

CRYPTOGLYPH™

Game Design Document

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INDEX

I. Project Summary	3
I. a. Requirements	3
I. b. Preparation	3
II. How To Play	4
III. Theoretical Foundations	5
III. a. The Qualifications of a Game.	5
III. b. The Systems of <i>Cryptoglyph</i> [™]	6
III. c. Interactivity of <i>Cryptoglyph</i> [™] (Modes)	6
III. c. Relevant Theory.	7
IV. Sample <i>Cryptoglyph</i>[™] Cards	9

I. Project Summary

The idea for *Cryptoglyph*[™] came to me while doodling on the letters printed in a text-book. It is a game of symbols; a drawing and guessing exercise with mechanics inspired by the card game *Apples to Apples* and the board game *Pictionary*. In the former, players are challenged to try and guess what word combinations will make the 'judge' player laugh the most, while in the latter, players are asked to guess a subject based on other's illustrations. As I was doing some research for a course in cognitive psychology, I was surprised at how relevant my concept for "Cryptoglyph" was to perspectivity, and how it embodies the theoretical underpinnings of learning and the nature of meaning. While it may not inspire others to pursue research on the subject, it offers a unique case study on different points of view, and an entertaining game play experience for lazy Friday nights.

I. a. Requirements

Though variations in play are encouraged, *Cryptoglyph*[™] requires the following suggested elements in order to play:

- **Three or more (3+)** willing players.
- **One (1)** set of *Cryptoglyph* symbol cards.
- **One (1)** pencil and pad of paper for each player.
- **One (1)** two-sided coin.

I. b. Preparation

To prepare for play, please follow the subsequent instructions. Again, alternative modes are encouraged for modified play, so please feel free to deviate from these instructions:

- (1) *Players begin by sitting in a circle, around a table or on the floor.*
- (2) *Shuffle the Cryptoglyph card deck and place it in the center, face down.*
- (3) *Select the youngest player as the first “cryptographer.” This player will be deciphering the first symbol in the deck.*

II. How To Play

Please follow the steps in this procedure to play *Cryptoglyph™* with friends. If you would like, feel free to print out to the card deck in the back of this design document.

Otherwise, you can also create your own. Regardless, here's how to play:

- (1) The first cryptographer selects a card from the top of the deck and shows it to the rest of the players. This is the first cryptoglyph symbol to be decoded. The cryptographer also chooses the orientation of the square card (i.e. which side is facing up).
- (2) Each player (including the cryptographer) takes their pencil and draws a copy of the symbol on their own pad of paper. Then, without showing anyone else, it is up to each player to transform that symbol into a picture. For example, a “U” shaped symbol can be converted into a watermelon, a smiley face, or anything else that may come to mind. The objective is for other players to try and guess, based on what they know about the cryptographer, what his/her interpretation of that symbol will be.
- (3) Once everyone has finished drawing, everyone shares his or her decoded cryptoglyphs with the rest of the group. Laughing is strongly encouraged.
- (4) After sharing, it is up to the cryptographer to decide who came closest to matching their interpretation of the symbol. More than one player can be chosen. In some cases, all player can be selected. In other cases, none.

- (5) Those players that came closest to the cryptographer's vision are awarded points by flipping a two-sided coin. Those who flip heads receive two (2) points. Those that flip tails receive one (1) point.
- (6) After the cryptographer's turn is finished, the next cryptographer will be selected by moving clockwise around the circle. A new symbol card is chosen and the old one is placed in a discard pile, and the process starts anew. Whoever is first to be awarded fifteen (15) points total wins the game.

III. Theoretical Foundations

First, before explaining some of the theoretical underpinnings of this game, it is important to note how *Cryptoglyph*[™] meets the qualifications of a game, namely, the many characteristics of its various systems, and its levels of interactivity:

III. a. The Qualifications of a Game

- Participation is a **voluntary** act and has its own safe “magic circle” of influence; literally, if you are involved in this game, you are sitting in a circle.
- The end result of *Cryptoglyph*[™] is **uncertain**, and there are **no profitable gains** to result from playing. It is also both an **immersive** and **non-serious** experience.
- The goal is to be the first to get fifteen points, and so is a **contest** of drawing and guessing. In order to win, each play must **abide by the rules** of the game.
- The symbols are interpreted through **decision-making**, and the game process is made up of a **system of parts** (players, cards, coin, paper and pencils).

III. b. *Cryptoglyph*[™] Systems

- As a **formal system**:
 - The **objects** are the cards, coins, etc. The **attributes** are the symbols on the cards and **the internal relationships** are the card placement in the deck. The **environment** is the play of the game itself.

- As a **experiential system**:
 - The **objects** are the players of the game. The **attributes** are the individual imaginations and drawings made by each player. The **internal relationships** are how each player will award points or compare their drawings. And, the **environment (context of play)** is the web of associations made with culture (i.e. possibly connecting *Cryptoglyph*[™] cards to symbols seen in everyday life) and preconceptions of what each player will do or what each symbol represents.

- As a **cultural system**:
 - The **object** is the game itself. The **attributes** are the design elements of the game. The **internal relationships** are the link between *Cryptoglyph*[™] and culture (for example, parallels between *Pictionary*, or to historical accounts of deciphering runes and hieroglyphics). And, the **environment** is culture itself.

III. c. Interactivity of *Cryptoglyph*[™] (Modes)

- **Cognitive interactivity**:
 - The imaginary interactivity between people; creating interpretations of each symbol, and then sharing those representations with the group.

- **Functional interactivity:**
 - The functional interactions with the cards and coin. Individuals flip the coin, or read and use the card symbols for their drawings.

- **Explicit interactivity:**
 - Following the rules of the game, in the most literal sense. The choices of players and the randomness of card selection and coin flips take the fore.

- **Beyond-the-object interactivity:**
 - References in real life to what might have happened in the game, or how things might have played out if a player, for example, got a *Cryptoglyph*[™] idea from something seen on a street sign.

III. d. Relevant Theory

- **Semiotics:** the study of meaning and the process by which it is made.
 - We interpret and construct meaning from our surroundings. In many ways, this is the objective of the game. Each *Cryptoglyph*[™] will take on a different meaning for each player (because of their various socio-cultural influences), and it is up to everyone to interpret, or create a literal 'sign,' out of the symbol through the “decoding” game process.

- **Individual and Social Constructivism**
 - Individuals construct meaning and personal interpretation via prior knowledge and experience (i.e. a player might make a smiley out of a “U” shape because that is the visualization it reminds them of most).
 - Socially, players in the game collaborate by creating various meanings for a single symbol. In many ways, this is collaborative, and can introduce new perspectives to players. (Note: I am reminded of a passage in novella *The Little Prince*, where a drawing of a “snake consuming an elephant” is misconstrued as a hat).

- **[Dynamic] Systems Theory:** smaller, interrelated parts acting towards a common goal. Or, how little “micro” changes can have an effect on the “macro” trajectory of a system.
 - Each player collectively creates meaning for a *Cryptoglyph*[™] symbol in the game. The “cryptographer” basically assigns meaning for a point score. This might change how players see the original symbol globally, when they go about their day (outside of the game), influencing daily decisions—however how minor.

IV. Sample Cryptoglyph™ Cards
