

# Transport of delight

As Eduardo Galvani says, interactive e-books had always been glorified PDFs until Apple introduced iBooks Author. Now the Mac app has enabled, rich, beautiful offerings such as *The Yellow Cab of the Universe Rides the Solar System*. BY ROBERTO DE VIDO

**T**okyo-based visual designer Eduardo Galvani's interactive iBook *The Yellow Cab of the Universe Rides the Solar System* incorporates animation, video, music, 3D graphics and interactive imagery – and it was all done using Apple's free iBooks Author.

## WHEN DID YOU START WORK ON 'THE YELLOW CAB OF THE UNIVERSE RIDES THE SOLAR SYSTEM'?

**Eduardo Galvani:** On 2 February, 2012. That's the day Apple released iBooks Author for the Mac – I downloaded the application and started work a few hours after the announcement was made.

## WELL, WHEN DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR THE BOOK, THEN?

**EG:** The book has been written in my mind for 10 years. Every chapter, every story. It's simply that until the advent of iBooks Author, it would have been too difficult – too time-consuming, not cost-effective – to create in the way I wanted to create it.

With very few exceptions, interactive e-books to date have been glorified PDFs. The potential was not being explored. You would have a few effects, and then be back on the PDF page. ePub is fine for text, but it's not really ideal for graphical content.

And before iBooks Author, I would have had to spend three to four times longer, using Quartz and Cocoa, and the book would probably have been outdated by the time it was done.

## HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO LEARN TO USE IBOOKS AUTHOR?

**EG:** Around two days to learn to use it properly. On the first night, I created the title. On the second day I thought up the taxicab.

## WHY A TAXICAB?

**EG:** I had previously thought about many ways to tell the story, but once I decided to go ahead and try to write the book, I said to a friend, "If this isn't a success, I will close my design business, move to New York, and drive a taxicab. I have all the

requirements: a driving licence, a green card, a bad accent, and I am rude to my clients." My friend thought it was a great idea.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE WORKED ON YELLOW CAB WITH YOU?

**EG:** Over 25 people have helped on the project, but only two of us are full-time. At the moment, it's a labour of love. Everyone involved in the project is getting paid less than they are worth, or not at all, giving their time and effort because they believe strongly in the book, in the mission.

## SO, WHAT'S THE MISSION?

**EG:** In the dedication to the book I wrote that I created this for my daughter, who is a teenager and who, like many teenagers, thinks she doesn't like science. And I created it for every kid.

To me, this is the final legacy of Steve Jobs. Steve was all about education, and iBooks Author made it possible for me to create something that didn't make sense, economically, for me to make before.

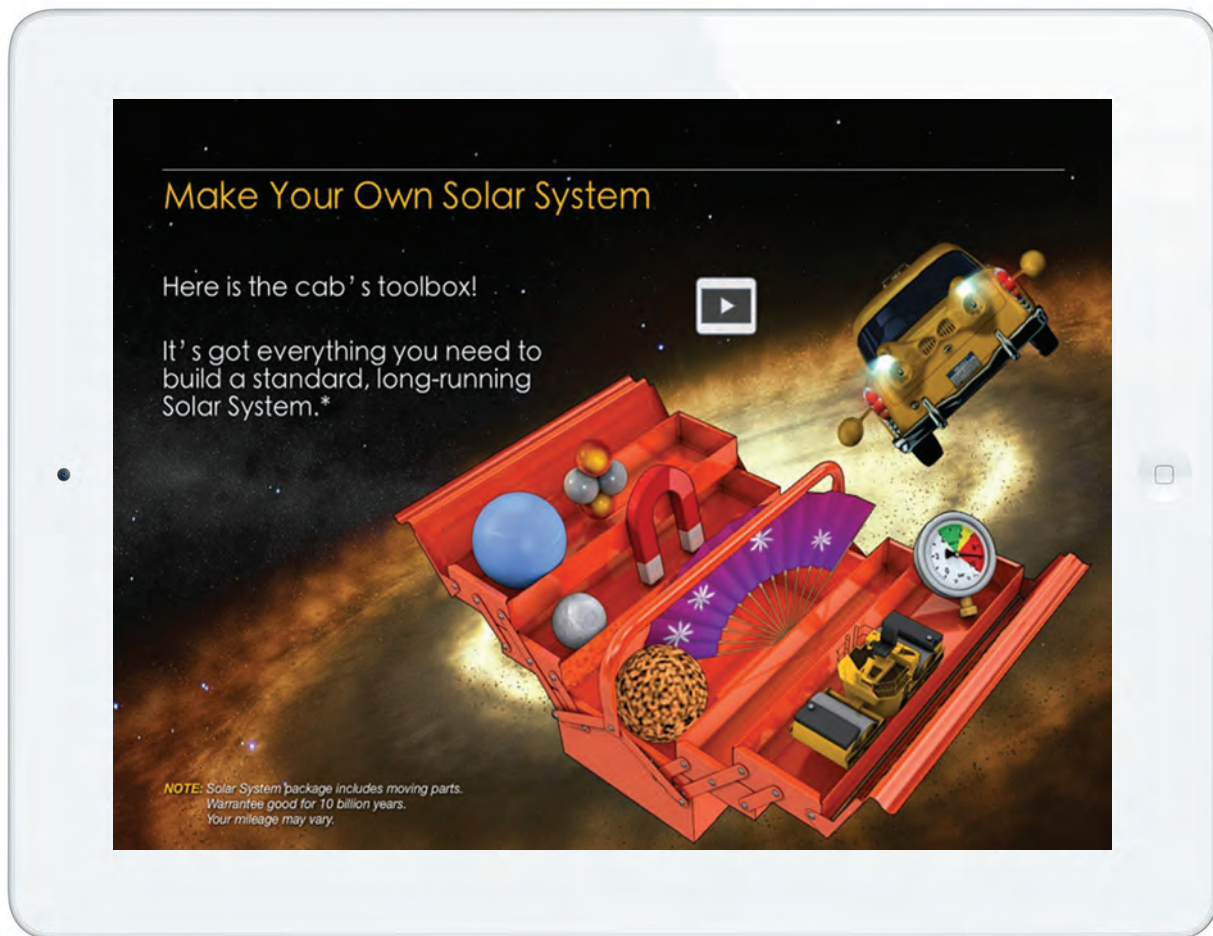
I had the whole thing in my mind, but I couldn't afford to produce it. iBooks Author is a software application I would pay \$10,000 for, and Apple's offering it for free!

## YOU SAID IN THE BEGINNING YOU WERE A ONE-MAN BAND. WHO WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO JOIN YOU ON THIS PROJECT?

**EG:** David Russell, who is the editor, was the first one, with Todd Porter, our CEO. When I spoke with David, I needed someone who could match my visuals with text. And Todd handles the business side of things, which I hate to do.



**First cab off the rank.** Visual designer Eduardo Galvani says it took him "around two days" to learn to use iBooks Author properly.



### THEY'RE BOTH IN TOKYO?

**EG:** I knew David from the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, and I knew Todd through my involvement with TEDxTokyo, of which Todd was a founder.

### YOU'VE HAD A LOT OF HELP FROM NASA AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY, RIGHT? HOW DID YOU GET THEM INTERESTED?

**EG:** In the beginning, I was very excited about having the chance to finally write this book, and I talked to all my science connections. I've been interested in science since I was a small boy, and I have had the chance to meet a number of people in what is ultimately, a fairly small world.

Science was fantastic for me as a kid. It took me to places so much faster than novels could. And it's non-fiction; it's happening right in front of you!

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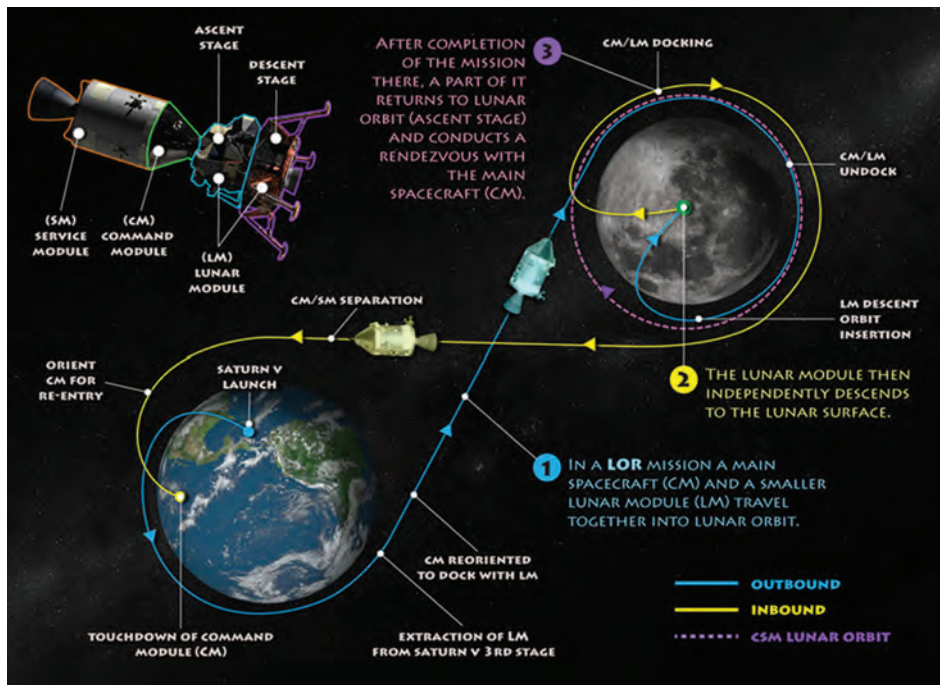
My parents both died when I was very young, and I had an unusual upbringing. I had a tutor who was a Jesuit priest, Father Francesc Domingo Segura. And he was very interested in philosophy and science. He devoted 15 years of his life to educating me, and he introduced me to rational thinking, observation, curiosity ...

When I was 11 years old, he introduced me to Bertrand Russell's *ABC of Relativity*. And I said, "Wow." The same year, he introduced me to Russell's *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*.

The next year, my parents both died, and I was taken into the care of my grandparents. The first birthday after that, when I would be 13, Father Francesc said to me, "Eduardo, on this birthday you will get whatever you ask for."

He suggested I ask my grandparents to let me attend an event for children that was being held in Ithaca, New York, at Cornell University.

The event was organised by Carl Sagan, and I met him then. I met him again 10 years later, and through him I met Michio Kaku, and through Kaku I met Paul Davies, and so on. It's a small family.



### WHAT HAVE YOUR FRIENDS IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY DONE TO HELP?

**EG:** Ten out of 10 people I've shown this book to have said, "Great!", "Fantastic!", "Wonderful!" And so when I contacted Paul Davies, he sent me on to people at Caltech. And the Caltech people said, "Oh, you must talk to people at the University of Arizona!"

Everyone along the way was so open, so willing to help. The Caltech people looked at some of the data I had and said, "That number is so old! You have to add two more zeroes!"

The University of Arizona people gave me the blueprints to the Mars rover, Curiosity. And so the information in the book is absolutely accurate! NASA sent me a special hard drive and gave me access to data from

Curiosity, and I have been able to use things that no one has published anywhere else.

It's just because they think it's a great project, and because they want the same thing I do: to help people to learn about and love science.

### WHAT WERE YOU DOING BEFORE YOU STARTED WORK ON YELLOW CAB? DURING THE 10 YEARS YOU WERE WRITING THE BOOK IN YOUR HEAD AND BEFORE THAT?

**EG:** Well, I'm a visual designer, a graphic designer. But I never thought my legacy would be shaving-cream commercials. And in 2011, after the earthquake and tsunami here in Japan, my work started to dry up. I was scraping the bottom of my pot.

After February 2, though, I was working day and night on the book, and as I said, I was confident that people would love it. At that point, I got a telephone call from an old client, who works for a very, very powerful company, and who wanted me to work on a television commercial.

The guy calls me and says, "Eduardo, can you come here at five o'clock?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Eduardo, is that you?" I said, "Yes, it's me!"

And we go back and forth and he asks me why I can't come, and I tell him, "I'm busy." So he says, "Can you come tomorrow?" And I said, "No, I'm busy." Because I had pushed all my chips into the centre of the table at that point.

Anyway, the conversation concluded, and I am not kidding, with this guy telling me, "You'll never work in this town again." That's a story I hope I will enjoy telling for many years to come.

### WHEN DID YOU LAUNCH YELLOW CAB?

**EG:** On November 2, 2012. Just after the launch of the iPad mini.

### AND HOW WIDELY IS IT AVAILABLE?

**EG:** At the moment it is available in 32 countries, through Apple's iBookstore.

**Everyone involved in the project is getting paid less than they are worth, or not at all, giving their time and effort because they believe strongly in the book, in the mission.**

**IT'S IN ENGLISH ONLY AT THE MOMENT, RIGHT? WHAT ARE YOU PLANS FOR TRANSLATION?**

**EG:** Believe it or not, our first translation may be into Swedish. And then likely Japanese and Spanish.

**OKAY, WHY SWEDISH?**

**EG:** The Director-General of the Swedish National Space Board asked!

**AND HOW SOON WILL THESE OTHER VERSIONS BE AVAILABLE?**

**EG:** We have not decided that yet.

**WILL THE CONTENT BE EXACTLY THE SAME?**

**EG:** Yes.

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE YELLOW CAB OF THE UNIVERSE?**

**EG:** Next summer we're planning to release the second title in the series: *The Yellow Cab of the Universe Visits Mr Albert's Brain*. That one will follow Albert Einstein through the world of physics. After that, biology and chemistry.

**SO THAT'S WHY YOU ARE INVOLVING MANY PEOPLE ...**

**EG:** Absolutely. The astronomy book is done, except for the translations, and except, of course, that astronomy changes every day as scientists learn more and more, and undoubtedly we may have to update the book now and then.

But practically, what I'm doing now is trying to divide myself. I want to focus full-time on the creation of the stories, and leave my admirable team to the business aspects.

I had a bizarre dream the other day: I saw a way to explain thermodynamics through broccoli! 🍷

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