

A Guide To Reading *Homestuck* That Would Have Helped Me Get Into It Sooner.

This ‘article’ has been circling in my head for the last week or so, and I decided the best way to deal with it was to actually write it down. You see, I’ve just caught up on *Homestuck*. I love it on several levels, and I am deeply impressed with it as a story. I can already tell that I’m going to write academic work on it, as well as wandering around various online forums getting my Thoughts everywhere. The thing is, I nearly didn’t get around to reading it at all. I tried once, and bounced off.

This has stuck with me, because if I hadn’t made the effort to go back, I’d have missed out on something cool. So I figured I’d write this, both as a way of figuring things out myself, and hopefully helping people over the hump I got stuck on.

Part of the problem with stories like *Homestuck* is that they are *really difficult to explain* to anyone else. They are rabbit holes of context that builds up gradually, meaning that if you’re talking to someone outside that context, it’s hard to communicate why they should care, or to avoid spoilers.

So here we go: my attempt at a *Homestuck* blurb and some suggestions about how to approach it, both of which would have helped me get into reading it.

Why You Might Want to Read *Homestuck*.

Homestuck is a story that begins as a group of teenagers start the (convoluted) processes needed to play a new videogame together, gradually discovering that the nature of the game is much higher stakes than they realised. It’s fiercely imaginative and unrestrained science-fantasy/speculative-fiction that is as internally consistent as it is *weird* and *interesting*. Imagine *Doctor Who*, if *Doctor Who* told a single developing story across multiple seasons with their own internal arcs, as if it were *Babylon 5* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, instead of the more modular seasons it presented us with. (And I have to admit, I think *Homestuck* has a fundamentally better written story than *Doctor Who*.)

It’s *funny*. I have laughed until I wept reading it, and until my face hurt in places I didn’t know I had. Moments stick with you long after they’re past, and sections of dialogue hang in the mind and become part of everyday conversation.

It’s full of interesting characters, including a vibrant cast of strongly written, interesting women. It passes the Bechdel Test with flying colours and Gold Stars.

It has a rich cast of characters across the GLBTQ spectrum and also isn’t afraid of featuring characters with disabilities. (Everyone’s pretty white, though.)

It has powerful Big Damn Hero moments and is full of surprises.

It’s made me cry on several occasions.

The music is simply phenomenal and gets stuck in my head. I’m going to spend Too Much Money on Bandcamp eventually, I can just tell.

And I almost didn’t get into it. How sad would that have been?

Getting Down the Rabbit Hole.

It’s a basic fact that *Homestuck* does not make itself easy to get into. There’s an accessibility gap that requires effort on behalf of readers. This is something I want to write about academically, but I also think there are pointers that would have helped me get into the story.

I’ve found that the obstacle I needed to get past was Act 1, which unfolds over 40 or so multi-page updates and two months worth of content. It is a *miniscule fraction* of the story

so far, which is in its final stages after four years of development. This is all the more reason not to let those first two months be a barrier to all the rest of it. So, here begins the guide.

1) Let It Wash Over You.

Rule 1 of *Homestuck* is to relax and see what happens. The early part of the story is filled with silliness that seems without purpose, but which will actually matter later on. It really is an introduction in terms of setting the scene, but it also doesn't provide much in the way of *hooks* for what will make the story so distinctive. The upside is that you don't need to be close-reading it, just following the action. There are programming gags that I found a particular tar-pit for my engagement, but rest assured that once you get past them they don't return to central focus.

Whenever you see a button marked 'PesterLog' or any button beneath the image, click on it and read what's underneath. A huge amount of the depth of the story unfolds in conversations between characters over social networking clients.

My suggestion is to work through it until you hit a screen labelled END OF ACT 1. That's where the first hook is, really. If you're finding Act 1 actively painful to read, then I'm not going to ask you to keep at it. If you see no point to it and want to know why you should bother, it might be worth clicking on this link:

<http://www.mspaintadventures.com/?s=6&p=002146>. That's the End of Act 1 animation, and it's what I consider the first major hook, so if you're asking what the hell the point of any of this is, I suggest watching it before jumping ship. If you still have no interest, then it's entirely reasonable to stop. If on the other hand it piques your curiosity and you want to know What The Hell Just Happened, then you can return to where you were and read onwards to fill in the gap. The good thing is that the End of Act 1 animation won't actually spoil anything – but it nods in the direction the story is going, and shows what some of the stakes are.

If you make it that far, I hope it's smooth sailing from then on. If you get as far as the End of Act 3 and you're still not really grabbed, then it is safe to say that *Homestuck* is not your sort of fun. (The animation which concludes Act 3 is available here:

<http://www.mspaintadventures.com/?s=6&p=003049>. However, it's one where the impact of watching it out of context will be more reduced than for the one at the end of Act 1.)

2) Startling Transitions

This is kind of a cousin to "Let It Wash Over You." There are points where the connection between what a new chapter discusses and where the story had been is Really Unclear. If at points you wind up confused, you are NOT doing it wrong. Don't worry about it: *Homestuck* is a mystery story as much as anything else, and seeing how seemingly unrelated elements come together is part of the fun.

There are also in-depth summary pages provided at semi-regular intervals after about a year's worth of content and which are filled with links, which make for a useful safety-net.

It is fair to say that these transitions do represent a spike in the effort required to continue, because you need to deal with the mental puzzle of a sudden change in gears and in some cases away from characters you're invested in. Still: assuming that the wider story appeals at all, everything will eventually become clear.

Anything, no matter how bizarre or ridiculous, is going to get tied back to the main story – and the voyage will be an interesting one.

It's also worth mentioning that the characters are often first identified as caricatures as a kind of shorthand, but the story is clever in gradually showing a great deal of depth to who they are, without ever contradicting that first impression. If you think a new character is a pointless joke... keep calm and Let It Wash Over You.

3) Navigation

This one isn't about circumventing a problem with *Homestuck* so much as it is an approach that worked for me: there is a 'save game' button at the bottom of each page. I made liberal use of this. I *also* kept a spot in the bookmarks toolbar for wherever I was up to in the story, and replaced it with a fresh version regularly. I also kept a folder for dragging interesting pages to so I could go back to them later. You won't need to do this at all, but if you find something cool or interesting enough that you might want to return to it, then it'll be easier to bookmark than find again through navigation.

Also, anything with an [S] in the title involves sound and/or music, so don't be startled when that happens. Also, don't be me, and remember to plug in your headphones because otherwise you'll be missing out.

4) Length

There is a lot of *Homestuck*. It's been going for four years, and the creator has been crazily dedicated in bringing out content. It's likely to take a while to get up to date, but you don't have to feel like you need to read it in one sitting. It's not going anywhere. Just navigating through it normally will be fine, or using the tips I went with if you want might make it even easier still.

Fundamentally, there's a lot of content. Approaching it as you would a long book, or a series of long books, is entirely fair.

The flipside is that if you get into *Homestuck* as I did, it can consume a lot of your time and brain-space. Plan for this. If you know about other times you started reading a webcomic and then wound up not sleeping for a few days because of reading the archives, then there's a good chance it could happen again.

So, there we have it. I'll update this document as more ideas occur to me, but it seems a good place to start.

And just to make it as easy as possible to start, here's the link to the very first page: <http://www.mspaintadventures.com/?s=6>

That way, there's no effort needed to find it, and no chance you might get spoiled by later content.

Good luck, I hope you enjoy it, and I'm curious to see what anyone thinks either about *Homestuck* or this daft guide.