

05. Hypertext. Narrative. Art. Tech.

TECHNIQUE, STRUCTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY: FROM WEBLOG TO WEBTALE

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eNarrative Spotlight 4: a chat with

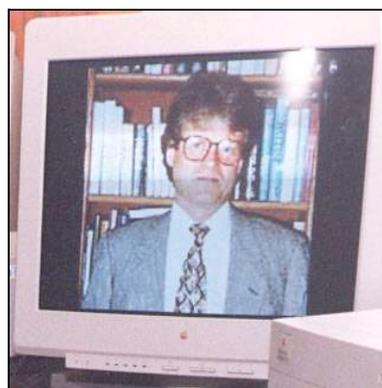
Richard Holeton

Richard Holeton is the author of [Figurski at Findhorn on Acid](#) (Eastgate 2001) and the Head of Residential Computing at Stanford, where he taught writing for eleven years while conducting research in student computer-mediated communication. He holds a BA in English from Stanford and an MA and MFA from San Francisco State University, where he completed the university's first electronic (hypertext) thesis. Holeton's fiction has appeared in *Black Ice*, *Five Fingers Review*, and other literary journals.

After a little coaxing, Holeton agreed to stay on the screen for a brief chat...

Eastgate: What started you writing electronic fiction? How does hypertext change the way you think about fiction?

Holeton: Like some writers, I think I may be the worst person to talk to about my work, but your questions are good ones so I'll give it a shot...



For me these are closely related questions, because my favorite paper fiction was already "hypertextual" or proto-hypertextual -- *Tristram Shandy*, *Pale Fire*, works where the form is self-consciously part of the subversiveness, and part of the fun or the

playfulness or the satire, of the art. So it wasn't a giant leap at all from Sterne, the Nabokov of *Pale Fire*, or Calvino, say, to electronic hypertext, it was more of an "aha" experience: look mom, I can do stuff like that too -- and more -- in this new medium.

How did you get the idea for *Figurski*?

It started with a short-short story I wrote called "Streleski at Findhorn on Acid," published in the paper journal *_Grain_* (Winter 1996). (In "Figurski," the real-life convicted murderer Streleski appears as the dubious inspiration for the fictional Figurski.) Then I started creating other scenarios using the formula "Somebody at Somewhere with Something," got the idea for combining a limited number of these elements into an overall plot, and it took off from there.

Why was Storyspace the right tool for Figurski?

The "combinatorial" (to use Eastgate's description, which wasn't previously in my vocabulary!) structure of Figurski -- scenes generated from all the permutations of three characters, three places, and three artifacts -- seemed a natural for Storyspace's nested writing spaces. Plus, if you want to highlight that structure for the reader, and you have a tool that generates graphical maps of the structure, well, that's a pretty good match. Of course, when you look at the broad spectrum of hypertext capabilities, including sophisticated techniques like Storyspace's guard fields and all the things you can do now on the web with javascript, php, Flash, etc., Figurski is obviously very uncomplicated in design. But for my purposes I needed only the basic features of Storyspace: nesting nodes, links, default navigation, map views.

What are you working on now?

I've been playing with a "database fiction" (so far, in Filemaker), and also conceiving a new piece, for the web or Storyspace, for which I may seek a designer-programmer-digital artist as collaborator. And I finally ordered some books on graphic design and on bathroom remodeling, in hopes that one or the

other will inform my writing. ;)

What's been on your screen lately?

Reruns of "West Wing." How will the public react to President Bartlett's revelation that he has MS, and will he seek a second term?

[Interviewer carefully taps monitor screen.]

Oh, *that* screen. After seeing her work displayed at DAC, I became an admirer of Alicia Felberbaum's "holes linings threads". Most recently I looked at your other eNarrative profiles: Powazek, Leishman, dane, and what's been on *their* screens. Wow! Some terrific looking stuff. I hope those graphic design books I ordered arrive soon.

I heard you wrote a blurb in response to Michael Tratner's testimonial about Figurski. Would you be willing to share that?

Tratner's blurb: "Holeton's hypertext belongs in the tradition of screwball comedy, but it raises that tradition to the level of metaphysics -- a cross between Borges and the Marx Brothers."

My response: "Tratner's blurb belongs in the tradition of whacko commentary, but it raises that tradition to the level of quantum physics -- a cross between Heisenberg and The Three Stooges."

Who wrote the last question?

I did.

So we're switching roles now?

It appears so. When did you start working at Eastgate and why?

Editor at Eastgate with Passion for Electronic Writing.

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