, when Lawrence Lessig turns down the imprecations of his followers and tells them to write a response instead:

So I've gotten (literally) scores of emails about this piece by Mark Helprin promoting perpetual copyright terms. "Write a reply!" is the demand. But why don't you write the reply instead. Here's a page on [wiki.lessig.org](#). Please write an argument that puts this argument in its proper place.

[Lawrence Lessig](#)

So the wikinistas take to the web, roll their avatar's digital sleeves up, and get down to business, quickly turning out a few thousand words

At the core of Helprin's article is the idea that physical and intellectual property are equivalent "that revoking the rights enjoyed by copyright owners after a limited (albeit long) term is the same as revoking the rights enjoyed by owners of physical property. Physical property, such as real estate, is a finite resource that operates as a zero-sum game. And the laws regarding physical property treat it as such. Intellectual works are abstract concepts and do not naturally operate as zero-sum games. Copyright law converts a work into a kind of zero-sum game so that the author can make money selling his work, but once that legal construction expires, the work returns to its natural state of a non-zero-sum game.

[Against perpetual copyright - Lessig Wiki](#)

This leads the *New York Times* to blog, on *The Lede* about Lessig blogging about them, and the wiki:

If it worked, he would pull off an interesting feat: Another copyright battle would be fought without doing any of the work himself. Indeed, it would be done by believers in a movement that he helped start, with material that he wrote and then allowed anyone to reuse, as long as they credited him (which they did, twice).

[To the Editor: Please See Wiki - The Lede - Breaking News - New York Times Blog](#)

And, of course, the blogosphere in general is blogging about the blogging and the wikying, and its getting downright dizzying:  
In addition to explaining the difference between tangible works and intangible property, it clarifies the point that artists are entitled to profit from their work, but usually the ability to extract value from a work, ends after a few years. When that period is over, the rights should end in order to allow others to createâ€¦

[No to perpetual copyright at Almost As Good As Chocolate](#)

All we need now is for the letters to the editor to start flooding into *The Times* and we'll be ready to start the next lap.