Chapter 12

Weaving Nature Mage: Collective Intertextuality in the Design of a Book-to-Game Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on the analysis of previous cross-media game adaptations, on empirical research, and on reflection on practice with the design of a game concept for a fantasy book. Book-to-game adaptations are particularly interesting examples of cross-media adaptation. They not only weave the literary source text with intertexts from the game medium, but also require a modal transposition from the realm of words to a visual, interactive, multimodal medium where narrative and ludic logics intersect. This study proposes to look at different layers of cross-media intertextuality in the process of adaptation - at the level of specific texts, at the level of medium conventions, and at the level of genre conventions. It draws on crowd-sourcing research with readers to demonstrate that collaboration operates through multi-layered processes of collective intertextuality through which the intertextual repertoires of individuals meet to weave a final text.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is based on empirical research and reflection on practice in the design of a game concept for a fantasy book series, Nature Mage. It looks at intertextuality in operation when author, games researcher and readers come together to work on a cross-media adaptation.

I met the author Duncan Pile in 2012, when we started thinking about possible adaptations of his story into digital media formats, namely a game. This collaboration forms the basis of practice-based research contributing towards the UNESCO Chair project Crossing Media Boundaries: Adaptation and New Media Forms of the Book, lead by Professor Alexis Weedon at the University of Bedfordshire. It is an ongoing project, and here I reflect on the path walked thus far, focusing on our thinking and work towards reader involvement and the design of a Nature Mage game.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0477-1.ch012
Video games that adapt source texts from other media are particularly interesting as objects of study for the analysis of intertextuality. From a contextual perspective of production, they provide a window into practices of cross-media adaptation increasingly significant in contemporary media. And, from a textual perspective, games-as-adaptations present a heightened level of intertextual and intermedial complexity since they not only cross media, but also mix narrative and ludic logics.

Etymologically, the meaning of the word text is “a tissue, a woven fabric” (Barthes, 1977, p. 159). The idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends, as Barthes argues, on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the “already written” and the “already read”. Every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts, and this meaning is actualised – effectively established – in multiple ways by authors and readers.

Weaving a new game text based on a book means dealing with distinct resources of a different nature: narrative resources from the source book and ludic conventions of the destination game medium. These constitute different kinds of threads used in the weaving of a new text. The adaptation of a book into a game requires a medium translation, entailing a fit into its specific affordances. It involves the transposition of narrative resources from an established literary genre to a more recent hybrid form, influenced both by literary and gaming genres in a complex web of traditions and conventions.

This chapter discusses the intertextual processes and influences, the numerous **threads** used for the weaving of the *Nature Mage* game concept, with the ultimate aim of proposing a model for the analysis of game adaptations as processes of **collective** intertextuality: the meeting of the media repertoires, intertextual references, opinions and desires of the individuals involved in an adaptation, in turn framed by medium-specific affordances, generic conventions and more widely the very contexts of production.

**BACKGROUND**

**The Story: A Hero is Born**

The *Nature Mage* series, written and self-published by Duncan Pile (2011, 2013a, 2014) consists of three volumes (see Figure 1) in print and e-book format: *Nature Mage, Nature’s Servant and Nature’s Peril*. The author is currently working on *Nature Master*, the fourth title in the series. Below you can read a blurb for the first book.

*Gaspi is an ordinary boy, living in the mountain village of Aemon’s Reach, but life, for Gaspi, is forever changed the day magic erupts in him. He discovers he has a powerful gift – he is a Nature Mage, able to control natural forces and creatures and bend them to his will. It is a rare gift, and no-one has been born with it in centuries, but Gaspi’s powers also have a dark side, and without training they will kill him. He is forced to leave his home and travel to the distant city of Helioport, where the Archmages of the College of Collective Magicks will teach him how to use his powers.*

*Accompanied by his guardian and his best friends, Gaspi sets off on the long journey to Helioport. The journey is fraught with danger, and Gaspi and his friends discover that there are demonic creatures abroad, intent on finding and killing anyone with magical ability.*
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