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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/2471>

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NEW GAME+

By

Bobby Rich  
B.A., University of Louisville 2012  
M.A., University of Louisville 2014

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in English

Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2016

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A Thesis Approved on

April 5, 2016

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ABSTRACT

NEW GAME+

Bobby Rich

April 5, 2016

This is a creative thesis composed of two components: 1) a critical introduction that contextualizes and supports the project of the second component, 2) a book manuscript of poetry. The project explores genre concerns of poetry by developing experimental prose poems that incorporate video game themes, language, and instructional writing. The project presents the interplay of the notions of control and failure to examine the borders between simulation (games) and reality (the world outside of games). The poems are constructed around the idea of designed failure, through which, the introduction argues, their status as poetry is inherently threatened, and they run the risk of actually becoming the forms that they imitate: game instruction manuals. The project argues that the poems reveal the porousness of borders between simulation and reality, because failure of form and meaning is inevitable.

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## OFFICIAL PLAYER'S GUIDE TO *NEW GAME+*

### **Introduction**

*New Game+* is a collection of prose poetry inspired by video games. In scope, it is a book manuscript that ruminates on the desire for control and the inevitability of failure, considering how these issues can be investigated, represented, and illuminated through the video game medium. *New Game+* is framed as a collection of game manuals for hypothetical video games, which have yet to be created or played by anyone. If interpreted by a reader with the proper skill set and motivation though, there is no reason these games should remain hypothetical. Someone could actually design the games along the parameters these poems define, at which point the poems would shift from hypothetical to legitimately instructional, functioning as instruction manuals in reality, beyond my design or control as author of the text. This raises a question that guides *New Game+*: how porous are the borders between genres, between illusion and truth, between simulation and reality? More broadly: if simulation can effectively imitate reality, is there any such thing as simulation in the first place, or is everything, at its conception, real?

If the hypothetical video games presented in *New Game+* can be conceived as possible, and with the potential to be made real someday, then I argue the poems which present these games can also be conceived of as real instruction manuals in themselves. Because of this issue of potential, the reader is urged to consider him or herself as player

and reader, and to consider this document, this critical introduction to the manuscript that follows, as *not solely* a critical introduction, but as an “Official Player’s Guide” to *New Game+*. This document, in keeping with the player’s guide genre, reveals the ins and outs of the game(s) in question, the secrets, inner workings, strategies, tricks, pitfalls, traps, and sites where all the treasure is hidden. So begins the walkthrough.

## Background & Basic Operations

The manuscript of *New Game+* is composed of eight manuals for hypothetical video games; the lengthy, singular poem entitled “New Game+” (presented in small sections throughout) the manuscript; and a single, preliminary “memo.” All of these pieces, in some way, have to do with video games, using their imagery and archetypes. The pieces establish rules and parameters, and address issues of control and failure. Considered as a whole, each piece contributes toward developing the world of the game Designer, the main voice of *New Game+*, both inside and outside of the games it designs. The influence and background for this video game focus comes largely from personal experience in the era of the Super Nintendo video game console, and more specifically, from its notable Role Playing Games (RPGs). Much of the gameplay aesthetic presented here draws from 16-bit game design, which, now considered “retro,” was cutting edge in the early and mid-1990s.

*New Game+* has been influenced by the classic (though largely overlooked in the U.S.) 1995 (U.S. release) Super Nintendo RPG *Earthbound*, developed by Ape Inc. and HAL Laboratory. Unlike many other games in this genre (especially at that time) *Earthbound* focuses on contemporary, often average settings in (a place like) America, with recognizable, relatable characters, as opposed to magical settings of high fantasy, and classically heroic characters of royal descent. More significant to this project, however, is the aesthetic and narrative development of *Earthbound*, which, while often absurd, satirical, and humorous, also functions to make the player feel alone in the game world, cast adrift against incredible odds, and, ultimately, alienated. In the final segment of the game, in order to defeat the primary antagonist, an alien force known as Giyagags,

the protagonist Ness and his team must travel far back in time, to a point when the villain is only an infant. To do this, Ness' team must be killed, and their souls implanted into robot bodies. During the final fight, the team is not confronted with weapons, fists, or magic, as Giyagas lack these qualities; instead they are assaulted with abstract feelings, such as an overwhelming sense of isolation, and, to quote the game, with “incomprehensible” attacks. *Earthbound* is both beautiful and unnerving, and plays a significant background role in the conception of *New Game+* as a whole, as well as the particular games presented in the project (the central character in “Play Manual for *DungeonMan*” is a direct reference to a similar character in *Earthbound*, “Dungeon Man”).

The general concept of “New Game+” gameplay is taken from yet another Super Nintendo RPG, *Chrono Trigger*, developed and published by Square in 1995, which, though it did not create the concept, coined the term “New Game+.” A “New Game+” works like this: a player completes a game; upon completion, they are presented with the option of starting a “New Game+” that will allow the player to start the game from the beginning, but instead of starting from scratch, the player is allowed to start the game retaining all of the experience (skill level and strength), currency, and items that they had earned in their previous playthrough. Although the “New Game+” option does withhold some things from the player, such as key items which influence the story progression, in general a “New Game+” file makes for a significantly easier playthrough, and, more importantly, allows the player to complete certain tasks they may not have been able to achieve on the first time around. In *Chrono Trigger*, for example, playing the game with

a “New Game+” file allows the player to complete many of the difficult side-quests, and unlock the game’s numerous alternate endings, directing the story down different paths.

Other games of the time (and today), such as *Earthbound*, employed a similar concept to that of “New Game+,” with key differences. In *Earthbound*, after completion of the final battle, the player is allowed to continue gameplay, and to see the effects that defeating the primary antagonist has had on the gameworld. This is not a new game, but the same game continued, with conflict, battle, and the threat of death, but now without a definite goal. The player is free to wander and explore, but toward no clear end. *Chrono Trigger* allows the player to play the game again with the intent of unlocking alternate endings, but it too, ultimately, gives way to endless, aimless play. Continuous playthroughs become increasingly meaningless. Because there is no way to win, to complete the game with any sense of real, definite finality, the only path that offers any kind of difference for the player is the path of failure: not just of losing the game (as that can also repeat endlessly, if the player so chooses) but rather, failure to play at all. This is the failure of the player giving up on the game all together, resigning it to collect dust, corrosion, and ultimately, to decay beyond a point of playability. All game media, whether cartridges, discs, or digital downloads, are mortal, just like their creators and users.

What is it to win? It must be something more than *not-losing*. The potentially infinite loop of a New Game+ file in *Chrono Trigger* is a perpetuation of not-losing, but not necessarily a state of winning. Even if a player loses, that is to say, is defeated in battle and dies, the player can always choose to just pick back up where they fell, more or less. This isn’t even unique to *Chrono Trigger* or *Earthbound*. Every game is basically

like this, even the most frustrating arcade games of the 80s and 90s, which were (and with little illusion about it) on their face designed to beat the player. No matter how bad you might be defeated, you can just insert another coin or two and press “CONTINUE.” Games are made for profit. Games are designed to challenge the player, and often beat the player, but also, to squeeze every last quarter from your pocket (in a literal sense, when considering arcade games), and so they are designed to let you choose to not-lose. The player can choose this posthumous continuation for just about as long as they want, as long as they can stand it, or as long as they can afford. Eventually, though, loss will catch up to the player, they will either be unable to continue, or lack the desire to. The game’s repetition will become uninteresting, taxing, or banal. That is where we find failure, the final loss, the ultimate “GAME OVER.” Failure is the breakdown of the communication between player and game, the point at which the player ceases to operate within the rules of the game, and ceases to make sense, selling the game, trashing the game, discontinuing any and all trips to the arcade. Failure is also the point at which the game ceases to play, or be playable. The game might simply become so meaningless that the player can longer play, but only operate the game. The game might, physically or digitally, decay to the point of permanent malfunction. The game becomes something other than what it was designed for: it becomes unplayable, and so, no longer a game.

So, loss leads to failure, and often precedes failure, but loss is not, in itself, failure. But what is it to *win*? In a typical sense, it is success, reaching the end of the game, slaying the final villain, achieving the high score and putting your initials in the #1 slot on the rankings board. But then what? Well, you can play again. Arcade games offer this option, if you just insert another coin. A New Game+ file offers this option. And you

can win again. And you can play again. And win again. In the case of many retro arcade games, there is a point at which the player can actually cease to win. Is that the essence of what it means to win? Finality? Some games can be pushed to a point at which the game can, by the limits of its software, go no further, count no more points, register no more actions though still accepting input. Eventually, winning ceases to offer anything, and it becomes apparent that winning, even the “ultimate win” of the arcade, is just as meaningless as losing. Interest in the game is lost, and again, failure arises. Winning is only a temporary state. Continuous winning demands infinite play, repetition, and so, is impossible. If the player does not lose interest, they will either die, or the game will decay. Winning, like losing, leads to failure too. Doom will always find you in the end.

Herein lies the primary issue at hand in the project of *New Game+*: how to confront and accept the inevitability of failure, and also the failure of whatever controls we try to establish and enforce to prevent or counteract this inevitability. The final word of the final line of this manuscript is “lose,” and no matter how many times you read it, it will always end this way. The entirety of the project works toward the inevitability of failure: of the game Designer; of the player; of games themselves; of language; of poetry. Nothing follows the final loss. The reader may repeat their reading of *New Game+* as many times as they choose, but it will always end in loss, and, inevitably, failure. Consider the whole line, “Here find there is no way to win, only more precise ways to lose,” (74). Like the post-game approaches of *Chrono Trigger* and *Earthbound*, *New Game+* encourages repeated readthroughs/playthroughs, and presents the notion that in this continued play, you might find something new or novel, but in doing so, you will



always also find loss, though perhaps a more precise sense of it, one that grows increasingly tailored to your unique, doomed experience.

To encourage continued play is to encourage the embrace of failure, by inching ever closer through repeated loss. *New Game+* recognizes and operates on our tendencies to repeat our behavioral patterns, and relive the same situations, despite our knowledge that they are doing us no good, getting us nowhere. *New Game+* is essentially a work of nihilism, a nihilistic compendium that catalogs and describes the many ways that the player *can*, *will*, and *should* fail, and moreover, how this failure is ultimately indifferent to the personal plight of the player. In the same stroke, *New Game+* catalogs the failure of the reader to interpret, the Designer to control, and the author to define. “Play at your own risk” does not begin to provide a meaningful warning for the potential player; there is no risk, as failure is certain.

Every game manual presented within the manuscript also ends in failure, pointing to the uncertainty of individual outcomes. However, though the manuals may be ambiguous as to how a player might lose and fail the game they describe, they clearly present no possibility of success. There is, in fact, no mention of success, with any sense of finality. Even in “Play Manual for *Effective Parenting*,” though it offers the possibility of successfully completing the second level of the game, the manual is quick to note that, upon completion, the player will be made to repeat the first level all over again. In the absence of a clearly defined possibility of “success,” ambiguity is as good as certainty of failure. A line in the final segment of the poem “New Game+” makes this clear: “Here find all outcomes are equivalent,” (74). All outcomes are failure, despite superficial differences.

To put it bluntly: *New Game+* fails. Its failure is, in fact, a designed outcome. It fails on purpose, and was doomed at its conception. *New Game+* explores failure as a concern of poetry, and what it presents is not just the failure of games, of a Designer, of players, but a failure of reading, of an author, and of poetry itself. Failure in the poetry *New Game+* is, like for the Designer, what drives the work. As each game fails, it generates games from the Designer, and as each piece fails, it generates new pieces from me. *New Game+* fails because of its resistance to existing as poetry, because it wants to be something else, something more, especially when considering the game manuals. These poems are designed to simulate game manuals in such a way that they could, as I've suggested earlier, lead to the real production of the hypothetical games they describe. They are simulations of simulations. If their production were to actually occur, the poems would cease to simulate, and would be readily used as game manuals in reality. Because the poems can actually become game manuals, the simulation might as well be reality from the start, and so they fail as poems. They are, with every readthrough, less and less reflective of my own work as author, and more and more reflective of the reader or player's interpretation of their "real" function and purpose. This interpretation, in turn, is bound to fail as well, as it will press for a central, essential meaning in the poems that does not exist. There is no essence to be found, and there never was. The author is long gone, the poem is long gone; there is now only text that I call my poetry, and that the reader or player may call something else entirely. The success of *New Game+* is the failure of poetry, the offer of repeated readings and interpretations until it is played out.

## How to Play *New Game+*

*New Game+* as a manuscript is dominated by the long sequential poem, “New Game+” The four interweaving threads that comprise this poem establish the world that the individual game manuals appear in, as well as the progression of the (unnamed) Designer toward inevitable failure. The segments that make up the poem function as disconnected stanzas, many of which also function as individual poems in themselves; they work with, and apart from, each other. This segmenting has been influenced by Angela Veronica Wong’s book of sequential poetry, *How to Survive a Hotel Fire* (2012), which, in similar style, presents segments of poetry that are readily connected and disconnected with each other, both in form and in content. “New Game+,” broken into sections of four segments each by the game manuals, is organized by the thermodynamic principle of entropy. Each segment (and this is applicable to the game manuals as well) presents a greater degree of disorder than the previous segment, with the final declaration of failure being the “heat death” that entropy irreversibly pushes all systems toward. Because of this, as “New Game+” presents the progression of the Designer toward inevitable failure, it is simultaneously portraying the Designer developing into an increasingly disordered, chaotic state, socially, mentally, and aesthetically, as the side effect of attempting to resist this failure.

The entity of the Designer (which represents itself through the use of first-person plural pronouns) can be explained through examining the components of *New Game+*, beginning with the four threads that comprise the eponymous poem. The four threads can be identified as such: 1) the “Here/Find” segments, which present personal attributes of the Designer, often in relation to game design concerns; 2) the “Don’t” segments, which

establish rules (always presented in the form of negative statements) defined by the Designer, for itself, though addressed to an ambiguous “you”; 3) the “Outside” segments, which develop the world that the Designer inhabits, and how the Designer relates to this world; and 4) the “Pig” segments, which present a displacement of the Designer’s more chaotic thoughts onto a separate entity, the Pig, and develop a strong sense of dissociation within the voice of the Designer.

The voice and cadence of these threads has been influenced by works like Marvin Bell’s *The Book of the Dead Man* (1994), and Ryan Ridge’s *American Homes* (2014). While this cadence is also at play in the game manuals to a certain degree, such as in “Play Manual for *DungeonMan*,” the threads are especially marked by the lyrical repetition of their defining terms and ideas: “Here/Find,” “Pig,” “Don’t,” and in the “Outside” segments, the repetition of terms like “Room” and “Window.” Both Bell and Ridge use this method with the effect of deconstructing the idea that they repeat. Through patterns, they produce variance and new meaning, both elimination and redevelopment of the word in question, and the concept it denotes, attacking and reassessing the (in)stability of language. With both authors, this can be seen at play through the entirety of their books. For Bell, from “The Book of the Dead Man #13:” “When the dead man hears thunder, he thinks someone is speaking / Hearing thunder, the dead man thinks he is being addressed. . . . The dead man speaks God’s language,” (Bell 39). For Ridge, “*American Homes is a book. American Homes is an idea. American Homes is a book of ideas. American Homes is just beginning. American Homes is about to end. . . .*” (Ridge 3). For “New Game+,” “Don’t sit with your back to an open door. Don’t answer questions that cannot be asked. Don’t look yourself in the eyes, what is hiding there...”

(30). The use of the cadence of repetition in *New Game+* as a whole, but especially in the poem “New Game+,” is performed for the same reason as it is found in Bell’s and Ridge’s work: to interrogate language, to attempt to manipulate and control it, and find new meaning where it breaks down.

Through these four threads, the poem “New Game+” essentially functions as the Designer’s journal, in which notes are kept about experiences in the world, fears, observations and philosophies, and a record of the Designer’s increasingly disordered state. Everything presented in “New Game+” informs the game manuals that the Designer produces. “New Game+” also, to use a video game term metaphorically, functions as a kind of “overworld” for the game manuals that appear throughout it. The poem, as a whole, can be seen as a large, sparsely populated map through which the Designer moves, going between its general setting, and the specific, more interactive settings of the individual game manuals.

The Designer presents itself through the first-person plural because of its inability to identify itself as a singular, cohesive individual. This is evidenced by lines such as “We haven’t seen Ourselves in awhile,” (27) and “Here find a body that cannot find itself,” (41). If the dominant theme of *New Game+* is failure, all of the Designer’s acts can be seen as efforts to establish control where it feels it has none. The use of the first-person plural is an attempt to establish control in the face of the Designer’s growing inability to identify with its own body, thoughts, and actions. From an authorial stance, use of these pronouns is intended to diffuse the narratorial voice so that the reader of the poems in this collection cannot readily identify a source for the voice that they encounter in reading.

The Designer is amorphous, fragmented, and distant, both evocative of empathy, and ineligible for it.

In reading *New Game+*, the reader occupies the position of player, the receiving agent who must interact with the Designer's creations, the games. The use of the first-person plural, while establishing distance between the reader/player and the Designer, is also intended to encourage complicity. Much like a first-person shooter video game, it, at some level, invites the reader to see through the Designer's point of view, take on the Designer's concerns, as well as its disorientation. The player is not asked to imagine themselves as the Designer, but rather, to see what the Designer sees, and do what the Designer desires. The game manuals do not exist passively, but actively, and the player is not a disinterested observer, but an active participant. With each game manual, the player is asked to consider possibility, and explore. "We" invites you to see what "We" see, and, at the same time, implies the question: can you go along with this, and for how long? How complicit can you be in the activities of the games? As I write about the Designer in this player's guide, I am resistant to refer to the Designer as a singular character, or by pronouns that would easily define it as singular, such as the gendered pronouns "he" and "she." Because the Designer appears indeterminate in the manuscript, the Designer remains indeterminate in external discussion, not exactly singular or plural, but somewhere in between, an embodied fraction. Though the player is ultimately separate from the Designer, through complicity in the games the player grows closer to the Designer, without ever being able to fully understand or identify the entity that created the failing games.

The Designer's use of the first-person plural serves another purpose as well, which is that of resistance in a paranoid system. In *New Game+*, paranoia over perceived conspiracies is not just a dominant feeling, but a way of knowing. Paranoia is an epistemology in itself, a system of knowledge which informs its agent that yes, it is all, in fact, connected, and yes, it is all, in fact, designed to crush you like a bug. This paranoia is present throughout the poem "New Game+," and can be seen most clearly in the "Don't" thread. The Designer feels it is necessary to define rules for how to operate within the unnamed game/conspiracy that it finds itself in. This paranoia is clearly visible in lines such as "Doors without locks, knockers, peepholes. We need their closure," (34). However, paranoia is also an epistemology of suspicion, and so, of uncertainty, which threatens its agent. To be proven correct in one's suspicions is to be destroyed by the truth, but to be proven wrong is to be destroyed by one's own folly. "Play Manual for *MilkMan*" is designed around this dangerous binary, asking in its final line, essentially, which fate the player would prefer, if both result in their destruction. The catch here is that, in order to maintain a paranoid epistemology, one's suspicions must not be proven either way, but rather, allowed to remain unanswered, resulting in ambiguity, and, again, failure.

In Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), from which this idea of paranoid epistemology has been borrowed, the greatest antagonist of all is not a singular person, or a wicked individual, but rather, an unidentifiable system, "They," with a capital T. This idea of paranoid epistemology has also been influenced by the conspiracy paranoia of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), and Jorge Luis Borges' "The Lottery in Babylon" (1941). "We," for the Designer, is existential rebellion through language, a

deliberate inversion of “They,” a way for the Designer to establish itself against something, instead of being able to establish itself for itself. “We,” for the Designer, is a way for it to incorporate its surroundings, to try and define the world as its own, under its control, apart from They, the source and orchestrator of all failure, which always wins out. Though They is not identified through the poem “New Game+,” it is the primary antagonist of “*MilkMan*,” identified by name, and is present (though unnamed) in “Play Manual for *deadman*,” “Play Manual for *DungeonMan*,” and “Play Manual for *GlueMan*,” all of which establish the player as a protagonist battling against an antagonistic force.

Pig, however, though presented as being an entity outside of the Designer, is not part of the monolithic They. Pig is part of the Designer, a displacement of the Designer’s own collective fears and uncertainties, as well as a symptom of the Designer’s dissociation, and the embodiment of failure. If the greatest (perhaps only) virtue that the Designer can hope to achieve is control, Pig denies its achievement, and reminds the Designer of its doom. Pig is the failure of the Designer, of design, of gameplay, and poetry, and functions without control, despite the Designer’s best efforts. Pig is an Id monster, which subsists on greed, gluttony, lust, and violence. Pig defies meaning and produces nonsense, interrupting the Designer’s efforts to catalog, define, design, and control through its insistent presence.

Pig first appears later in “New Game+” than the other threads, because it is a mistake, an accident, a part of the Designer that it cannot rectify, but only helplessly watch in disgust and horror, and record. While the Designer has some degree of control at the beginning of “New Game+,” the late arrival of Pig into the poem marks where that



control really begins to slip. Pig's first appearance presents the Designer's inability to apprehend Pig, or identify Pig as anything besides Other, "Pig begs devouring, Doctor. . . . Balls are for stomping, or swallowing whole," (43). In Pig's second to last appearance, the Designer seems to have a better recognition of Pig than of itself, shown by the oscillation of binary coding, with Pig and the Designer alternating in indeterminacy: "Now We're zero. Now We're one. Put your snout through Our belly, Pig, now We're zero again," (67). Pig's last appearance, however, shows the Designer acknowledging that it is, in fact, Pig; the Designer is seeing itself from the outside, yet still unable to fully identify with the entity that is presented. "The closer you get, the less We see you, the more We see Ourselves," (73). Pig is a failure of identity, and in the end, Pig remains a failure, unable to be made sense of and unable to be assimilated, permanently indeterminate, ambiguous, anomalous.

The game manuals draw on the world and issues presented in the poem "New Game+," and are created by the Designer as a way to combat this creeping indeterminacy. Each game manual is a separate attempt on the Designer's part to establish control, by developing a self-contained world in which the Designer knows all of the parameters, tricks, and possible outcomes. However, as each game inevitably ends in failure, each game is, in itself, a failure for the Designer, which spurs its need to continue to develop more games, which continue to fail. Here too we find the cyclic generation of poetry. As each poem fails at achieving stability in meaning, and establishing itself as poem (and not as instruction manual), each failure generates new work. Though the Designer attempts to establish, through the presence of its voice in the manuals, the sense that it is Omniscient and Omnipotent, the manuals reveal that in

reality, the Designer knows little more than the player does about each game. The outcome is just as uncertain for the Designer, shown through lines such as “We would like to know Ourselves. Think Hard,” (37) from footnote number seven in “Play Manual for *MilkMan*.”

The overwhelming need of the Designer to establish and enforce control, despite the (unacknowledged) knowledge of failure, informs the voice that the Designer uses in the game manual poems. Though this voice also expresses uncertainty like the voice in “New Game+” does, the voice in the game manuals attempts to hide this uncertainty through the presentation of authority. As the Designer’s authority is reactionary (against the Designer’s own fears), the voice takes on a tone of aggression, of violence. In the prototypical stages of this project, I was enrolled in a creative writing workshop course. Though the work at the time was not nearly as developed as it is now, the basic ideas, themes, and tones were present. Responding to the piece, “Play Manual for *Free Will*” (the first of the game manuals to be written), one of my peers pointed out that the voice that presents the piece seems malicious, and antagonistic toward the reader, like it is trying to *inflict*, rather than convey, its poetry.

This “malicious” voice is intentional to my construction of the Designer entity. It is in the game manuals that the Designer feels it has the most control and authority, while also understanding that this control is constantly threatened, by the instability of the game software and hardware, by the limitation of the Designer’s own design capabilities, and by the involvement of the player. The Designer wants to design a game that will produce a singular, unchanging meaning, a game that can be won, without any further question of what it means to win, and the finality of winning. But, the Designer understands that such

a goal is impossible, is doomed, and so reacts violently. Rather than being “God” of the game, the Designer assumes the role of tyrannical dictator. Here too is the failure of my own authority, as I cannot maintain control over these poems, or hope to achieve a kind of stasis of meaning. Here is the understanding that my project in the poems is doomed by my own inherent limitation. The poems, like the games, cannot be won, but only repeated and warped, failing as they become other than their design intends. To write is to lose authority as soon as you remove your hand from the keyboard.

The Designer’s reaction to its own failure is why the title of the piece that begins the manuscript, “~~A MEMO ABOUT OUR TARGET CONSUMER,~~” is struck through. The player is, for the Designer, not a consumer of game media, but a “target,” something to be captured and controlled, an “[IT],” (26) which will be caught, not in games, but in, “these delightful traps / We present,” (26). This piece is an erasure, borrowing language from a Chess instruction book, *Winning Chess Traps: 300 Ways to Win in the Opening* by Irving Chernev (1946). The original passage is as follows: “Hence we present these delightful traps to the reader in the confidence that he will learn a great deal about opening play, and that he will thoroughly enjoy himself as he learns,” (Chernev vi). The passage was significantly manipulated, rearranged, and erased in order to produce the poem. The “We” that is present in the game manuals is derivative of the instructional use of “we” (exemplified by Chernev), and is presented with a stronger voice (intended to convey authority) than the “We” in “New Game+” because the Designer feels that, here, it can establish itself. As the Designer does so, it taunts, antagonizes, and mocks the player, such as in “Play Manual for *deadman*.” “In control of deadman, you control nothing. . . . We encourage you to experiment,” (42).

Though varying in typography and presentation, each game manual is, essentially, a prose poem, influenced by such books of prose poetry as *Return to the City of White Donkeys* by James Tate (2004), and *The Reason Why the Closet-Man is Never Sad* by Russell Edson (1977). Both Tate and Edson present prose poems that, to some degree, challenge the boundaries between prose poetry and flash fiction, by suggesting, but not completing or following through on, a narrative in their work. The game manual poems are informed by this challenge, and so each manual, in describing a game, does not quite present a narrative, but presents the potential for one. If the games were to be played, a narrative would develop, but as manuals, narrative only exists in potential, and so they approach, but resist, definition as flash fiction, while testing the boundaries of prose poetry. Marvin Bell's *The Book of the Dead Man*, though not identifiable as typical prose poetry (due to its use of line breaks, it is somewhere between prose poetry and free-verse), presents a similar blurring of poetry/fiction borders, and informs the work of *New Game+* in similar ways to Tate and Edson. However, it should be noted, the piece "Play Manual for *deadman*." is not, in its basic conception, influenced by Bell's work, as this manual was written before I read *The Book of the Dead Man*. The presence of the "deadman" character is just a coincidence, separate from the influence of Bell.

The varying typographies of the game manuals each have been developed deliberately to contribute to, or subvert the meaning of, each piece. While the justified, narrow text block presentation that is prominently used throughout *New Game+* is something that is typical to my own writing, the specific formatting and organization of the manuals have more readily identifiable influences. The use of numbering and hanging indentation in "Play Manual for *Free Will*," "Play Manual for *MilkMan*," and "Play

Manual for *Strange Attractor, or The Home Wrecker*,” is influenced by Bell, and is intended as a subversive act, emphasizing the inherent failure of each game’s design. Though both “*Free Will*” and “*Strange Attractor*” present themselves as being about chance, freedom, and chaos, they are meticulously ordered. Truly free will and real chaos should be able to resist all attempts to order, yet here the player finds numbered, quantified, step-by-step rules. In “*Free Will*” this means that free will is illusory. “*MilkMan*” uses indentation and numbering similar to “*Free Will*,” but, because it is a game dealing directly with conspiracy paranoia, much of the game’s description is presented through footnotes, in an effort to hide the suspicions that the game operates on from the all-knowing, all-seeing “Them.” These efforts at hiding fail, however, because the suspicions are still, of course, visible to all.

In “*Strange Attractor*,” this order implies a more sinister, dangerous meaning, implying that there is nothing chaotic about the player’s actions. It implies that it is all planned, and the avatar the player controls *really is* a sociopath, despite its claims to the contrary. The real danger of “*Strange Attractor*” is what the game might reveal about the player. If the player accepts the game’s objective, and is complicit in its activities, then the situation of gameplay shifts from the player controlling a sociopathic avatar, to *the player being a sociopath* who is in control. The actions of the avatar are only a reflection of the player’s choices, and the game world a space in which their desires can be pursued. The player’s choice to progress in the game is the choice of complicity.

“Play Manual for *deadman*,” “Play Manual for *GlueMan*,” “Play Manual for *DungeonMan*,” and “Play Manual for *Effective Parenting*” all break away from the numbered, neatly organized typography of the previously mentioned poems, in favor of

something more varied and disorganized, which challenges linearity. The typographies of these poems are influenced both by Wong, and, significantly, by Anselm Berrigan's poem "Zero Star Hotel," (from the book of the same name, published 2002). In Berrigan's piece, segments of the poem, of identical size, are presented six per page, with three on the left side of the page, stacked vertically, and three on the right. This typographical arrangement both encourages linear reading (top-bottom, left-right) and non-linear reading (in whichever order the eyes lands) because of the indeterminate nature of their organization. This idea is directly employed in "Play Manual for *deadman*," as each segment of the piece can be read however the reader so chooses, emphasizing the infinitely looping nature of the game, as well as its inherent indifference toward the player, and its ambiguity toward winning and losing. None of the segments have any necessary, ordered connection to the others.

"Play Manual for *GlueMan*," though presented in a more linear fashion, still utilizes this segmentation, to a degree. It is haphazardly composed of fragments that both connect and do not, and if the poem were to explode like it suggests the character of *GlueMan* will, none of the fragments would have any particular precedence over another; all fragments are equal, and equally threatened. "Play Manual for *DungeonMan*," offers the possibility of non-linear reading in its typography, but as this game focuses on a labyrinth, so too is its organization labyrinthine, designed to trick and trap. One may choose to read it in a non-linear way, but will quickly encounter the dead-end of nonsense. Like any true labyrinth, there is only one way to navigate this poem. "Play Manual for *Effective Parenting*" is organized in two columns, one for each level, and allows for both linear and non-linear reading, emphasizing the infinite repetition and

alternation the player will experience between Level One, and Level Two. Like “*Strange Attractor*,” the complicity that “*Effective Parenting*” operates on is especially dangerous for the identity of the player; to play the game is to be complicit in acting out the paternal fantasy of infanticide.

“Play Manual for *This Has Been a Mistake*,” is the final game manual poem in *New Game+*, the final game of the Designer, and its final failure. The typography of this piece is especially disordered, reflecting a last ditch attempt, by the Designer, to establish control, with the title signaling, even before the piece begins, that the project, as a whole, has failed. The typography attempts to reestablish order through several means: through linear development, through numbered “rules,” and through, as was initially used in “*Free Will*,” justifying the text within a four-inch wide block. The poem is, however, fragmented in both content and appearance, suffering from the kinds of glitches that a player might encounter in a game (especially a cartridge game, such as would be used with the Super Nintendo) that interrupt game play and presentation. The poem presents a corrupted projection of the Designer into its own project, failing to even begin to articulate what the game might involve, but rather, describing what the player should do with the game in physical form, before the Designer turns its disgust on itself. “*This Has Been a Mistake*” is the Designer’s dissociative collapse.

## The Beginning of the End

At the start of this player's guide, I suggested that, although the games described in the poems of *New Game+* are hypothetical, there is no reason that they have to be; they each could, in fact, become very real. This potential is playing on an idea presented by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra & Simulation* (1981). In it, he proposes a test that reveals the porousness of borders between the simulated and the real. "Organize a fake holdup. Verify that your weapons are harmless, and take the most trustworthy hostage, so that no human life will be in danger (or one lapses into the criminal). Demand a ransom. . . . You won't be able to do it: the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with the real elements," (Baudrillard, 20). No matter how "simulated" you try and keep the simulation, it will always bleed into the real, and you will run the risk of really stealing money, really being shot by the responding police, and really dying, or being imprisoned. *New Game+* operates along this same principle. Though the game manuals only currently exist as poems that simulate game manuals, they can shift from simulation to reality, not just with ease, but entirely by accident, beyond any control I might try to enforce as author. If I can simulate the description of a game, someone with the appropriate skills can *really* design that game, *really* sell it, and many people, including myself and including you, could find ourselves *really playing it*. If I have the authority to hope the reader may come away from this manuscript with anything at all, it is for the reader to acknowledge what I acknowledge in my development of this project: the porousness of borders between the simulated and the real, and the fact that, in writing this manuscript, I have unleashed these ideas in the world, and they may run free,



transforming into something completely beyond my intention. In that freedom is the failure of poetry, and the failure of author.

*New Game+* is not just about games; it is a game itself. The poem “New Game+” shows that, for the game Designer, if games can be reality, reality can be a game, one full of repetition, without the possibility of real progress or the finality of success. This applies both inside and outside of the project. If the games, the simulations, described in the poems of *New Game+* can be real, if the hoax that *New Game+* presents can become truth, the borders of reality and simulation are truly porous. *New Game+* is both a collection of poetry, and a game that challenges this porousness. It dissolves what we would like to believe are the strongly defined differences between the real and the simulated, which as a consequence, finds equivalence between the two. Reality might as well be a game, with all its players doomed to repetition and failure.

~~You can't win.~~ Good luck.

NEW GAME+ MANUSCRIPT

By

Bobby Rich

A MEMO ABOUT OUR TARGET CONSUMER

In [REDACTED] confidence

[REDACTED] [IT] will

learn

[REDACTED]

play

and [REDACTED]

[IT] will [REDACTED]

enjoy

[IT]self

[REDACTED]

as [IT] learns

[REDACTED] these delightful traps

We present [REDACTED]

## New Game+

We haven't seen Ourselves in awhile. There are no mirrors in this room. Spitting loose hairs, no target in mind. Inevitable miss, inevitably missing, something, always. There is always something missing.

—Here find the sacrificed seventh pawn.  
Hypothetical game, literal consequence.  
Here the fourth cold coffee cup. Fifth. Sixth.  
Curdled cream, no sugar. Here the opened  
letter, still unanswered after two weeks of  
blizzard, maybe more. Maybe.

Possibilities appear, dull lamps in this fog.  
Eyes that won't focus on them, fingers that  
will let them slip away for lack of tactile  
sensation. Nerves not shot, but inverted; We  
jump at the chirp of a robin, rest at the sight  
of an oncoming snowplow.

Don't sit with your back to an open door.  
Don't answer questions that cannot be asked.  
Don't look yourself in the eyes, what is  
hiding there... Don't hang mirrors where  
you might be caught by surprise. Don't,  
don't.

Play Manual for *Free Will*

1. —The individual characteristics of this game's hero are beyond unimportant, though many will feel that this is untrue. Make of it what you will. The hero does not move through the game-world; the game-world moves around the hero. This is not unique to *Free Will*, in fact, it is necessary to the game's engine, as with all games; it is important to keep this in mind at all times, for reasons that even We have yet to fully understand.
2. —The hero can engage in a wide variety of activities. All actions are reactions. Every action, however small, will gain points. You may choose not to manipulate the actions of the hero on ethical grounds, or out of boredom.
3. —Conversely, the hero does not have to do what you want it to do. The hero believes it has free will. Potentially, the hero really does. These sorts of things are never entirely clear. Regardless, the hero may ignore you or act out in rebellion.
4. —The hero may not harm you physically, but may harm itself in an effort to cause you harm; We suggest you do not develop an emotional attachment to, or sense of dependency on, the hero.
5. —You and the hero may choose to do absolutely nothing but sit and watch each other (though, of course, it is a computer-generated character and is not "really" "watching" "you"), in which case you may ask which of "you two" is gazing into the other's abyss, which is a question We suggest you not ask.
6. —The game ends when the hero dies, like many good stories, and many bad. At the end, the points you have gained will be tallied up. The points mean nothing and offer no reward; they only serve an admittedly questionable



sense of aesthetics. Perhaps you enjoy large numbers; We sure do.

—Here find the game you've played before, find all the strength you've gathered, slaying the same predictable beasts, mountains of gold and precious items, a cursed statue, a singing stone, the petrified lips of an ancient tyrant, bulging your digital wallet. You can take it all with you, contrary to popular belief, all your experience and your riches. You can use it all again, whatever use it may be. Here the task: find the use.

Rooms that will never be entered. We need that space. Doors that were not made to be opened. Doors without locks, knockers, peepholes. We need their closure. We perform studies in digital basement design. Places to put away, and never think about again. Places for Us, born in dirt. Our tail now grows back with forked tip, the bastard. Coded, encrypted, places that aren't even there. The fog has doubled in weight. We wear shovels on Our snouts, just to cut through it, torches screwed into the modular sockets of Our eyes. Let Us dig out Our rooms with Our jaws.

Do not wake into what you cannot fall asleep from. Do not fall asleep when given the option. Traps wait for those who choose.

—Here the constant, methodical plodding.  
The modus operandi of an earthmover. Here  
find the sincere optimism of a vulture,  
roosting over a freeway. Find patience, sans  
saint. Certainty like sin. Here a home, find it  
dug way down in anonymous rib cage,  
hiding between bleeding light and clotted  
shadow.

## Play Manual for *MilkMan*

Across the road at the convenience store, every man getting milk is spying on you.<sup>1 2 3 4 5 6</sup>

This game will not confirm or deny your suspicions, but will simply ask you to decide: is it better to be right, or to be wrong?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>—No one actually buys milk for the purpose of consumption. The purchase of milk is purely a method of covering up Their observation of you.

<sup>2</sup>—At the grocery, old men with beige hearing aids tune in to the frequency of your voice, the frequency of your thoughts, and report their findings behind the glass doors of the refrigerators. And it's not just milk, but all dairy products. Yogurt, cottage cheese, heavy whipping cream; powdered milk, even.

<sup>3</sup>—At that one breathlessly overpriced market, They have a cheese counter, run by a snobby little man with snobby little eyebrows who is correcting a stock boy, not on the pronunciation of an intoxicatingly stinky French cheese, but on the pronunciation of your last name.

<sup>4</sup>—Look at you! You're a job creator. Men, women, and children wake every day to attach milking machines to bloated, moaning Holsteins. They're all in on it. They all know what you've done and why you're under surveillance; They're all loyal to the cause. The children are raised on the gospel of the Great Eye; your name is often the first word They speak, uttered with all the conviction an infant can summon.

<sup>5</sup>—Earth is altered. Miles and miles of land cultivated to feed cows bred specifically for this purpose, with their genetics constantly perfected. Exponential tons of shit are produced each day, poisoning the ground and air. The polar ice caps melt from the exhaust fumes of the many shipping trucks moving the milk to anywhere and everywhere you might be.

<sup>6</sup>—These are your suspicions.

<sup>7</sup>—We would love to know the answer Ourselves. Think hard.

Windows free of metaphor. Windows that do not look out or in, that keep to themselves, that do not ask Us about Our business, or tell Us about theirs. We must install windows We can gaze through, to other windows. It's all windows there. The perforations in Our ears will someday afford Us deafness. We will wish to tear at the dotted line, and commence silence. Someday. Until then, We need windows that don't let sound in. Or light. Or dark. Windows We can keep secrets behind, cover up, ignore, forget about for months. But now We have a hole. A hole through where We can be seen. A hole through where all Our words blow away, Our meaning lost among dust and pollen and traces of people like you.

—Here the gameworld mapped along the  
veins in your eyelids, blinking cartography.



Don't eat that, not after what happened last time. Don't swallow, the infection grows in your belly. Don't lick your lips at funerals. Don't know why you would.

—Here find new snares, new ways to not  
escape. Here, new ways to hurt, We find  
them, and find them, and find them.  
Something We swear We will never do  
again; chorus, refrain. Here find a body that  
cannot find itself.

Play Manual for *deadman*.

—Enemies abound in this world. Danger: every crowded aisle. Danger: every scheduled stop. *deadman* journeys through the world by bus until he is discovered, dead. Then you will lose the game. This may take days; this may take minutes.

—*deadman*. plays out in real-time, during real hours of operation. Rise early, you makeshift guardian; *deadman* has all your time to spend.

—A level is completed when all transit shuts down, and *deadman* is abandoned, left for living. A new level will begin the next day, somewhere else in the world. Where Our hero will take you, We won't say. Sleep now, and dream of travel. *deadman* lives out your dreams.

—*deadman* can do all the things a dead man can do. He can perform no actions. He cannot hide himself, or “play alive.”

—In control of *deadman*, you control nothing. You may calmly watch, and hope *deadman* goes undiscovered. You may throw your controller out the window. We encourage you to experiment.

—Keep your puckered eyes on the corpse; sometimes *deadman* wakes to discover he is not Our hero at all.

—Pig begs devouring, doctor. Eyes and ears, snout and smile. A groin all full of needles short circuits the justice design. Clamp your teeth to your corkscrew tail and count 'til the sun comes round again. Take a shoulder, a knee. Swine soup to soothe your piggy throat. Hooves are for holding, kissed with respect. Balls are for stomping, or swallowing whole.

—Here find the game you've played before, characters you've met in playthroughs past, who are meeting you for the first time all over again. Here villains you've defeated, pretending to be allies. Something much stronger than déjà vu, Find the absolute knowledge, beyond doubt or suspicion, that you've been here before, turned this key, had this conversation, suffered this mortal wound and been miraculously saved at the last minute by a woman with feathers and talons and beak.

—Pig begs communion. Show your brittle soul the door, trans-substance antsy for salvaging. An infinity of hard corners, an infinity of foamy guards, and weary eyes ready to look the other way. Go blind just to find relief. There's blood, Pig, for the cup, and cloth for the sick that wait there. Sweaters for the children vomiting in the font. Flesh for the bucket mouthed choir boys.

We have been told Our gaze is unsettling,  
that We wear a predatory smile. We have  
been told Our subject cannot decide whether  
We are looking right through them, or are  
preparing to eat them whole. We are  
learning. Learning to accept compliments.  
Learning to disguise intentions, and when to  
reveal them, when is most opportune.  
Learning to read you like tea leaves,  
extracting meaning from your pores, your  
tremulous words and many nervous  
redundancies. We will pinpoint Our strike,  
collapse you in a heap. We will find where  
all your fears hide, and call them out to play.  
We will crawl inside your mind and lay  
eggs.

Play Manual for *GlueMan*

GlueMan of great power,  
reluctant champion of the  
information age, bipedal  
blackhole; nothing escapes  
him, though he wishes  
otherwise.

---

GlueMan, pitted between the  
forces of external sensory  
overload and internal  
emotional combustion. He  
fights with homemade  
adhesives; Our hero, chimera  
of splinters and paste.

---

GlueMan navigates the world  
on perilous missions:  
Wednesday night  
supermarket shopping after  
all the churches have let out;  
office Christmas parties at  
dive bars with open karaoke,  
and foamy churning sea of  
small talk; ten minutes,  
twenty minutes, fifty minutes  
*I must be getting home*, with  
questions of his daily  
accomplishments and  
struggles on endless,  
warbling loop, and the  
baffling fight to pay and  
leave *no thank you, no more,*  
*please, just the check.*

---

The more GlueMan takes in,  
the closer he gets to  
exploding into a cloud of  
fiberglass dust, an airborne  
itch.

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The game of *GlueMan*  
provides no system of  
measurement for determining  
Our hero's potential danger



level. GlueMan himself doesn't know how much pressure it will take, so your knowledge is as good as his. There are also no defined beginnings or endings to GlueMan's missions; there is no completion, and dangers are always present and in play.

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*GlueMan* is a game about keeping it all together. There is no victory to be found, or villain to be vanquished. *GlueMan* is a game of blind maintenance. How long can you keep Our hero from coming unglued?

—Here, here, seasonal drip, always in season. The nose that keeps bleeding, bleeding. Lactic acid flush. Here cotton stuffing like a bear, like bird in bird in bird delicacy. Find stoppage. Damned damnation. Here shifting, lost stance, round the corner Spring comes, and with it, disease. Rain net and slush scales, cold walks on the backs of nameless beasts.

—Pig. Hold the sides. Sweet stinking onions, plain pepper bean syrup, sugar corn balm. Hold on now, Pig. The sexual union of cabbage and horseradish, the sanctity of vegetable copulation. Beg Us for hunger, We're too damn full to think. Beg Us for holes to leak. Find solace between teeth and tonsils, only in hosts without lack or loss.

Don't suck the day from your arm hairs.  
Don't cough up the year in hairballs. Don't  
make cheese from bodily bacteria, no matter  
where you found it. Don't click your hooves,  
chalk your horns, chew your soggy cud.  
There's no time anymore for that.

— Here find the game you've played before, the game free of morality, free of humanity and all its pesky little hang-ups. We can do better. The game so real, reality is just cheap imitation. Human nature is artifice; good people are bad players, entertaining only themselves. Find the game that goes beyond entertainment, beyond push-button, coin-op, dopamine daydreams. Here meaning, absent minded player, nothing between the ears to lose.

Play Manual for *Strange Attractor, or The Home Wrecker*

1. —You are a strange attractor, a corruptive force, a beacon of chaos. From your eyes flows toxic light. You are "not" a "sociopath," We are certain.
2. —Find a subject: bored, unsatisfied, anxious, with a lover at home to feed lies like warm dumplings. In turn, the subject will find you. Gender is unimportant; the thing in question here is sex, and sex is sex so long as it is convincing. *Are you convinced?*
3. —Do not define the subject's path, but discover its trajectory, a rocket's parabola, to its logical point of impact: in a bed, on a couch, in a car perhaps. The expansive game-world offers many exciting settings.
4. —Leave your mark; a brand, framed in teeth, high on the back of a thigh, so thick and fit for roasting. Leave it in a place to be forgotten, soon discovered by third parties in the worst surprise.
5. —A champion maintains the appearance of innocence and *naïveté*. Show no signs of malice. Indeed, as the game designers, We remind you there is nothing malicious about this. The game is just the life of the avatar, just nature; the hawk dives in, and makes off with your favorite mouse.
6. —Quality chaos comes with patience. When it comes, remember to laugh, remember to sing! Let it be authentic; you must really indulge to keep your avatar alive. Feed on the damage you do, opening scabs with kisses, sucking honey from fresh wounds for new chances to increase your score. Push it as far as you can go. Devour every last drop. Once chaos is set in motion, there is really no sense in stopping it.

7. —Offer no consolation to the damaged, only joviality. It is joy, it is joy, purely adulterated; power brings so much joy!

—Pig begs violation. Oh, damn the laws.  
Tell Pig what We'd do, if it weren't for fear  
of persecution. Go and see, 30,000 horny  
snakes writhing in orgy. Ratio ninety-to-one  
for the ladies, with every boy late and cold,  
later and colder. With every boy impatient to  
disappoint. It has been a long winter.



This is Our blasphemy, Our dotted line spinal cord, Our mind separated from Our body, Our mind from Our mind. The mouth speaks free of the skull, reaching Our ears miles away, talking about Ourselves like We're watching a nature film. There We are in the Western desert, screaming at stones that look like Our senior class that it looks nothing like the movies depicted. Here We are in the valley of yellow air, struggling to synchronize the tasks of sleeping and breathing, often achieving discord, cacophony. Look at Us go, a body to ramble, a body to fall, a mind to contemplate the pit We descend into, a mind to observe the contemplation, three thousand miles away in a walkout basement. Send postcards.

—Here find blueblack boots at the edge of  
the bed, seen through quilted bunker. Here  
find infinite spectral patience for a breathy  
sliver of acknowledgement. You're not real.  
You're not real. Our teeth rebel against Our  
jaw, pulling root knees to flat enamel faces.  
Here find a tonguworm, burrowing in the  
core of Our apple skull. Find home in the  
mouth of a hungry whale. You're not real.  
You're not real.

You're being watched. Don't need to see it,  
not in this shallow blue light. Don't ask for  
proof. Don't provide explanation. There is  
no truth to be trusted, no lie to be called out,  
only the illusion you lean on for stability.  
Do not, you.

Play Manual for *Effective Parenting*

—Two partners must learn how to be effective parents. In Level One, the partners are suddenly awakened at 3AM by the sound of their only child crying. Potentially, this is due to a painful ear infection; potentially this is due to a nightmare; potentially the child is crying for no particular reason other than just to cry.

—This is a game about solutions. If you cannot solve the problem of the child's crying quickly enough and complete Level One, you will enter Level Two.

—It is impossible to complete Level One.

—In Level Two the child asks for a soothing bath. You may *run warm water, produce aromatic bubbles, play with bath toys, and comfort the child* so that it will stop crying.

—In Level Two you will also be presented with the option of holding the child under the water, and while controlling the two partners, you must work against the *Struggle Meter™* that appears on the screen, until finally, the problem of the crying child is solved.

—If you fail at this task, you will be made to repeat Level One the next night. If you succeed at this task, you will also be made to repeat Level One the next night with a new child.

—*We would like to remind you that permanent solutions are the best solutions.*

—Pig begs compensation. Don't know why.  
Don't care to ask. Just pay the Pig so We can  
get on.

—Here find the game you've played before, the game you can't not play. If there is any single rule We can define, it is that one. To even think of quitting is to continue to play. Find the game that plays regardless of player. Infinite credits, a feedback loop of NEW CHALLENGER!s and CONTINUE?s and GAME OVERs, all buttons permanently mashed into action, forever engaged by candy cola corn syrup tar. Here find yourself a new face at random, find yourself at random once again, lost in the miasmatic glow.

Don't sleep until you've combed the room for spiders. All of them must be accounted for. Don't stop until you've hunted down every last one with a vacuum, until you sucked them all to their deaths. Don't sleep with the closet door open, you don't want any uninvited guests through there. Don't let any light remain, not a single wave or particle, you must strive for perfect nauseating black. Don't sleep with any part of your body exposed, don't slip outside of your cocoon. Don't think as you settle in; you'll think about the spider you missed, the worst one of all, how it waits for you to fall asleep. Don't you know, you always miss one.

—Pig, what are We thinking? Did We come looking for you? Did We come at all? The stairs were taken down the street and beaten with a tire iron. So how did We get here? Pig, pin Us to Our words like butterflies on velvet. Pig, oh Pig, collect Us.



## Play Manual for *DungeonMan*

You are *DungeonMan*, a imperial mold, of gossip filled carve a labyrinth into the Earth, trick turns. Coerce meaning

Stop going to work, is your only job now. Study the perfect angles for every turn, swiftly by existential despair. can populate your dungeon humans cannot speak of,

To play *DungeonMan*, you game. *DungeonMan* cannot achieved. The perfect dungeon impossible to complete, so it beginning; Mobius strip held perfect dungeon is without go, a trap never to be sprung.

There's a certain algorithm you that can make the labyrinth will. You must do more than embody the dungeon, and the breathe. You live with a castle twisted beaks roost in your corpses of those who failed to

The perfect dungeon cannot be granite boots, legs to run on to esophageal canyons, through

When you've placed the stone persistent ray of light, calms discourse of the world; when retrieval, you will find your made yourself into a dungeon,

devotee of the temple of rats. The world lacks order, so a guided path of dead ends and through its twisting finitude.

*DungeonMan*, this architecture dungeon's design, finding the giving its users hope, followed Capture nameless beasts so you with the sort of horror that nesting in its perfect corners.

play a game about making a rest until perfection has been is the dungeon without end, must be without entrance or together with mortar. The escape, a place no one will ever The perfect dungeon is nothing.

You are *DungeonMan*,

architect of nothing.

quest for, tucked in a lost tome, walls shift and change at your build the dungeon, you must dungeon will breathe as you on your head. Birds with towers, carrion feeding on the enter a place no one can exit.

found. Give your dungeon its own hiding places, through mountains of ice and isolation.

that blocks out the final, the moaning draft, the senseless you are beyond reach or prize: *DungeonMan*, you've now let's see you climb out.

—Here find clutter, signs of struggle by a body trying to reclaim itself. Find a room decorated in the mode of passive-aggression, alive and unwilling to shelter. Here a mouth carved into the desk, filled with bourbon, designed to speak, but just blowing bubbles. A chair made of ears, an echo chamber of circular anxieties, deafened by clothes, cleaned and folded and neatly stacked in the most efficient formation for collecting dust. Here an ever-growing layer of what We were, second after second, Our own personal carbon record, here and there as well. Find a bathtub full of guts that We can never quite get scrubbed clean, lungs in the stove full of ash. Find eyes and eyes and eyes hiding just out of sight. You will never find all of the eyes.

Don't [redacted] Don't [redacted]  
[redacted] Don't  
[redacted] Don't  
[redacted] *And above all*  
else, DON'T [redacted]

—Pig speaks truths, always in plurality. The dividing line between what is real and what is simulated has become increasingly porous over time, but Pig keeps it all sorted out. A home for every last metaphysical critter, a mayo jar for every fevered brain. And look at Us, Pig, gazing out into the world composed of algorithmic binary oscillations, a near-infinite tumbler, turning, switching, unlocking itself before Our calculating eyes. Tell Us what We're watching for, Pig, from Our vantage point, it is all an ocean of indecisive numbers. Now We're zero. Now We're one. Put your snout through Our belly, Pig, now We're zero again.

—Here find the game you've played before. Here your greatest power: sight, existing outside the programming. You can see it, the artifice of it all, the archetype behind every persona, the stock skeleton of every avatar, all predictable motivations and habits and patterns, the impassable boundaries of the world, and its many seams. Find that no one else is aware of it but you. Here communication breakdown, the unspeakable, the limits of language; none can hear what you can't say, cannot read lips mouthing words that don't exist. Here, the impenetrable fog returns, washing over you, washing over everything, seeping into your nostrils and ears, hugging your eyeballs like a jilted lover, that constant, creeping, capitalized *Numb*. Here find the same question you've pursued countless times before, the eternal quest of Player One: what is the difference between a win and a loss, if you are bound to replay this game anyway? Here endless play, find a new game completed before it began, the outcome already experienced.

Play Manual for *This Has Been a Mistake*

1. —Get rid of it now. If you fail, shit's on you.

Got a garbage disposal?

Good. Shove it in there.

Shove your hands in while  
you're at it.

They're already ruined.

2. —Don't have a garbage disposal?

You're a barbarian, the  
swarm, the horde.

You might as well  
just eat the game  
cartridge,

and do a swan  
dive into a trash  
compactor.

3. —Did you rent it?

*This Has Been a Mistake.*

That's what you should be  
thinking.

We don't even  
know what to  
tell you.

This game is  
not for you.

It never has been.

4. —Did you steal it?

Good.

That's what We like to hear.

We're going to lose money  
on this one,

that's exactly  
what We want  
to happen.

Let Us lose.

5. —Now Our needle further  
entangled in Our thread,

sinews sewn through skin joining  
busy hand in busy hand;

now meaning  
constructed with  
tongue bound to feet  
by tendons,

the way books used to be made.

Remember books?

Remember body?

Remember, forget  
your trappings.

We try.

We try.

When We feel human again, We'll cry until  
We laugh, spitmoan Our way through the  
beetle trees. Mind made of breadcrumbs, at  
the banquet of starlings; We'll never find  
Our way back home.



—Find ways We can show Our face again in  
disguise. [redacted] here [redacted]

[redacted] here [redacted]

[redacted] here [redacted]

—Pig begs crystallization, cure-all for internal schisms, in stasis there is no change or shift or break. Let Us smell your psychic wounds, soak Our bread in your lymph. We will talk about Ourselves. Pig, We're screwed. Phillips flathead hex. We're farsighted, so maintain your distance. The closer you get, the less We see you, the more We see Ourselves.

—Here find the game you've played before; remember, it is only a game. Like all games, it is of no consequence. Here find all outcomes are equivalent. Know when to stop before you start. If you feel that you have a problem, find numbers to call, places to go. Here people to talk to, find pills to take. If you are unsatisfied with the outcome of your game, you may always begin again; you will, always. The game will find its way back to you. Here find there is no way to win, only more precise ways to lose.

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