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The Formation of a Multimedia Reader-Writer[1]

La formación de un lecto-escritor multimedia

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Over the last three years, I've been invited to speak to around ten thousand students in schools all over Brazil, relating my professional experience as an author, scriptwriter, and video game designer. In this series of talks, entitled "Doors", I relate to the students how reading has opened possibilities throughout my lifetime, leading me through four different careers and a multitude of multimedia publications.

As I tell the students, my love for reading started in my childhood. I grew up in the suburbs of Houston, Texas. As the last of five children, my family had accumulated a small library by the time I was born, offering plenty of options to get started. Before my own alphabetization, my parents would read books to me every night at bedtime. My tendencies toward storytelling also manifested early, when I would record my own stories in a tape recorder before I learned how to write.

When I did learn how to read, my desire for stories quickly exceeded our home collection. My main source of material was the neighborhood library. In particular, the library's summer reading program–which offered prizes for frequent readers–had me changing out stacks of books on a weekly basis. Another incentive was the Scholastic Book Fair, which offered catalogs in the classrooms several times a year, allowing children to order and receive books at school.

In my adolescence, table-top role-playing games (RPGs) became one of my primary influences. RPGs require quite a bit of reading and, for those acting as "game masters", an enormous amount of creativity, improvisation and storytelling skills. Also, many role-playing games included bibliographies of selected readings, which led me to explore dozens of new authors.

These games, which I played throughout my teen years, were likely the single greatest influence on my later writing career. In fact, my first writing submissions, while still an adolescent, were to role-playing game companies and magazines. These youthfully naïve efforts failed, but introduced me to the concept of submitting fiction for publication.

Despite graduating from a public school considered "very weak" by university admissions commissions, my extracurricular reading led me to high enough scores on standardized testing to earn a scholarship at Rice University, one the United States' most prestigious private schools. Although my principal interests at the time included literature, history, and technology, family pressures pushed me toward the third, to study Electrical and Computer Engineering. I would graduate five years later with honors.

My degree led to my first career, as a microprocessor architect at Intel, and also my first publications, in the form of corporate white papers. In 1997, I moved into technical consulting, working with video game developers around the globe. During one of my visits to Brazil, I met with Southlogic Studios, a four-person development studio in southern Brazil. In 1999, I left Intel and joined them, where I moved from programming to game design to production. This work began forming a bridge in my career between technology and storytelling.

During this time, I also started lecturing part-time at local universities (what would become my third career) and producing occasional research. Since my first publications in 2004, I've published close to twenty academic publications—articles and textbooks—dealing with video games, narratives, and fiction. As my non-fiction publications began to appear, I was inspired to submit fiction again. In 2005, after many rejections, I finally had my first published fiction appear in *Deep Magic*, a monthly digital publication from the United States.

That would begin a long stretch of improving my writing through courses, workshops, and mostly, reading. Along the way, I published dozens of books, short stories and poems and have seen my work printed in ten languages to date. That work has been recognized with many honors, including a nomination for the prestigious Nebula Award in 2011.

In 2009, Southlogic Studios was sold to international entertainment giant Ubisoft, where I worked for a time as Creative Director. There, I learned about transmedia creation from colleagues around the world, and in 2010, I left the company to dedicate myself to my fourth career: storytelling. From my time at Intel through Ubisoft, I participated in the creation of over twenty video game titles, totaling millions of units sold.

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Having spent many years working with literature and video games, I began studying a third storytelling medium: comics. My first publication in that area, a graphic novel, was launched in 2014, and was also the first publication to carry the name of my transmedia universe known as *The Elephant and Macaw Banner.* That book was chosen as a finalist for Book of the Year by the Writer's Association of Rio Grande do Sul (AGES), and Book of the Month in Passo Fundo, Brazil's national literature capital. That fictional universe has since expanded to prose, published in four languages, and features an upcoming board game and role-playing game, both of which passed through years of development. The books have been adopted in dozens of schools around Brazil.

In 2014, I moved on to yet another medium, studying scriptwriting for TV and cinema. Although I've been contracted to write several scripts for these media, none of those projects have yet reached the marketplace.

In 2015, I was hired as transmedia writer for the project *Starlit Adventures*, where I produced the script for the video game, three original comic books, and a pilot for an animated series (in development). The video game has reached over five million players and the comics hundreds of thousands.

After twenty years in the entertainment business and four careers, reading continues to be fundamental to my personal and professional development. Reading has helped me transition from one career to the next, to create better stories, to identify new properties for my projects, and has never ceased to be a wonderful form of entertainment.

Moving forward, I look to apply my years of multimedia experience to projects that blur the lines between classical media. As video games and other interactive products show signs of being the dominant forms of entertainment in the near future, I'm looking at ways of "making smarter games", with better integration of storytelling and text in the games. In this way, I look to convert players into readers, without them even realizing it.

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