Managing DITA

How to get the most from what DITA has to offer

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Topics

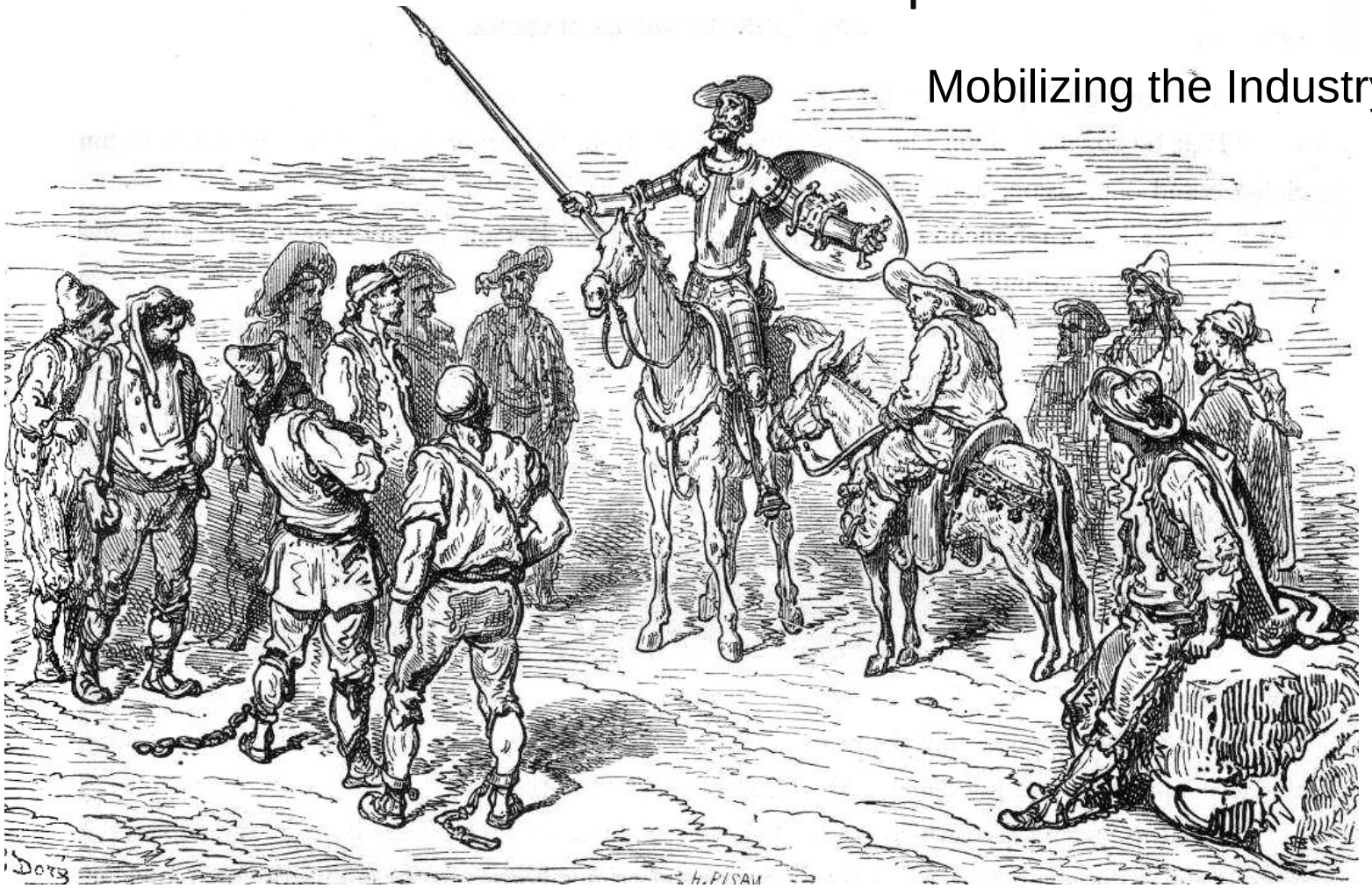
- DITA
  - What's the Big Idea?
- Dangers Signs
  - Challenges to be overcome
- Management Tactics
  - Best practices to be deployed
- Just Rewards
  - Reflecting on outcomes

What's the Big Idea?

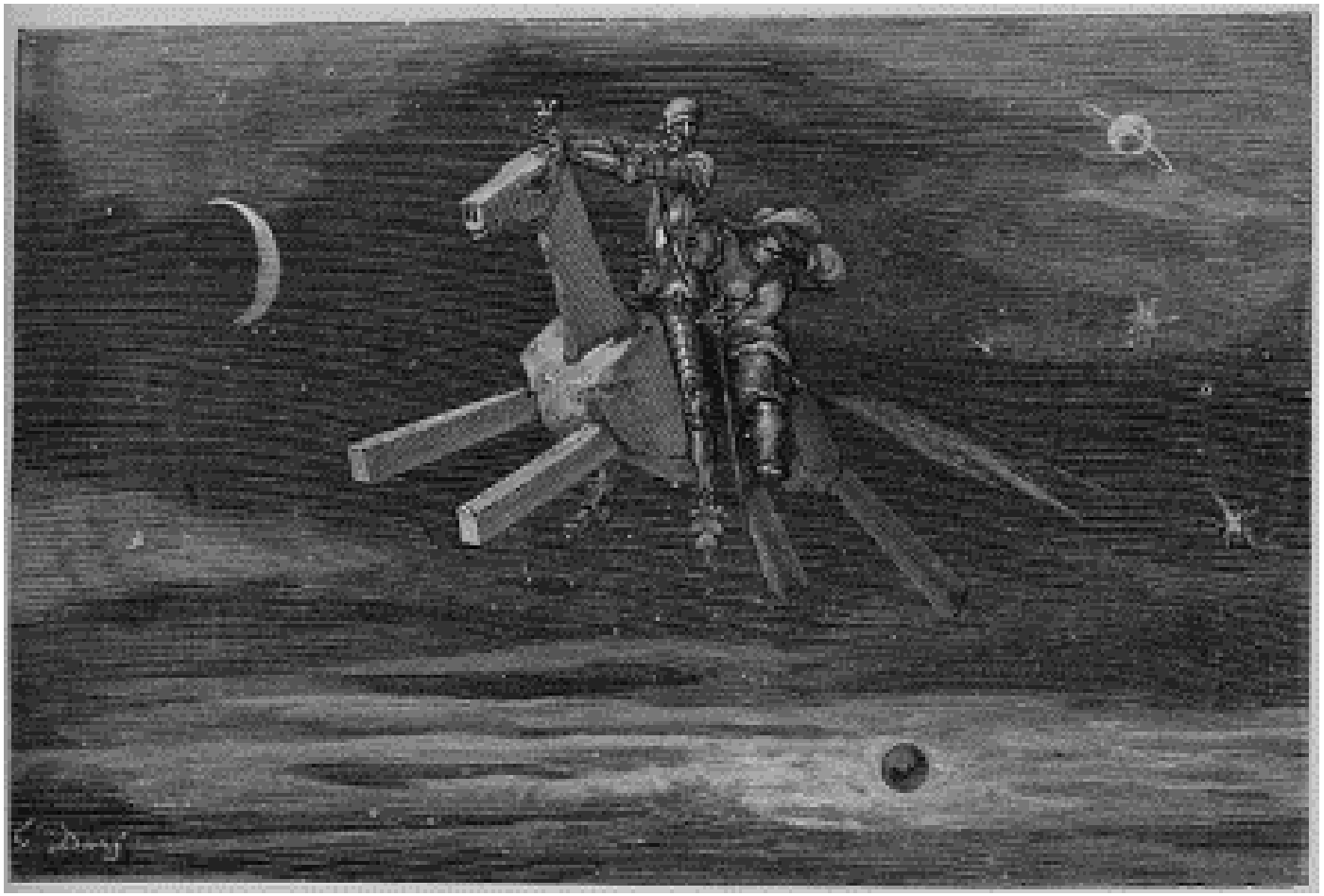
- DITA changes things
  - A standard enjoying broad adoption & support
  - An expanding array of commercial & open source tools
  - An increasing emphasis on extending the reach of DITA across the enterprise
    - Lightweight DITA
  - A framework for facilitating content reuse
  - A framework for adapting markup to meet needs

The DITA Message Spreads

DITA attracted immediate attention & enthusiasm.
It struck a chord with customers & product vendors.



Momentum Carries DITA into New Territories



DITA becomes the starting point for
a new breed of enterprise content management solutions

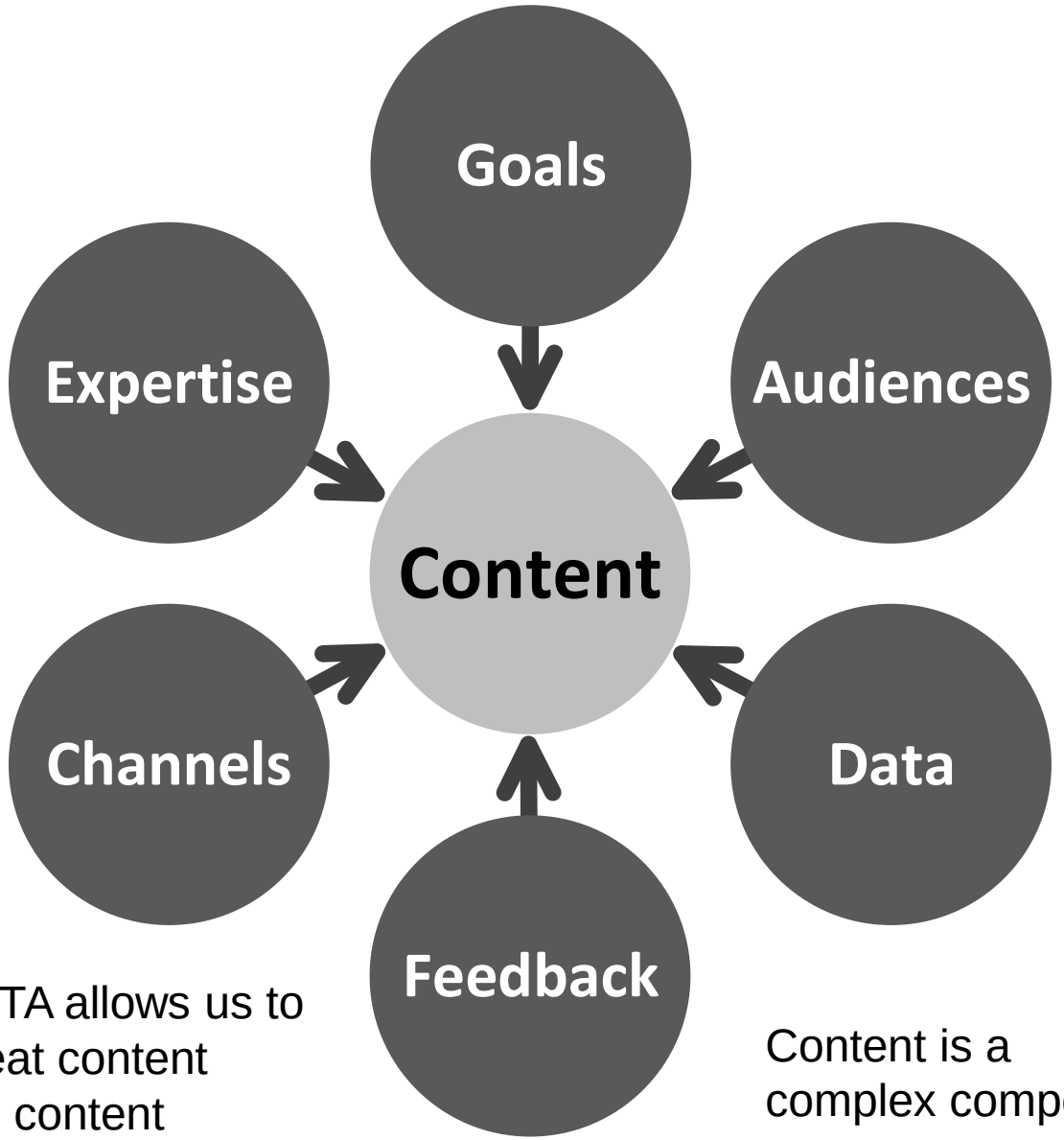
DITA Enters the Fray

- Landscape of enterprise content management is chaotic
  - DITA initiatives are thrust into the middle of it
    - Business applications, enterprise information governance, product management, corporate marketing, legal, engineering….

Opening the Pandora's Box of Integration

- DITA opens doors
  - Connecting content sources previously kept separate
  - Enabling integrated services previously not possible
- This flows from the extensibility of DITA
  - Permitting the incorporation of a wide range of details
- Integration is a challenge
  - New to Documentation Teams

The Integrated Nature of Content



DITA allows us to treat content as content

Content is a complex composite artifact

FLASHBACK – Unleashing Organizational Forces

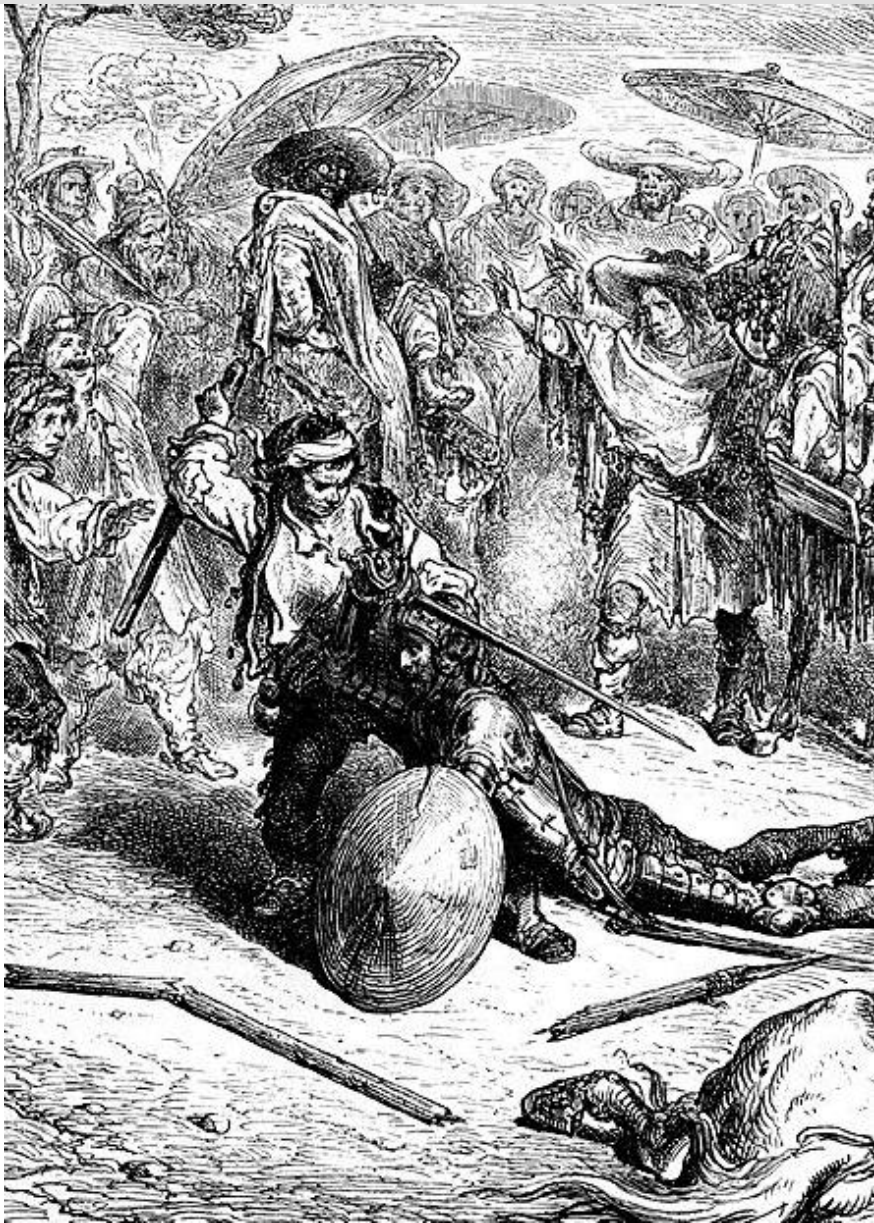
2012

CONTENT STRATEGY

A DANGEROUS METHOD

Broadening Adoption brings Escalating Pressures

- Expanding implementations
  - Lead to expanding demands
    - On DITA as a standard
    - On DITA as a shared solution
    - On DITA Product vendors
  - Pleasing everyone becomes (almost) impossible
- Leads inevitably to *one of*:
  - Over-extension of the standard
  - Re-architecture of the standard
    - Isolating essential constants



The Necessity of Moving Forward

- Failure to Move Forward
  - Condemns the industry to a peripheral status
  - Cuts off vendors from the robust funding associated with enterprise mandates & solutions
  - Withholds from enterprises a fundamental capability that is desperately needed
    - The ability to manage & leverage content as a strategic asset

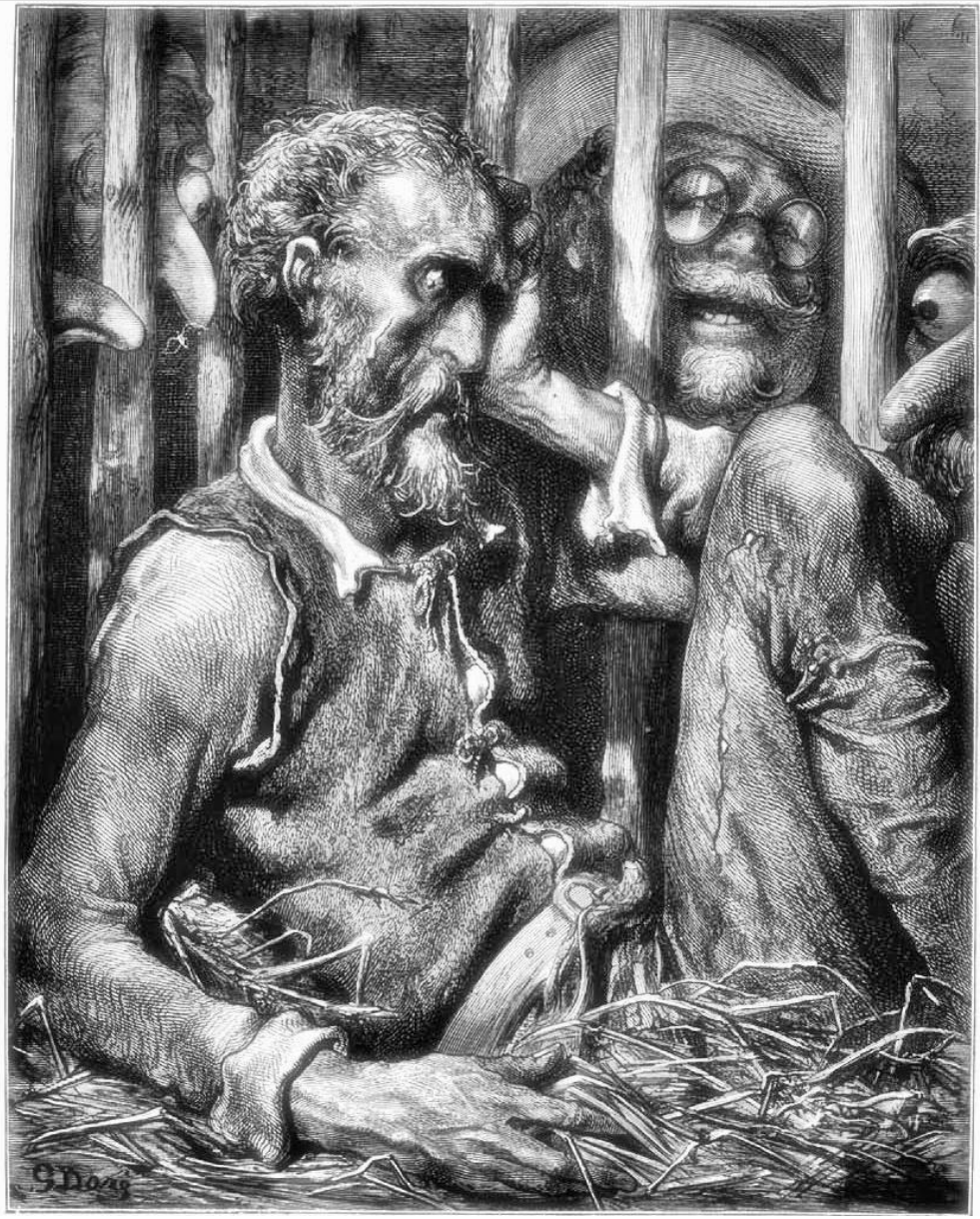
Danger Signs – The Challenges that Await

Cue the Critics

- Expect questions & criticism from everywhere
- Content is not well understood as an area for investment
  - Others want the funding
- Content seen as a cost
  - Traditional view
  - Not see as part of the product offering

Information Technology (IT) Groups

- IT Groups
  - Have little if any awareness about content technologies
  - Therefore they do not acknowledge it as an area of legitimate investment
  - Will oppose the introduction of unfamiliar supporting technologies
  - Will seek to redirect allocations to their projects



Major Shifts in Priorities

- Organizational Shocks
  - Can strike at any time
  - Will force budget & personnel allocations to be revisited
  - Content Management projects that are insufficiently flexible will be hammered by these changes
    - Adaptability is critical and often missing

Resistance to Change – Clinging to the Familiar

- Change is always hard
  - “We fear change!” Garth Algar
- It entails uncertainty & risk
- It threatens hard won security in practical knowledge (e.g., tools)
- Disciplinary biases often reinforced amid change
  - Only hearing familiar voices

Some Recent (Bad) Experiences

- DITA CMS Misalignments
  - Different stakeholder perspectives on role & nature of the DITA CMS
  - Conflicting agendas between Documentation team, Marketing & IT
  - Documentation Team Leader unprepared for the fight
  - Result: Big costs, long delays, frustrated users & customers

Losing Hope

- Successive shocks & setbacks can deflate the drive forward
  - Everyone is susceptible
  - Can lead to a retreat back to familiar territory
    - Refinement of details
    - Incremental savings
    - Reduced value
    - Certain death
  - May or may not be a conscious decision

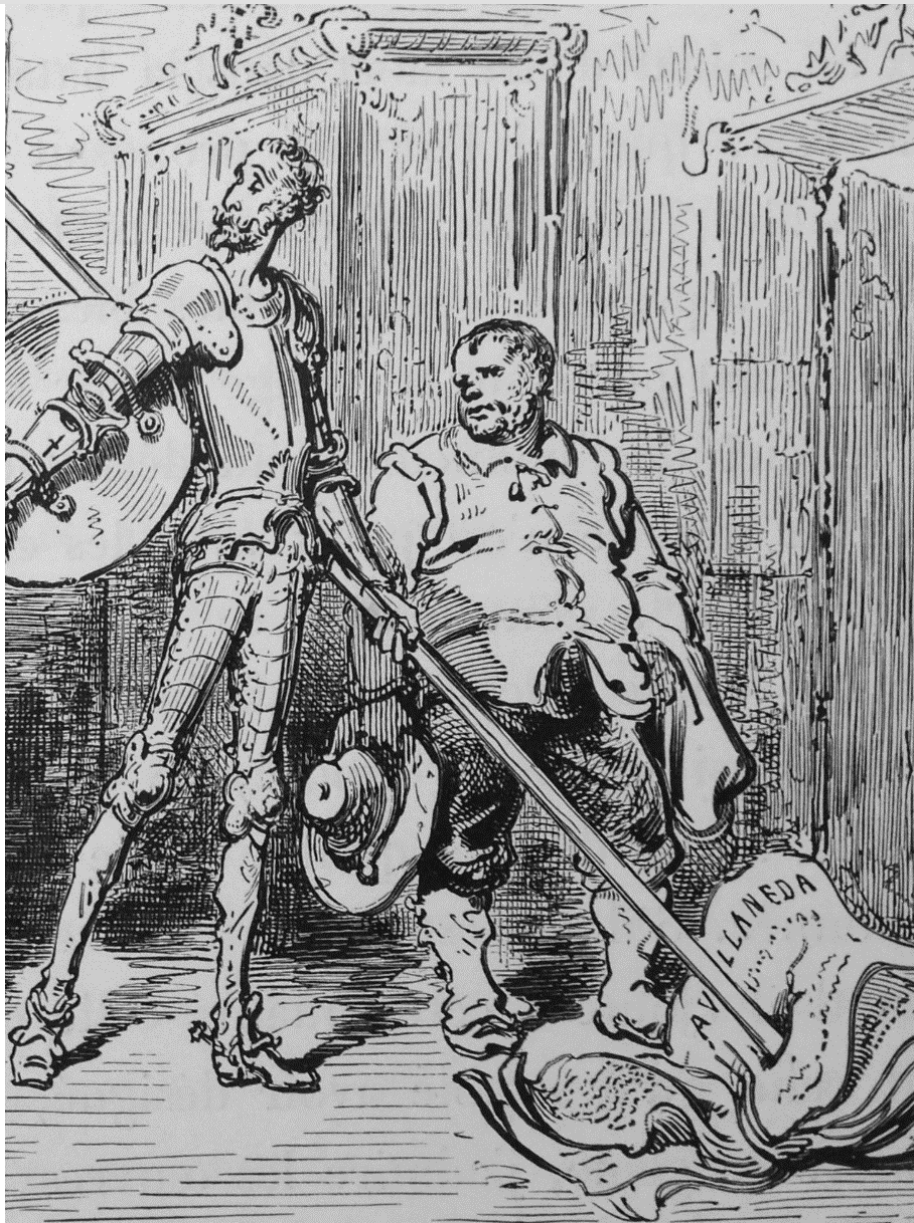
Moving Forward – Management Tactics

Managing Expectations

- Defining realistic goals
  - That are still compelling
- Dealing with the Silver Bullet mentality
  - Executives are often susceptible to “magic solutions”
  - Will often assume an initial investment solves everything
  - Will assume that things will be simpler than they in fact are
  - Will have little patience for complications & explanations

Managing Investments (Picking your Fights)

- The Selection & Sequencing of Project Investments
  - Of vital importance
- Too Large
  - The risks associated with it becomes too great
  - The scale of investment required absorbs budget
- Too Small
  - Falls below executive visibility
  - Does not win influential allies
  - Does not attract new money



Managing Progress

- Balancing the interplay between:
  - Time
  - Investments
  - Results
- Tell a credible story & sustain it as events unfold
- Find a sustainable investment curve
  - Self-funding steps
  - Sell the benefits as realized

Managing Complexity

- Technology & processes have a natural tendency towards complexity
  - Doubly true for content management projects
- Steer towards sustainability
  - Open & Adaptable technology
  - Reasonable investment & support profile
  - Careful management of specialization & customization
    - Determine where the value is…

Managing Suppliers

- Organizations need help to move forward
  - They do not have the tools or expertise to proceed alone
- Supplier community must be engaged & managed
  - Suppliers are generally good
  - Their goals are not always the same as yours
  - Their perspective will have been formed by their past
  - An important project element…

Managing the Team

- Migrating to DITA & a CMS places demands on team
  - And on the Team Leader
- People will often struggle
  - To see how the changes will impact them
  - To see how they will adapt
  - To muster the energy that change demands
- This calls for Leadership
  - Assuming responsibility

Managing Perception

- A key battleground will be how the DITA project is seen
  - Is it seen as a source of innovation? As a benefit to customers?
  - Is it seen as a sink hole of spending with elusive gains?
- Take the initiative
  - Find ways to connect to the customer domain
    - Sometimes called “inoculation”
    - Customer accolades as armor

Managing Stakeholders: Experts

- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)
  - Immersed in their specialties
    - Often exhibit disciplinary biases
    - Often inclined to combativeness
  - In constant demand
  - Extremely busy
- Essential sources of expertise
  - Engaging SMEs is
    - A constant challenge
    - Increasingly essential
- Striking *Win-Win* bargains is both hard & necessary

Managing Stakeholders: Executives

- Learning how to Play the Game
  - You need to become a player
  - Bringing something to the table
  - Bargaining win-win deals
- The Political Architecture
  - Projects need to prioritize tasks that provide bargaining chips
  - Projects need to sidestep contentious areas until ready
- Extoll any & all progress…
  - Stay on the radar

The Consolations of Content Management

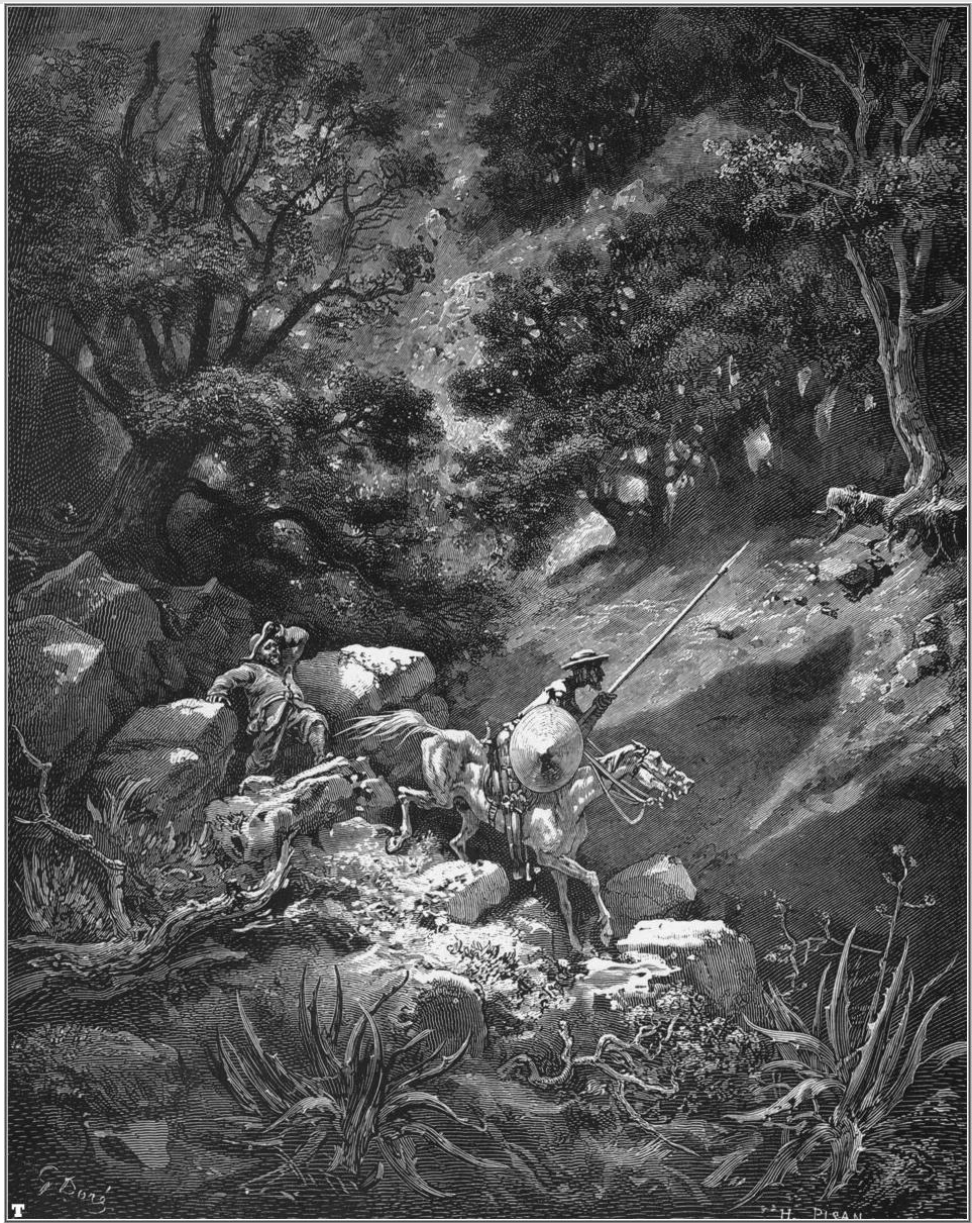
Remembering Yuri Rubinsky (1952 – 1996)

- A moving force behind standardized markup languages
- I have unilaterally declared him the *Spiritual Father of XML*
  - Embodying the best intentions that pushed for expanding the reach of open content standards
- He believed that open content
  - Was a force for good in the world
  - Its benefits would be wide-reaching
  - Worth committing your life to

Photo courtesy Rick McGinnis

The Real Secret: The Road is Hard but *Don't Give Up*

- The realization of benefits & their acknowledgement is always elusive
  - It is in the nature of content to have a complex relationship to outcomes
  - All of the preceding tactics need to be pursued
- Don Quixote achieves many good results
  - By sheer dint of persistence
  - Even if he does not see it



Other Dangers? Other Tactics? *Discuss*

Connections

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To Morrow to Fresh Woods and Pastures New

Gnostyx Research Inc.
equips organizations with the tools and knowledge they need to make the most of their content.

As an independent content solution provider that specializes in leveraging open standards and extensible technologies, Gnostyx offers:

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