

Cryptozookeeper: The Instruction Manual

Foreword by Alex Gray

In 1999 I was 14 years old, that's when Robb Sherwin first started touching me.

Being from Scotland I was naive, we'd only had mains electricity for a few months before the Internet arrived. Of course, at 14, I used this new technology to find the things a growing boy yearns for: Star Trek transcripts, ironing tips and Magic: The Gathering deck building guides. But I remembered something from my earlier childhood, a fond memory of gathering around an old flickering Atari with my family, and playing text adventures. Perhaps with this new connection to the sum of all human knowledge, I could find other people still interested in those old textual experiences.

Some searching on Dogpile and Yahoo led me to the 'IF Archive', a file server full of completely impenetrable file names in arcane arrangement. I was lost and dispirited. Perhaps this hobby wasn't meant for people like me, youngsters who just wanted to play something for old time's sake. Crushed, I reached over to hang up my state of the art Scottish modem. But, just as I started disengaging the acoustic coupler, I noticed something on screen. A filetype I recognised on a file whose name could only spark wonder in my adolescent brain.

'chix.exe'

I downloaded it. I played it.

Three hours later I awake from my coma. I took stock. It... It was vile. I had led such a simple, honest life up to then. I can honestly pinpoint the exact moment that my life went wrong as the day that Robb Sherwin made me harass four women in a night club and then go dig up bodies.

At the time I thought it was astonishing, I had never seen such well realised characters. Of course, it's obvious now that each one is the delusion of a sick mind, but at the time I didn't know the denizens of his game shared names with the headless dolls sitting around his ward.

The author was kind enough to put his email address in the Help menu, and so I emailed him, and a few hours later he replied! I was overjoyed, not just because this genius had responded, but because the Internet worked! I could send letters instantaneously to someone in America. It was incredible.

From this excitement we started a rapport, which in hindsight might better be called 'grooming'. He taught me a lot over the coming decade, as we wrote back and forth. Sometimes, he asked me to take pictures for him. I never asked why. I've been told since that he put them in his 'interactive fiction', which I guess means he stuck them to the dolls.

Robb Sherwin is a terrible, terrible man. He is also the best text adventure author in the world because unlike every other person in the scene, he knows the uninitiated just want a fucking .exe

-- Alex Gray, Edinburgh Scotland, June 15th, 2011

Cryptozookeeper: Prologue

Blue LEDs are an intriguing, enticing symbol of the future. TIME Magazine pronounced them their "Person of the Year" in 2015, as they continued their tradition of being simpering, cowering pussies that make the safe pick while the world spirals into a dystopian oligarchy. But nowhere were they more prevalent than in the bedroom of William Vest.

Vest owned over two dozen devices armed with 47 deep-cyan LEDs that glowed brilliantly while he slept. 48 when his discount Roomba would enter for a little late-night strutting and vacuuming. His Roomba had finally won the Great Turf War when Vest's cat went missing a week ago, and it liked to vroom itself under the bed, smugly, picking up cat hair that, frankly, Vest would have been perfectly content to leave be, lest all trace of his former tabby be eliminated from his home.

The Roomba would have none of it.

The microcontroller in the thing went a little haywire with all the initial static electricity, and as a result, Vest could never successfully program it to clean while he was at work, making deliveries. The portable vacuum cleaner would seemingly delight in picking the least opportune times to clean, and due to selection bias, William would hear its condescending, buzzing tones after a night of Herradura and crying. It had been such a night.

Ten of the blue LEDs were embedded in Vest's computer alone. He hated that computer. He had been told that it would automatically download the latest version of Windows when a new version was released. He was lied to, of course -- the sales associate could barely count to eight, much less provide any cogent facts about Windows 8. However, Vest innately trusted his fellow man, and that trust prevented him from ever turning his computer off at night. He woke up each morning to immediate disappointment upon recognizing that, no, the new version of Windows hadn't automatically installed itself. He could have turned the PC off and enjoyed a bit more darkness, but he never dared to.

Other devices pockmarked with blue LEDs included his stereo, his stereo speakers, his MP3 player, the charging station for his MP3 player, his alarm clock, the security sensor on his bedroom's window, and the crown jewel in his possession -- a flat tablet that allowed holographic representations of board games to be played wirelessly with wargame enthusiasts worldwide. The Grognook.

The Roomba stirred and undocked itself. It traveled in a straight path to Vest's bed.

Vest had played a game called "bobbing for Jaeger" the night before and was in pain. He was extremely good at the game, and he consumed a lot of Jaegermeister. He really wasn't built for it, being a human being, and everything. His brain felt like it had shrunk to the size of a shy, severed testicle. He dry-heaved as he woke, and had a passionate and intense craving for waffles. He couldn't see clearly, but having memorized the position of all 47 blue LEDs in his room, he was able to snatch the Roomba from the floor using motion as vision. He stabbed and

pawed at the diode on his window to open it, and threw the Roomba into his fenced-in yard, two stories below.

The Roomba would eventually find the cat and they would cuddle together for warmth in the unseasonably cold New Mexico evening. But the act of heaving his portable vacuum away from him cleared Vest's mind for a brief moment, and he realized he was going to have to call his boss and take a sick day. He felt like he had done so a dozen times before. He had sworn, deeply, to never do it again. But not calling in was worse than taking the day off, so he had to do it. The thought of doing so with no future waffles pierced him, but he got on with it. He fumbled for his cell phone (LEDs 34-37). He dialed Igor Cytserz.

Cytserz told him, in broken, challenging English, that he had already called in sick a dozen times previous in the last three fooking hours, and to stop fooking annoying the shit out of every him and every other mobile phone-enabled creature on the planet.

Vest nodded grimly and threw his phone out the window, reasoning that he at least had something to look after it for a few hours, to keep it safe -- the Roomba -- and that there was no way he was getting up for the rest of the day, which would take him into the weekend, where expectations would be delightfully absent. It would then be Halloween, and he was always fond of that time of year. Maybe he'd crash a party where people could play "bobbing for prescription-strength Aleve." He turned in his bed, but it offered more comfort. "Or bobbing for death," he thought.

He fell asleep, snoring loudly.

Yehoweh Porn was tired of saving the last human family.

He popped the tiny cartridge from his portable game player / telephone, and placed Robotron in his jacket along with all his other old arcade game ports. "The problem," he thought, "with the last human family is that Mikey wore red on the day the robots turned, making him look fuckin' indistinguishable from one of the enemies: the grunt." Porn decided to ensure that his kids always wore stripes on stripes, or whatever the 257th color was, if he ever had any. He daydreamed of the inevitable round of makeup sex when his future wife, whoever she may be, was told she couldn't let their kids leave the house dressed in a green shirt, green hat and red trousers. For the flight, he was wearing his custom Asteroids shirt, the one with the two colors in the game completely reversed, ready to take on all comers when it came to fashion.

The pilot announced that there was an amazing view of Pike's Peak through the clouds on the side of the plane opposite from Porn. With everyone on the plane distracted, Porn grabbed a new game, recently released. The writing on the cart read 'Made in Zaire' and '(C) 2015.' He was happy that there was someone with less awareness of international politics and borders than himself, and booted the cartridge. He wiped a tiny bit of sweat from his brow. Not just because every single flight leaving Denver International Airport is specifically tuned to the needs of the lizard men preparing to run the New World Order from the baggage claim, although that

was most of it. He didn't want anyone to notice that he was playing something created after Gauntlet II. He had a reputation and after all. There were children on the flight.

Porn was traveling to Christmas City, New Mexico in order to give a speech. In much the same way he was permanently nostalgic for the games his father introduced him to when he was a kid, the technology sector was extremely nostalgic of the dot-com boom from the beginning of the century. Startup money and venture capital was being lovingly ladled on increasingly terrible decisions, and Porn could not wait to unveil his talk about creating an Internet taste archive.

The idea was fairly terrible, and he felt there was a good chance he would get booed off the stage. But he was really going to get away from home for a few days. The conference had agreed to split the cost of the fare with him, which Porn thought was very nice of them. He was worried they wouldn't pay for anything when he showed them what he had written for the Taste Project so far. He created it in LISP, and this was everything he had:

```
;;; ITP.lsp
;;; =====
;;;
;;; === THE TASTE PROJECT ===
;;;
;;; (c) 2015 PORNOGRAPHIC LISP, LLC
;;; =====
;;;
;;; This function simply returns
;;; the string Hello World that is
;;; in quotes.
(DEFUN TASTE ()
"INPUT TASTE" )
;;; to do: accept taste inputs
;;; to do: convert all known tastes
;;; and flavors into binary code
;;; to do: create searchable
;;; database of tastes
;;; to do, rev 2 - port it to the
;;; Nokia N-gage
```

The N-gage was the greatest phone in the world, in Porn's mind, because it forced the user to sidetalk, or, hold the phone out from his or her but basically his head, instead of along it. It looked ridiculous, which appealed to Porn, but he wasn't sure if that was still state of the art because talking to Porn on the phone is very tiring and he didn't get a chance to do it much these days.

At any rate, the organizers only agreed to help out with travel costs when they saw the source code, as they were impressed he had finished that much.

He was stuck in the new game he was playing. It wanted him to speak a command into the phone's mic to get to the next board, but the thought of saying, "I love you, Pikachu" in a crowded flight repulsed him. He wasn't even sure if he loved Pikachu, or if his in-screen character was capable of love -- it was pretty goddamn presumptuous. He was probably overthinking things -- the stewardess interrupted his train of shallow and infantile thoughts with raised eyebrows, silently inquiring if he'd like a drink. A drink would be amazing.

He ordered a Bloody Mary. The stewardess gave him a brief smile, sort of flirting, sort of not, because she was awesome at her job and loved putting her customers at ease. She sort of ended up spilling it all over him when the plane began a downward spiral into the scrub of southern Colorado, because even though she was a trained professional who would do everything possible to help the 63 passengers on the flight die in dignity, she had never expected suicidal hijackers to be so excitable and amateur to try to kill them all before drinks were served. But when you constantly find ways to remove those with accumulated wisdom from your profession, you end up with a very immature industry. Porn clucked his tongue at these childish cretins as he encountered a game-killing bug and texture tear in trying to save his Pikachu game in the most basic way possible.

Vest woke up the next day to find his cat licking his face. He was happy that he returned, because he loved his cat and was afraid that the coyotes had eaten it. In fact, he was a bit surprised to find it alive, but he couldn't remember the last time he heard a wild animal keen at the moon, and the stars, and the empty space between the two, for no Christing reason.

"Mudwall, boy! You're back! Ow!" Vest's head still throbbed, a day later.

Mudwall couldn't actually speak, but that didn't stop Vest. "I'm back, Billy-boy!" he pretended it said. "Waaaaaaaaaaaahfles!!!!!"

"That's a really great idea, buddy-boy," said Vest. "We require waffles, with loads of fresh preserves. This is going to mean getting up, but I think I can get up for that."

"And fresh creeeeeeeeeeeeam!" Mudwall utterly did not squeak. Vest hugged his cat, then drew his blinds and hugged the heck out of his cat some more.

Vest got out of bed once and for all and left his bedroom to find some waffle mix. He missed Mudwall casually strutting over to the window, parting the blinds and flicking the roomba off the sill, onto the ground again, thus disrupting an entire day's worth of gripping and climbing by the robot. Mudwall had to do it quickly, because Vest had managed to turn the griddle on and was back for another marathon of joyous hugging.

There were three hijackers. Porn never figured out how they opened the cockpit doors. They were never supposed to be able to get that far. They were wearing starched, egg-colored shirts.

Possibly bone. Maybe -- maybe! -- ivory. Porn preferred to think they were shirts of solid ivory suits of armor because it would make, in the retelling, these guys seem like even greater monsters to his sissy friends that cared about animal rights.

One of the changes that the lizard men, who totally control Denver International Airport, made to all outgoing flights was to install technology that would make getting around easier for their race. They had been doing it for years. As cold-blooded creatures, they wanted to, needed to be close to one another to share body heat, so the seats grew smaller. They had no use for the food we humans would eat, so in-flight meals went away. They found our obsession with packing large suitcases for travel peculiar -- they began charging for carry-on.

If you were a six or seven foot tall humanoid reptile (commonly thought to be a simple being of cryptozoology) intent on taking over the world and making slaves of your human oppressors, you could hardly be in more luxurious comfort than the average coach flight out of DIA.

Porn took a couple of free airline headphones that were within reach, as they didn't fit the ear canals of any passenger on the plane. He separated them from the earbuds, and twisted the two wires together, forming a wire with two 1/8th" RCA plugs on each end. He connected one end of it to his phone, and the other to his seat's mobile computer. It would be fairly easy to gain control of the onboard microcontroller, and the thing that stopped most people from engaging in this sort of nonsense was the threat of getting shot in the ear by an air marshal. If there was one on the flight, Porn assumed he had a bit more to worry about at the moment. Porn navigated a few screens through his phone's touchscreen, figured out the Apache password ("tomcat", and he was sure it wasn't going to work, but absolutely positive that it would, if that makes any sense), resisted the temptation to login to his remote server back home and check on his torrents, and turned off the standard cabin lights. He then enabled the fluorescent lights that were specifically installed so the gecko-faced colonels of the New Order could hang upon them and bask and bask and bask.

The whi-- *ivory*-colored shirts of the three hijackers made for perfect targets at the front of the plane. The air marshal from a few seats back shot all three of them in the chest. Blood stains slowly grew, providing negative space along their still-lit dress shirts.

Porn got up from his window seat, as much as he could, to point at them and make some jeering and patriotic comment, when he heard the air marshal reload. He ducked just as a shot whizzed by his head. "Oh yeah," he thought, "I'm wearing exactly what color the bad guys were wearing; of course our hero is gonna take a poke at me. Robotron just never stops teaching us shit."

The rest of his flight was spent in relatively frustrated jubilation, as free drinks were given to all the passengers, yet the stewardess wouldn't reimburse him for the Bloody Mary that she spilled earlier. He didn't want to push the issue, but Jesus Christ. She finally shut him up by saying that there'd be no "further drinks for you, Pikachu," and Porn recoiled in open-mouthed horror that he had been found out.

The shot that almost hit him opened up a small hole over his seat to the bypassed and cemented-over air conditioner system that he always believed was secretly there. Cold air washed over him on an airplane for the first time in years. He had his old video games, the excited energy of a crowd and circulated air. He was sober, granted, and that would have to change, but otherwise couldn't be happier.

William Vest directed the cabbie to the departures segment of the Christmas City International Airport. The cabbie really didn't understand why, if he was picking somebody up, he was being directed to go there, but he didn't care either. In fact, every time Vest spoke, he turned up the sportstalk radio a little.

"Ah, I see my friend," said Vest. "He's the one wearing some video game sweater even thoUGH IT'S VERY HOT OUT." Vest had to shout over some awful opinions about box lacrosse to get that last bit out. The cab stopped a good twenty yards after Vest asked him to. Vest got out and shook his friend's hand.

"Good to see you, buddy," he said to Porn. "How was your flight?"

"Oh man, it was fucking unreal, actually," said Porn. "I got scammed out of a Bloody Mary. I'll tell you all about it. I want to find the biggest porterhouse steak and put it right where it belongs first, though. Hey, is that a cab? Did you ... why did you take a cab to pick me up at the airport?"

"I'm actually between cars at the moment," said Vest. "I'm saving up. Not for the car, but for the flames I'm going to put on whatever car I wind up getting."

"Do I... is the meter running? Is that a thing? You didn't have to do this."

"I insisted. It was no bother."

"You didn't," said Porn, "have to do this because it was a hassle, you didn't have to do this because it showed me that you're out of your fucking mind. I know you're still vegan, but seriously, get a chicken Caesar salad or something. I'm going to motorboat a New York Strip and then another T-bone. I have no idea what I'm even talking about, I'm just gonna munch on a bunch of meat. And you should, too! I saved the whole flight. Well, me and the air marshal."

Porn threw his suitcase in the back of the cab and the pair found a restaurant.

No matter how many times Vest told Porn he didn't really play video games, it never shut Porn up. Vest thought he had a fairly good idea regarding what happened on the flight, but every time he thought he had it completely, some factoid about an asteroid game or something would come up, and Porn would take twenty minutes to circumnavigate the point.

"But," said Porn, finally, "It's really fucked up. I feel as if the entire purpose of the flight was to kill me, you know? Like someone was trying to take me out."

"That's a bit paranoid," said William. "You don't have any enemies, do you?"

"Not in real life, no, but probably through the Internet. I dunno. Whatever. God, this was a great idea," he said, dapping a napkin against his mouth. "I can't really cook at home, on account of those people I've angered through the Internet. They sort of launched a distributed denial-of-service attack against the microprocessor in my fridge, so I can't open it. Been eating a lot of cereal, oatmeal and whole grains lately."

Vest understood a little of that, but it had been years since he worked a computer job.

"It was good to see you," he said, and meant it. "How long are you in town for?"

"Four more days," said Porn. He collected his things and paid the bill. It took forever, but that was New Mexico. It was charming when you weren't in a hurry, and they weren't. The pair left the restaurant.

Porn breathed in the dry desert air and enjoyed it. "I thought we could hit up the old community college hang-outs the day before I leave, if you were up for it. Maybe see what's going on in the Red House, or -- are you okay?"

"Nnnnnghhhhh," replied Vest. He held his belly. "I don't actually feel that great, no. I haven't had a chunk of meat -- "

"Filet," corrected Porn.

"Pile of meat like that in years. God. I gotta take a cab into work, but yeah, let's do something before you go."

"You bet," said Porn. He shook Vests hand and patted him on the arm. "You'll be fine! This is just your body's way of telling you that it appreciated actual protein, but fuck you for holding out on it for so long. So it's just totally wiggling out, like a guy whose wife made him wait till the wedding night. Don't get into any trouble before I get done with this conference."

Vest agreed, and as soon as Porn was out of sight, went searching for something to calm his stomach in the nearest trash receptacle. He thought he found a jar of jam, which would have been like winning Poor-Person Lottery, but as it turns out, it was hair paste. He almost drank that, but being so woozy, smeared it into his hair instead before he realized what he was doing. He hailed a cab from the back alley and went to Cytserz's place for whatever tonight's nonsense would entail.

Instruction Manual

Windows Interpreter: <http://www.generalcoffee.com/hugo/gethugo.html#windows>

Hugor is a new interpreter developed by Nikos Chantziaras. It works on Linux, OSX and Windows. The current status of the project can be found here:

<http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/Hugor>

Basic Gameplay Commands:

NORTH to go north. Can be shortened to "n".

SOUTH to go south. Can be shortened to "s".

WEST to go west. Can be shortened to "w".

EAST to go east. Can be shortened to "e".

EXITS lists the ways to leave the current area or room.

NORTHEAST to go northeast. Can be shortened to "ne".

NORTHWEST to go northwest. Can be shortened to "nw".

SOUTHEAST to go southeast. Can be shortened to "se".

SOUTHWEST to go southwest. Can be shortened to "sw".

IN to go in, usually through a door.

OUT to go out.

UP to go up.

DOWN to go down.

TOPICS person: Provides a list of current and valid conversational topics.

THINK about person: This does the same thing as the topics verb.

TALK to person: Tells Vest to talk to another character. Can be shortened to "t".

LOOK: Prints the room description.

EXAMINE item: Stare intensely at a particular item. Can be shortened to "x".

CALL person: Should you be required to make a phone call, this will do it.

CAST: Gives you a brief description of each major character you've met so far.

Management Commands:

INVENTORY: Displays what Vest is holding. Can be shortened to "i".

WAIT: Allows time to pass for one turn. Can be shortened to "z".

AGAIN: Repeats the last command. Can be shortened to "g".

SCORE: Prints the current gaming session's score.

System Commands:

ABOUT: Prints the initial info message.

HELP: Gets you back to these help screens.

SAVE: Saves the game in progress. You will be prompted for a filename.

RESTORE: Loads a saved game.

RESTART: Begins the game anew, as if playing it for the first time.

NP: States the title and artist of the song now playing.

FASTFORWARD: Picks another song to play.

SCRIPT ON: Logs the game's text to an output file.

SCRIPT OFF: Turns off game logging.

OOPS: When followed by a word, corrects a typo of the previous line with that word.

UNDO: Takes back the previous command and puts the game in a state one move earlier.

PAGE UP: Not the literal words, but pressing PGUP on your keyboard will bring forth the scrollbar window.

Note: the up arrow key will bring up your previous commands.

Color Commands:

COLOR WHITE: black text on a white background.

COLOR BLACK: white text on a black background (default).

COLOR BLUE: white text on a blue background.

COLOR GREEN: green text on a black background.

COLOR DARKGREEN: dark green text on a black background.

COLOR AMBER: amber text on a black background.

COLOR YELLOW: yellow text on a blue background.

Testing:

Marshall Abbott, Bananadine, James Bernoski, Jonathan Blask, Greg D'Avis, Ben Davis, Michael Fransioli, Alex Gray, Juhana Leinonen, Rob O'Hara, George Oliver, Drew Mochak, Marius Mueller, Ben Parrish, Brian Rapp, Johnny Rivera, Paul Robinson, Sorrel and Mike Sousa.

Cast:

William Vest: GERRIT HAMILTON

Anheiser Grimloft: JONATHAN BLASK

Lebbeus Baird: ALEX GRAY

Deanna Malone: DAYNA RICH

Ukilicoz: DUSTIN GODEC

Jane Bennett: ALANA SHORT

Nunez: RANDY McLELLAN

Igor Cytserz: ADAM THORNTON

Puzzle: GOLEM

Gumms McGrathley: ROBBIE McLELLAN

Bleem: JENNIFER NICOL

Billy: JAMES BERNOSKI

Overchay: STEVE DAVIS

Byrone Bastao: BEN PARRISH

Cytserz's Employee: MATT RANDALL

Zeke: MICHAEL SHERWIN

Additional acting by Ben Parrish, Stephen Granade, Marshall Abbott and Randy McLellan's life-size puppet that looks suspiciously like Christopher Walken, as John G.

Art:

Steve Davis, Jeffrey Olson, J. Robinson Wheeler.

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The characters and events in this game are fictitious. Any resemblance to real characters or events is entirely coincidental.