

In a Library Far, Far Away

Jorge Aguirre

“Love your Library” series

I grew up in suburban Ohio in the 1980s. As a child, I was convinced that I could teach myself ESP. If I could master Extrasensory Perception, I could master clairvoyance and telekinesis. In other words, I would be just like my hero, Luke Skywalker, because... isn't ESP just a fancy word for The Force? I needed to find books about ESP, I mean, The Force. My supportive mother dropped me off at the Tremont Library in Upper Arlington, and I would run down to the basement to begin my research. The basement was the reference room. The reference room was where all the secrets of the universe were kept. At first, I found plenty of books about ESP. But books about alien abductions, ghosts, and other paranormal phenomena were shelved nearby and I veered off course from my original journey toward Jedi Knighthood. At some point in my reference-room odyssey, I discovered the microfiche machines. For anyone born post-2000: microfiche is a roll of film containing photographs of a newspaper or other document. I learned how to load a roll of microfiche into these beautiful contraptions. There was a knob you could turn right to advance months and years beyond. I was mesmerized by the black and white blur of images that passed by on the monitor as I would time-travel on the microfiche. I read newspapers from the year I was born, or randomly read about the Labor Day sales at Lazarus Department store in the early 1970s. The microfiche machines were not that far from the magazine section, which had the reference area's most comfortable seats. So, I'd sit there, waiting for my mom, reading *Highlights*, *Time Magazine*, or paging through *TV Guide*. Eventually, I made it out of the basement reference area to the main floor and the world of fiction. One summer, my parents sent me to Colombia to visit my *abuelitos*. The last place a kid wants to be during summer is away from his friends and parents, alone in a foreign country where they spoke a different language and where their spaghetti tasted different than Ohio's spaghetti. Before I left, my mom sent me to the library and I borrowed a bunch of books including the whole *Chronicles of Narnia* series. I packed my mini-library into my suitcase and off I went. That summer in Cali, whenever I was lonely, I would astrally project myself into Narnia through books borrowed from my hometown library in a place, far, far away. Did I ever learn The Force? Can I summon a book to fly across the room with a simple wave of my hand? I wish! Am I reading your mind now as you read this? No. That would be weird. But just like Luke Skywalker left his small town on Tatooine to see the universe, the library helped me leave my smallish town in Ohio to see the world. My library helped me transverse time, space, and worlds. Today, I take my children to my local Montclair library in the hopes that my love of libraries, which was born in a basement reference room in Ohio, will be passed on to them. And secretly, I hope they'll find the book I never found. It's the one that will teach them ESP, I mean, the ways of The Force. I have no doubt that as my kids unlock the secrets and worlds contained in their library, someday they'll find it.

Jorge Aguirre is the Montclair based author of *Giants Beware*, *Dragons Beware* and the forthcoming *Monsters Beware*.