

127. Computer Games

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Hello to everybody all around the world. This is Luke from Luke's ENGLISH podcast. And you are listening to Luke's ENGLISH podcast, which shouldn't really be a surprise because I expect you downloaded it and pressed the play button on your machine, whichever machine you are using. Welcome to Luke's ENGLISH podcast. This is a podcast in which you can hear natural British English as it really is spoken by a person. That person in this case is me. Welcome to the show. This one is all about computer games or video games. We'll be looking at games from the early days of Space Invaders, PacMan all the way up to the game industry today, which in fact is worth more than the movie industry globally, worth more than the music industry, worth more than DVD industry, and worth more than the book industry. That's right, the computer games media industry is one of the biggest entertainment... I think it may be the biggest entertainment industry that we have in the world today. But what do people really think of games? It seems that many people believe that computer games are just something that is used or done by geeky teenage boys with no friends who never go outside, never see the sun, and spend all of their time indoors playing games, maybe learning how to become a murderer or something like that. Is that what you think of games? Or do you have a different opinion? I wonder.

I'm going to talk to you about a kind of history of games at the beginning. And I'll give my own, kind of, personal history of computer games and after that I'm going on to kind of discuss a few different questions related to gaming.

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Let's see, so what do you think? Are they for just sad teenage boys or are they kind of something that everybody can play, well, let me give you a couple of facts, okay, so it is fact time. I did a bit of research on the Internet I found a few facts about the video games industry, now this facts related the two America, so not to the whole world but I managed to find some information about America in particular, maybe we can use America as a kind of benchmark for the way games are consumed all over the world, maybe not, who knows, maybe in your country, you deal with computer games in a completely different way. But generally speaking I think that the trends in America are quite reflective of trends in the rest of the world, more or less when it comes to computer games, anyway.

So the average age of a computer gamer or games player in America is 30 years old, that's right, 30, so not a child, not a teenager, but 30 years old. In fact most gamers are in the thirties surprisingly enough and are they just boys or do some girls play as well. Well according to the statistic which I found, just less than half of the gamers in the US are women, so it is about 49 percent women, 51 percent men. Now this data includes not just games played on consoles, for example the PlayStation 3, the Nintendo Wii or the Xbox 360, it is not just games played on dedicated games machines but also games that are played on home computers and even

games that people play on their tablets or the mobile phones, for example Angry Birds or Tetris or something like that. There is a massive variety of games now and they come in all shapes and sizes, so I expect that there are many women out there who maybe don't play games in a kind of obsessive way that you might imagine sort of the teenage boys who play on the PlayStation, but nevertheless they stood playing games on the smartphones and stuff like that.

I know personally from my own experience that my girlfriend got completely addicted to Angry Birds and she got completely addicted to Fruit Ninja on her iPhone. My mum and dad they got addicted to Tetris when we had a Game Boy in the house. So, you know, you might be surprised, it is not just for teenage boys who have no friends, it is also used by many people of many different ages, different genders and so on.

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Okay, in fact, nowadays games are used a lot in education as well, many people even consider them to be the future of entertainment and possibly the future of social networking and communication. Games have, still have a long way to go before they can rival, kind of art forms like films or novels in the way that they can tell stories but they have so much potential in terms of the way they are interactive, their ability to tell us a story or the way that they can be used to connect people online.

So, we know the games are developing fast. I wonder what it is going to happen with games in the future. I have got some questions at this point, before I start telling you my own personal history of computer games, I have got a few questions which I will hopefully deal with in the second half of this episode, but please send me your responses to these questions, I am very interested in your opinions, please join in the debate, here are some questions.

First of all, What do you think of computer games? Do you love them or hate them? Do you think they are sad or do you think they are cool? Do you like all games or do you just like some specific ones? Do you play games or do you avoid them as much as possible? Do you think that they are a good use of your time, or do you think they are just a total waste of time? Are they unhealthy and bad for us? Or do they help us to develop particular skills or even keep us fit? Are they a good way to connect with people? Or are they just basically antisocial things to do? Are computer games just a bit of fun or are they somehow immoral, unethical, and kind of dangerous? Can computer games be the future of entertainment? Will they replace films or ultimately are they unable to become works of art in the same way that we imagine theatre, movies or books to be works of art?

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Find this particular episode on those web pages, and just leave your comments below, I am very interested to see what you think, so let me know just give you my own kind of personal history of games.

Let's see. Well, I was born in 1977 and computer games had been around for quite a while already when I arrived. In fact really the first big success in computer games was in 1972. It was released by company called Atari who aren't really around so much anymore but it's kind of an original old-school retro computer games maker, you could say. They came out to America in 1972 they came with a very earlier computer game concept. Do you know what it was called? I wonder. It was called Pong. And it was very basic very-very simple and essentially was a kind of table tennis or tennis simulator. And you've probably seen it. You might you've even played it. You might seen it on TV or even played it yourself on the computer of some kind, may be on some kind emulator on your PC, maybe.

But Pong basically involved two little white lines on the two sides of the screen which could be controlled to move up or down. And then there would be a little white ball which is basically just a tiny square made of probably about four pixels. And this square would bounce between two white lines. So white lines represented your bats, your table tennis bats, or your tennis rackets. And you would bounce this white ball between the two. So player one would be the line on the left, player two would be the line on the right. And BOP--BEEP-BOP-BEEP-BOP-BEEP. You just sort of hit the ball to each other and if you missed, then you lost the point. That was it. Very basic but somehow very addictive and there was something satisfying about the analogue sounds that you got from this game BOP--BEEP-BOP-BEEP. It was actually very addictive. It started out as an arcade machine. What's an arcade machine? Well, an arcade, computer games arcade is a place or a room may in a cafe or room in some public area where you go in and inside there are a lot of games machines, coin operated games machines. And you can go in there and put your money in and start playing the game.

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Originally games arcades would have been filled with kind of mechanical games of some kind like pinball pinball was the most famous, most popular kind of mechanical game. And it wasn't there until the early 70s that electronic games computer games were introduced so. Maybe 1972, 1973 probably in America you might have got into computer games arcade to play some pinball or might go into games arcade to play some pinball. And you might have noticed that a wooden cabinet with a TV screen and it might have been a game of Pong. This game was so popular, so successful, made so much money that Atari decided they were trying to develop a game of Pong or a computer games machine that could be used at home. And so they released the very first games console which had a sort of space in the top where you can insert cartridges. And the cartridges would be basically different games. For example, Pong or vary various others as well.

Pong is the most famous one for that era. And so that was the very first games console. A console is a machine which is dedicated really to playing computer games and nowadays we think of PlayStation 3 or the Xbox 360 as examples of games consoles. And it was kind of a revolution in home entertainment. That you could plug this thing in your TV and then bingo! You've got basic sort of racing simulator or basic tennis simulator. And it was very very popular.

Then of course you've got the games like Space Invaders from Japan. And this was another big success in the computer games arcades. Let see.. When did I get my first game? When did first experience playing games? I think it was probably when I was about 5 or 6 years old, I think. May be ever earlier. My dad one day brought home a kind of Pong copy. I don't think it was an original Pong machine or original Atari console. But he brought home some kind of Pong copy of some kind that he borrowed it from my friend I think. And he plugged it into the TV and then we started playing Pong. We used to have very good fun playing Pong. I remember there were these kind of dials or pedals that we used to control the line going up and down. Great fun, I think we only had it for a couple of weeks before we had to give it back.

The next game that I got was after my dad had been to Hong Kong on business. He went to Hong Kong for like a business trip and while he was there he picked up handheld games for my brother and me. Handheld means that there is a just very small machine, just small enough to fit it in your hand. The most famous handheld machine that we know now of course is the Game Boy. May be the PSP - the PlayStation handheld console. But in those days we didn't have Game Boy, we had like just small games which only had one game in them. So you could change the cartridges in the back. It was just one game.

And my brother was given a kind of yellow plastic thing that looked like a spaceship, but in fact it was a game called Galactic Invaders. This was a kind of chip copy of Space Invaders, but it was great. And my brother quickly became kind of addicted to this. And it was very good at it, I remember. Basically in this game you had three columns, and at the bottom you had a spaceship. And the spaceship could move between these three columns and shoot lasers up at aliens spaceship which was slowly coming down. And you had try to shoot them all before they got to your spaceship and destroyed you, killed you. At the top you would see sometimes UFOs flying across and the UFOs made a kind of memorable noise it was like DO-o-O-o-O noise.

And in fact the sound effects were pretty cool on this game (there were sound effects coming from Luke). That kind of thing I've thought that was cool when I was a kid. I don't know, maybe my parents found it incredibly annoying. They didn't seemed to mind really. There were probably happy that we were just sitting down and not destroying the living room. But it was good fun, that game and I was given a very earlier Nintendo game & watch thing... game & watch handheld games device. Now game & watch was what Nintendo was producing before they came out with a game consoles and the Game Boy. Game and watches was essentially a kind of.. It was like a clock or alarm clock.

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So, It's like a little display about the size of a credit card. And It would tell you the time, you can set an alarm. So, it would wake you up in a morning. And had a little arm that would come out on the back and you could prop it up on your bedside table. It would work like an alarm clock but also it had the game in it. So it's a kind of combination between a bedside alarm clock and a computer game. And the game was very basic. I mean, later on they released thing like Donkey Kong on it, but mine was one of the very earlier ones. And it was a game called Parachute. And

it, essentially in Parachute, what happen was you controlled a little guy in a boat and it was so simple that if you can imagine all.. you only had two buttons left and right. And you could move this guy in the boat to the left and to the right. That's it. And you only had about four positions that the boat could go in.

So, it's just literally moving this guy between these four positions. In the sky there is a little airplane which was dropping guys with parachutes and the guys with parachute were slowly descend. And it would land in one the four positions. At the beginning it's easy, because they come down one by one. But then as you progress they come down more quickly. And there are more of them you got to be very fast with your thumbs in order to catch these guys and parachutes. Because if you don't catch them they will land in the water. In if they land in the water.. that's right! Of course, they get eaten by sharks. And you get kind of a cool animation of when one of these guys lands on the water you see this little shark fin coming through the water and then they get eaten by the shark. It was quite a good fun. And required quite a lot of skill and dexterity in your thumbs and timing in order to make sure you catch all of these guys. So that was the first kid games we got.

That was the first game that we got, it wasn't until later on really, let's see, my dad brought home the very first home computer that I've ever seen, so it wasn't just a game machine but it was actually a computer it was called the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, which was, I think it had like 64k of RAM, RAM means random assisted memory I think, anyway RAM is the memory that your computer needs in order to perform its basic tasks and functions, all right?, so for example most laptops or most computers these days have about 2 gigabytes of ram, so that's all the memory space that the computer needs in order to kind of perform different tasks all at the same time, the more RAM you have the faster your computer can operate, and the more tasks it can complete all at the same time. So, most computers now has 2 gigabytes of ram or 4 gigabytes of ram, this one that my dad brought home would had 64 keys of RAM, just to give you an idea of how much that is, one gigabyte is about 1000000k. So 64k you can imagine just how basic and how simple this machine was.

But the Sinclair ZX Spectrum was a huge success in the UK and it was very simple, again you plugged into the back of your TV and you could, you know, play games on it, you could also code things, you could write codes, you could program your own games, it was very basic little keyboard with blue rubber keys which is kind of cool, but they were also pretty unreliable and they were crashed quite a lot. So my dad brought home a Sinclair ZX Spectrum and we played for about two hours I think before it just died, it just crashed and it never worked again, so that was the first experience of a home computer that I have ever had. It wasn't until later on, until, I think I was about nine or ten years old that my parents decided that they would buy an Amstrad CPC 6128, so that was a similar kind of level to the Sinclair ZX Spectrum but it is likely more advanced, I wouldn't say it was a next generation computer but it was better than the Spectrum, this one had 128k of RAM.

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Wooo, and you had to load programs or load computer games on to it using a tape player, so you connect the tape player to the computer just a tape player, like cassette player that one you used to listen to music for example, you connect it through the headphones socket and the games would be stored on cassettes, you know, these old cassettes we used to use to listen to music on a walkmans for example, same hardware but instead of having music on them, they would have computer games on them, so you put the cassette in the tape machine and rewind it, and then get the computer ready so you have to like typing the code to run the game, so you'd like load game and it would go into like a ready mode and then you'd press play on the tape machine and the tape player would start playing the code would start playing the game directly into the computer and you could hear the sound of the code going in, it was a kind of analogue code which would then you allowed the computer run the game, ok, and the sound would be like (different sounds) and that's the sound of the information that actually going into the computer from this tape machine and very slowly the game would load and it would take almost half an hour to load, half an hour, and probably about 50 percent of the time they wouldn't work, there would be some interference something would go wrong and the game would crash when it was loading.

So, it was always kind of exciting when a game would finally load so there would be this tense half an hour while the game is loading and you would like make sure that you didn't touch the tape player or touch the computer at all, because if you even breathe on the computer the chances were that it would crash, and the game wouldn't load. So, you had to wait half an hour and while it was loading you would get a title screen very slowly appearing line by line on your computer screen, and the title screen would be some sort of picture to represent the game and so while you waited for the game to load you could watch the title screen loading line by line and then the game would load and you'd be able to play it, and you'd keep your fingers crossed that it didn't crash because if it crashed while you were playing it, that's right, you have to start again, rewind the cassette reprogram the computer and load the game again.

The games were really basic, really simple, really basic graphics but there were some really good, I have some really good memories of playing games with my brother, we spent quite a lot of time together in front of this computer playing always, very early games, games like, let's see, games like BMX simulator, BMX simulator was kind of a top down view, so imagine you are looking directly down onto a BMX track, BMX is a kind of bicycle, you know, the bike for you you'd use to do trips, BMX bike, so BMX simulator, so you'd look down on the track and there were these little sort of very basic looking blobs, like coloured blocks with a line at the top, a line at the bottom to represent the wheels of the BMX and you would tap one of the bottoms to make the BMX go around and you'd turn with the left or right keys and now it's just basically keep tapping and the BMX would like move around the track and you had to avoid, puddles of water, you had to kind of jump upon over things and stuff like that and it was a race so it'd be me versus my brother in a very dramatic BMX race and each track would be different.

So they'd be more difficult each time, very very basic, but really good fun and I remember at being at simulator you can have 4 players playing it at the same time which was really cool,

because you had to use the keyboard to control the BMX's everyone would had to crowd around the keyboard, so I remember that sometimes when our friends came over, there'd be like 4 of us, all crowded round, trying you know to control the BMX's by touching different bottoms on the keyboard, not very practical, but certainly a lot of fun. James and I also used to program around games on the Amstrad, because there was no operating system in the computer, it was just sort of basic, and I don't know to describe it really, no operating system you couldn't just click on a window to open something you had to actually type in the code, you had to type the command directly in, in order to launch a game or to ask the computer to do something.

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So you had to learn a kind of basic set of commands and we learned how to make simple games, for example, we learned how to make a racing game where you have to control a little car, going through a valley so we kind of made a valley, a random valley, made of I think it was number one, so lots of number ones all, we'd make a valley and you had to control a little car and move it all the way through this valley, and if you touched the sides, game over, you know. That was good fun.

Lots of very lovely memories of playing games with my brother, probably early on a Sunday morning because in those days when we were kids we used to get up early, we actually want to get up early in order to play the games, that all changed the course then when we became teenagers and for some reason staying in bed was the main priority but in the early days we get up early on Sunday mornings in order to play these games, Didn't we go to church? No we just played games instead. That was our way, I don't know, that sort of showing our faith in the world was to blow things up in a computer, yeah, after that, let's see, after that there were other games and other piece of hardware out there, but there were just too many things for me to mention and too little time, so I am going to tell you my personal story and the machines which I play myself, okay, after that, the Nintendo Entertainment System arrived, in fact the Nintendo Entertainment System arrived a bit earlier but I didn't get one until a little bit later when I was about... I must have been about twelve years old maybe a bit older and I had a paper round.

I was a paperboy, that meant that I rode my bicycle all over my local village with the big bag full of newspapers in it and I would deliver newspapers to all the houses, right, so I had a job and I saved all my money for the paper round and I used it to buy a Nintendo Entertainment System, now it's the very first Nintendo home games console and it was a huge success all over the world the Nintendo with probably the most famous game which was Super Mario brothers and, you know, if you don't know who is Mario, I don't know where you have been because famously when just a couple of years after Super Mario brothers was released during the mid 1980, there were some survey than and it was discovered that more American kids were able to identify Super Mario than Mickey Mouse, so he became most famous than Mickey Mouse basically.

Super Mario Brothers was just a really great game, very very playable, platform adventure the basic concept is that Super Mario is an Italian plumber, I don't know why he was an Italian plumber but he was and why he used to kind a travel through these green pipes I suppose it

was just a way for them to design the game, they needed ways for Mario to move around between different levels, they decided that he would travel around through pipes, so he was a plumber, don't ask me why he was Italian, I have no idea why that was, I think maybe due to the fact that they couldn't really render his head very well because it would have looked strange that his head wasn't moving it when he was jumping up and down. So they gave him a hat and also they gave him a moustache, to just give him a sort of a particular feature on his face, it just made it easier to design his face in simple graphics, if he had like a clearly distinguishable moustache I don't how I think that's part of the reason. Anyway he was an Italian plumber and he had a brother called Luigi. So it was Mario and Luigi (in Italian accent) "It is a Mario". Mario's girlfriend I think it called Princess Peach, I think he had two girlfriends. Mario has been around for a long time now, I think he's had several girlfriends but the first one I think it was called Princess Peach, later on he got Daisy as well I don't know the differences between the two of them.

Anyway Princess Peach was his girlfriend, so just this poor Italian plumber has a princess as a girlfriend, I don't know, you work it out. Princess Peach would always get kidnapped, she was constantly being kidnapped, either she was kidnapped by a Donkey Kong who is a kind of huge evil gorilla, not the pink one mind you, just a normal coloured one but Donkey Kong would kidnap Princess Peach sometimes in other games but in Super Mario Brothers Princess Peach was kidnapped by Bowser who was a kind of huge green monster, some sort of evil turtle, I think. Bowser would kidnap Princess Peach.

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I don't know why kidnapped her or what he plan to do with her, once he kidnapped her. I don't really want to know really exactly what happened to her, but basically he would kidnap her and keep her in a castle and it was up to Mario to find his way through these different worlds in order to finally get to Bowser's castle, defeat Bowser and rescue the princess, pretty basic kind of fairy tale like story line. So you control Mario and you have to run from left to right, you jump over various obstacles, make sure you don't fall in holes and you can collect various different things that would help you on your journey. So when you start Mario he is a, well he's kind of big, if you get hit by a bad guy then he goes all small. "Doohgt-dooht-dooht" he kind of makes that sound. The sound effects were really great in Super Mario Brothers and very memorable. So if you get hit by a Kooper, Kooper is a kind of a evil bad guy, then you go "dooht-dooht-dooht" and go all small but then if he gets hit again, he's dead and he goes... I don't know the sound what is like, it goes something like "door-loo-drooloo", no that's in Tetris. That's a Tetris sound effect. Anyway, so if you get touched by a turtle then you would die. Strange logic you get in computer games. I don't know why if a turtle touches your foot that would cause you to die but this is Super Mario World so the rules are different, Ladies and Gentlemen, the rules are different.

Anyway there were very little touches in this game which made it really special, the main thing is just the game play, the way that Mario responded to your commands, the way he is sort of move around, the way you felt that he had a sense of weight, so when he jumped there was a

sensation of him having inertia or weight behind him, also there were very cool things like if he ate a mushroom he would become big and strong. Naturally again, I don't know why that is logical, that eating a mushroom make you kind of a super powered. I don't know what kind of mushrooms Mario was eating but anyway, there you go. Also if he ate a flower it gave him the power to throw fireballs, again, not real world logic there, so it is really funny, great sense of humour, a great sense of timing in the way the levels were designed, a genuine sense of challenge and so it became an old time classic and famous all over the world and since then we have loads of different Mario games, including Super Mario Kart, Super Mario Galaxy all kind of spin-off games from the Mario series. So, I bought my super Nintendo, I bought my Nintendo Entertainment System or NES, in Japan. It's called the Famicom, a classic games console with the very simple controller. The controller is the thing you hold in your hands in order to play the game. And it was a great plastic box with a lid on it and when you open the lid, slide it this big cartridge and then click the cartridge down and turn it on and you get this kind of "booout in" sound which shows you that it's a Nintendo console, and just really great fun.

They were really really classic games, not just Super Mario Brothers but loads of others and I played that for a while. Then my brother in 1989 I think he managed to get a Game Boy, I think he bought it from someone at school, so I got a Game Boy, and this was Nintendo first handheld game console and it was really great, it was kind of revolution because it was a... not just because of the way it was designed, it is very simple design, very appealing, very nice aesthetic, very simple sort of lay out and everything, and controls were just almost exactly the same than the control for the Nintendo Entertainment System controller and you could put different cartridges in the back, so you could play lots of different games, but really the main thing about the Game Boy was that it just oozed charm, it was just a really charming piece of hardware because of the sound effect again when you turned it on it would go (beeping). So now that seems like a small detail but for some reason it's just very satisfying, just the cute noises that this machine would make. Also the graphics were very simple, it was just black and white and it was a 2 bits machine, so 8, the next the NES - Nintendo Entertainment system was an 8 bits machine and that was basic, but the Game Boy was just a 2 bits machine so black and white, very simple sound effects and yet, with all of this basic like limitations Nintendo managed to produce some really classic games.

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It just shows you: don't need amazing graphics, you don't need like high quality HD TVs, all you need is a kind of inventive game designer, simple set of rules and kind of addictive game play and you got all of this from the Game Boy most famous game which was of course Tetris. Tetris is got kind of an interesting history because it was developed in Russia, it was developed in the Soviet Union before the Iron Curtain came down and so this is a Russian game, or a Soviet made game and God knows how Nintendo managed to get the rights to put it on to the Game Boy, but it was all, I mean the rights of this game all mixed up with the KGB, it is kind of interesting story of espionage on computer games, that could be another podcast of its own just the story of Tetris, I think it is a fascinating one, and it involved the American game publisher going in the Soviet Union in what must have been quite frightening times to be an American in

the Soviet Union and it went he managed to find a guy to design Tetris and eventually managed to get Tetris published in America and in the rest of the world and then Nintendo got the rights to put in on to the Game Boy.

And the great thing about Tetris was that anyone could play really, it is very simple to understand the rules but quite difficult to master the game, you've probably played Tetris and you probably know how it works. Basically you have different blocks, different shapes that fall down from above and the shapes are all made of basically four pieces, you've got this kind to have a square, an oblong, a little higgledy-piggledy shape and so you got about four or five different shapes and they fall down from above and as they fall you could rotate them by 90 degrees and the idea is to make the more fit in to a line at the bottom. And when they make a line you get a point and the line disappears. So on one hand you have to try to get as many points by scoring as many lines as you can and on the other hand you have to just make sure that the blocks don't all pile up until there is no space at the top of the screen. You probably know the game yourself but it is hugely addictive and very popular all over the world and popular with people who didn't normally play games, for example, my mom and dad, themselves got kind of addicted to Tetris.

Now they didn't really agree with computer games, they kind of frown on them, thought that they were possibly a waste of time, maybe even harmful or something, they still didn't really like them, they thought they were kind of sad, you know, just spend your time sitting there just doing nothing except playing a game, they thought there were sad, they probably felt it was not very good for us. But one day they started playing Tetris, they got hooked and they couldn't put it down, very addictive game and you'd probably experience it yourself, you could play Tetris for hours on end without even realising that the time had gone by, and in fact if you'd play Tetris for too long you would experience 'Tetrisitis'. Not 'Tetrisitis' is not a real medical condition but it's kind of a nickname that my friends and I would use to describe the way, if you have been playing Tetris for a while and then you close your eyes and try to go to sleep you could still see Tetris blocks moving down, you know, in front of your eyes, so you played so much after what you keep seeing Tetris blocks wherever you look, so that's 'Tetrisitis' and in fact that's kind of a common thing you get if you play any computer game for a long time, eventually you start seeing the graphics wherever you go, quite dangerous I suppose.

I remember playing Super Mario Kart, which is a driving game, with my friends from University for hours, and then leaving the living room in order to go to the toilet and as I was moving around the room, as I was moving around the house I felt like I had to like keep turning or pushing my thumbs in order to turn the corners of the house, just because I've been so used to playing the game for such a long time. That just show how engrossing and how kind of addictive and fun these games are that you just get completely sucked into them. It is that a good thing or a bad thing? I wonder, I really do.

So after the Nintendo and after the Game Boy, the next console that I got was the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, the SNES, or in Japan, the Super Famicom and this was great

because it was a lot more powerful than the SNES and the graphics were much better and there were suddenly a huge range of new games that you could get for it.

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The control pad was different it was more advanced, it had six buttons this time instead of just two, four buttons on the main part that you control with your thumbs and two shoulder buttons on the top, and that meant that the game designer had many more options, many more possibilities, and as the result you got lots of innovation, in the computer games which were released for the SNES. Okay, the SNES that's the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. It also just looked cool, it was kind of a nicely rounded it looks like was out of the Star Wars universe in somehow, in someway, it was kind of great plastic, it was a kind of rounded, it just looked nice. And when you put the cartridge in the top, it made a satisfying clunk sound, you push the cartridge in and it would go (clunk) like that, and there was a big bang in the middle to eject the cartridge and when you eject it, it would pop out like a toaster (Luke makes sound of popping out) like that, so it just the fun satisfying piece of equipment to use, and again, I bought my own Super Nintendo Entertainment System using the money that I saved from my paper round.

And I had a particular trick at Christmas time for getting tips as a paperboy and what I did was I learnt the names of all of the people on my paper round, all the customers. And so I bought lots of really cheap Christmas cards and I wrote inside each card "Dear...", you know, whatever the customer name was, "Dear Mister Smith" and then it said "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" and I wrote "from your paper boy Luke". And so what I did was on that particular paper round just before Christmas I knocked on the door of every customer on my paper round and I wished them a Happy Christmas, I gave them the card and the paper together and of course, they then felt obliged to give me some kind of cash tip and I made loads of money that day, I just made loads I remember by the end of my paper round my bag was full of coins and notes that people would give me as a tip and lot of people were happy to give me tips, because in their opinion I was a good paper boy. Maybe I should go back to do it now, maybe it's a good way to make some money for a change. And so, let's see, I spent my money wisely on a Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Now my parents didn't really agree with computer games, despite the fact that they bought a computer some years before but that was before that they really realized what computer games were all about at this point they really didn't agree with games and they decided that they didn't want to buy me a Nintendo, so it was up to me to do it myself. So I used the money that I saved on my paper round and I went down to my local, like technology shop, my local hardware shop and I bought a Super Nintendo Entertainment System which was packaged with Street Fighter 2.

Street Fighter 2 was just the best game going at the time, I've talked a little bit about Street Fighters 2 before. Essentially, Street Fighters 2 is a fighting game, a beat'em up, a beat'em up is another word for a fighting games. Basically you choose your character and then your characters fight against each other. It's pretty basic concept. There are kind of power levels at the top of the screen for each character and this is like lines and whenever you get punched

your power level goes down a bit until eventually your power level reaches 0 and you get knocked out, okay? Simple concepts, but it is a lot more complicated than that because each character had the wrong back story, they had the wrong fighting style and they had all the own special moves as well. And so the key to the game was learning the particular fighting style for each character, learning was the special moves and mastering them, you just can do the special moves in an instant and also you would learn the best techniques for fighting different characters, so for example, one of the characters was an Indian guy called, I think his name was Dhalsim, and Dhalsim was a yoga practitioner and so of course being a yoga practitioner he could stretch his arms and legs. So the thing about Dhalsim was that you could use him to fight people from a distance because his legs and arms were stretched out, so you didn't need to be close to your opponent in order to hit him, so you could be kind of far away, so he was a good defensive player, also he was able to speed fire out of his mouth naturally.

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And when he did that he would go "Yoga fire" or "Yoga flame" and that was always fun to make him go "Yoga flame" like that, just hearing him made that sound was always a good fun. So as Dhalsim you would kind of stand away from your opponent and you just go "Yoga flame", "Yoga flame", "Yoga fire", "Yoga fire", "Yoga flame", like that and that's the best way to defeat someone using Dhalsim. If you've never played the game you're probably thinking that I've lost my mind but I haven't, I really haven't. The sound of that and the way of the noises the character made and the way that they looked we are all part of the really amazing charm of this game. Other character was one like Ken and Ryu who are the principal characters in this game. And they have a kind of, a sort of karate style, let's say, but their special moves or one of their special moves was to throw fireballs, so they can of like summon up some special energy and then release it as it burning blue ball of plasma of some kind and if that hit you, you have take away a lot of energy from you. So that was one of the special move whenever they did it, they would say a command, they would say "Hurricane", no "Hadocan". "Hadocan" which is just what this character say when he would make a fireball "Hadocan", "Hadocan", like that.

And they had another move which was the dragon punch which is a kind of very dramatic, athletic punch which involve flying upwards into the air with a raise fist and if your dragon punch hit your opponent it would take a lot of their energy away. So it was a very effective move plus also the dragon punch would, could inflict multiple hits. So if you start low and you are close enough to your opponent, then the dragon punch could inflict like three or four, maybe five hits on your opponent, so it is very satisfying and dramatic when it happened and the character would go "Hurriiiuuucane" and then (sound of multiple hits) with a number of like different hits, combination of punches. Now I can't really describe it, I can't do it justice, you have to play or experience it just to see the graphics, the animation of these moves, the sound effects and just the overall experience was like very dramatic, very exciting. These characters were so well drawn, so well rendered, they were like super heroes, the way that they looked on screen, they were like big tough guys of ripping muscles. They were like Greek gods, that's probably the best analogy that I can make. If you go to Rome and you see statues of these incredible kind of Greek gods and they looked amazing, they looked super humans.

They are incredible, you know from Michael Angelo pictures from his paintings you see these images of people in the sky, this mussely incredibly inspiring characters flying through the sky. Well that's what that characters from Street Fighters 2 are like for me. "Hadocan", "Hurricane", now I would use to think that when the characters from Street fighters 2 said those things, "Hadocan", "Hurricane" I thought they were saying

- Hello Ken,
- How are you Ken?

as if Ken and Ryu was having a conversation,

- Hello ken,
- How are you Ken?
- I'm fine, Ryu. How was the wife and kids Ken?

That was what I used to think they were saying but when I read the instruction manual, no they just were speaking Japanese. Yes, so Street Fighter 2 was a great game. Now, after the Nintendos... I mean there were other games consoles like the Sega, Mega Drive, Sega Genesis and so on but I've never used to play Saga because I was dedicated to Nintendo, so I used to hate Saga, I shouldn't have done because they had some great games as well but then after that after Nintendo glory days, the next big thing, the next generation of consoles was the PlayStation, the Sony PlayStation, and that was such a massive success and one of the things that they've managed to do which the PlayStation was aim the marketing at older gamers because by this time the people who was started playing games when they were children they were grown up, they were probably in their twenties or teenage years and that, so they expected more adult type games rather than little Italian plumbers chasing after turtles.

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They wanted more adult themes, you know, and Sony PlayStation released lots of games that were for more grown up people including sort of games like Metal Gears, Solid or the Tekken fighting series and that was a huge success. Also was Sony managed to do with the PlayStation was to they made it into like a CD player basically, so not only you could play games on it, you could also play CD's and listen to your music on the PlayStation. So that was kind of a big started to become an essential, an essential piece of technology you had in your home and then later on the PlayStation 2 was able to play DVD's, so essentially what Sony started to do was to combine the gaming experience with the home entertainment experience in general. So you would have one machine that could play your games and play your DVD's, and so, you know, millions of living rooms all over the world had their TV and their PlayStation 2 underneath it and then the latest PlayStation console is the PlayStation 3, which now connects to the Internet and can play Blu-ray disc, so you can watch HD movies on it, you can even surf on the Internet, you can watch YouTube, you can watch films from Netflix on line and you can also play all your games with incredibly detail graphics, amazing quality sound.

This is too much for me to go into, to be honest, they really is. You know, now we've also got the Nintendo Wii which is strangely named because you know wee is something you do in the toilet normally, but not anymore, you can have a Wii in the living room now, thanks to Nintendo. The

Wii is very popular, a kind of brought Nintendo back. Basically the thing about the Wii is that you can, it's got motion sensors, so the control paths allow you kind of move your body and your body becomes the controller as it works. So the way you move your body or swing the control path around affects what happens on the screen, so this is a huge step, huge sort of change, huge innovation for Nintendo and again it meant that anyone could play it, because you can suddenly start doing fitness games, you could play golf in front of your TV, and you just sort of replicate the actions from the real world but holding a control path in your hands, so just swing your arms and the motion sensor in the controller knows what your body is doing and it replicates it on the screen. Wow, amazing, as a result loads of girls started playing Wii, and also parents and things, and especially with the idea that it was physically good for you doing a lot physical movements, somehow make you fit.

It also allowed people all over the world to smash their TV's and hit their brothers and sisters in the face, because you'd get some involved in swinging this controller around in front of the TV and sometimes you would slip it out of your hands and fly into the TV, and there are a lot of videos on YouTube of people destroying their television sets because they are playing tennis or something in the living room and they drop the controller and either flies into the TV or smashed through the window or even hit their little sister in the face or something like that. So, in the early days of the Wii, there were a lot of accidents until Nintendo decided that you had to wear a strap around your wrist, so you know, if you drop the controller while you are playing it's your fault, it is not Nintendo's fault, because they told you to wear the strap.

There were lots of other games as well between the PlayStation 1 and the PlayStation 3 or the Wii, but I don't have time to get into them now, I really don't. You just have to take my word for it. I imagine some of out there are the big fans of computer games. If you are, why don't you write about which games you loved? Write your comments under this podcast. If you are not a computer games fan, maybe you hate games, maybe you think they are a work of the devil himself, then please express your opinion by writing a comment below this podcast. So let's see, what about some of these questions: Do you play games or do you avoid them? Let us know what you think. Do you think games are a good use of your time or are they a total waste of time? I've never really managed to work that one out, I mean when I was in University I had a PlayStation 1 and a Nintendo 64, right?

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That was back in the late 1990 and let's see, I probably shouldn't have spent so much time playing games with my friends. I lived in a house with 9 people and a lot of the time we were in the living room playing games against each other. So we had a game called Golden Age, which is a kind of James Bond game and it basically allows you to run around in rooms, as different characters from the James Bond movies trying to kill each other and that was surprisingly good fun and we spent a lot of time murdering each other in virtual reality. Then you might think, Luke why do you waste so much time at University doing that? Why didn't you go on to other things? Why didn't you, for example, join the student's union radio and become a DJ?, Why didn't you meet more women at University for example? Why didn't you study harder and get an even

better degree?

Well, actually I managed to do my studies and I have got a fairly good degree, but I must admit that I did spend probably a bit too much time playing Golden Age with my friends. But having said that there would just some of the best times of my life, and now that sounds really sad because I have done lot of things, you know, I've travelled to different parts of the world, I had amazing experiences and things like that, but nevertheless there is something just very simple and fun and enjoyable about playing some games with your friends in your own living room. I mean, you know, travelling around the world is great and is that an amazing experience but staying at home with your friends, that's just good old-fashion fun. So, you know, maybe it's a waste of time, because ultimately playing games doesn't allow you to achieve anything, it's just fun in itself, yeah, so let me know what you think.

These days I am trying not to play games too much because if I start playing games again after a while I start feeling guilty, I can't really enjoy it anymore, because I know that I should really be using that time to do something either productive or just something very important like organizing my finances or planning, you know, planning a romantic dinner with my girlfriend or writing an email to my uncle and aunts or even just planning and preparing episodes of Luke's English Podcast or even just working out how the hell I am ever going to make some money from doing this. But all things are probably should be doing rather than playing, you know, Red Dead Redemption. Although that's just such a fun game. Red Dead Redemption is a game where you are a cowboy in the Wild West and you ride round on a horse, it is like a big Sergio Leone western, except your are actually in it, you are in the game.

So, I've got, I am in two minds about computer games, on one hand they're just great fun, really exciting and exhilarating, they can be a great way to spend time with your friends, but also I feel like, you don't achieve anything by playing them, and so you got, you know, you've got to be careful, don't play them too much, because, you know, you are just wasting time that could be spent doing things much more important or productive. Let's see, are they unhealthy, or bad for us? I wonder, I mean, it is a bit strange that some many games focus the action on sort of murder, often very violent, very gruesome murder. Not all games involve shooting people in the head of course, there are lots of very wholesome games, for example, there are farming simulators, games where you can, you know, learn how to bring up a dog successfully or games that involve taking photographs of rare animals, but there are also ahead of a lot of games that involve shooting people in the head or blowing people up and stuff like that. I mean, for example, a game like Grand Theft Auto is generally consider to be great because it gives you lots of freedom but as far I can tell, okay, that gives you some freedom, most of that freedom is in allowing you to, for example, blow up a police car while driving a motorbike of a bridge, you know. So it is not like you gives you that much freedom, you can't, if you are walking down the street, there is certain things you can do, and some things you can't do.

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So for example you can mug someone, you can shoot someone, but you can't just give a

bunch of flowers to someone for example, so the game really gives you the idea that's it's free, it is totally open, but in fact it leads you to those certain things and those things are usually pretty awful, hideous crimes that if you had committed in the real world, you could even put in prison for life or sentenced to death. So it is a bit strange that, why it is the computer games focus so much on bloody violence. Is that because essentially what we really want to do, that there is something inside us that wants us to commit violence crime. Maybe we all really would love to go out and blow things up, but obviously we can't because we know that that's just impossible, it is not allowed, but maybe, maybe is unhealthy for us, maybe it encourages us to act like that in real world, but I don't really think so, because... I don't think, there are more murder or more killing now in the world than there was before computer games arrived. I mean, I am sure that the world was a lot more savage, a lot more brutal hundreds of years ago before even, anyone ever considered the idea of computer games. Obviously in America they have lots of High School shootings and things, but I think that's more complicated than just it being the result of games, I think is related to the gun laws and also some other things.

In the rest of the world I don't think it is fair to say there are more killings consider the number of people who play games. You'd expect, if it was true that games cause people to copy the violence in the real world, then we were surely see way way more of that kind of violence that we do, because according to the statistic, millions of people all over the world play games like Grand Theft Auto which involve shooting policeman. And yet, the number of police shootings, I don't think is significantly increased since the release of that game. So, I don't think is as simple as that. Nevertheless I think there is something strange about the fact that so many games involve that kind of violence, but maybe it's cathartic, by cathartic I mean allow you to sort of release tension or release aggression that you can't release in the real world by kind of doing it in virtual reality. But there is something, again, there is something weird about the fact that games are becoming more and more advanced, so the graphics are becoming more and more high definition, so the kind of violence is much more realistic and also artificial intelligence is developing all the time. So we can moving towards... it seems we moving towards a place where computer games will as realistically as it's possible, replicate the experience of killing someone. So at what point will that become just genuinely immoral. When is it? When will artificial intelligence become so advance, and the graphics are so advance that killing someone in the game is really similar to killing someone in the real world. And that kind of open also some questions that we have already been dealt with in films like Blade Runner which question the idea of whether... when artificial intelligence reaches a certain point whether there is any real difference between an artificial person and a real person, when essentially they act and feel the same. When this artificial intelligence becomes real? Do you know what I mean, I am not explaining it very well, but in Blade Runner, that's basically what Blade Runner is all about, if you've never seen that film. Are games antisocial or do they connect people? Well, the kind of typical stereotype image of computer games player is that they're sitting in a darker room on their own without any friend, with no sunlight. But in fact, most of the time games are played with other people either when you have your friends with you in the same room or when you are playing with people online.

So, it is not really antisocial, it's just a different kind of socialising, online. I guess it is a bit weird online because often what happens is people just abuse each other over the Internet, because it's that sense of anonymity, but also it allows people to develop genuine kind of teamwork. Often the games that people play online together involve working in a team.

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And so, you know, it allows people to develop very refined sense of teamwork skills, and together when you play with your friends it is one of the most fun ways of socialise, it's not really that much difference to play a board game, you know a board game like draughts or Monopoly or something like that. It is not really that difference. Also many people say that games allow people to develop kind of quick reflexes and basic motor skills and decision making skills. They are not exactly... I don't know, are they analytical decisions making skills? For example, do they involve making really strategic decisions? Perhaps in some cases they do, depends on what kind of game you are playing, but many games allow you to develop your own kind of strategy, and allow you to analyse the situation before making decisions, other games are all just about your reflexes so immediate kind of motor skills, so games are not mindless, not by any means.

Yes, so, can games be the future of entertainment? That's another question. Well, people have been talking about games becoming like interactive movies for a long time but I don't think that they are yet, for a number of reasons, one of those is that in games it seems that the acting and story lines are always like really poor. They are on a similar level to those basic kind of Hollywood B movie. So I've never played a game that's made me cry. I've never... it's very rare games create an emotional feeling inside me. Normally some of a visceral feeling like excitement or fear maybe. Some games are frightening like horror films but I've very rarely experienced genuine emotion, sadness. I've never cried playing a game, except maybe when I played the Legend of Zelda, for some reason that was a very emotional experience, but maybe because it was just so long. Maybe I felt emotional at the end just because I've been up all night, I hadn't slept, or I'd just felt emotional because I suddenly realised just how much in my life I had wasted playing the game. So, I don't think games really allow you, they don't really elicit emotions the same way that watching actors and watching the subtle ways in which actors faces can convey feelings.

I mean movies really can be like fine art, but I haven't yet reached, I haven't yet experience a game just like fine art. Sure, some of them are aesthetic, they're beautiful, some games and but they rarely make me feel emotional. And usually the acting in games is appalling, you get these cut-scenes in which the story line moves on and they are just like awful acting. As I've said the story lines are predictable and dull, full of cliches. So, sorry, computer games have a long way to go before they can reach the same kind of level of emotional complexity that you get from a film.

So, keep going on games, keep going, I want it to keep innovating because who knows eventually we might find one game that is genuine work of art. But as they are now, at best, they are like exploitative Hollywood B movies, horror movies, westerns, that kind of thing. I haven't found one that is really moving, yet. But maybe I'm wrong, because I haven't played all

the games by any means so if you have played a game that genuinely moved you or that you found emotional then, again let me know, write your comment under this episode of the podcast. I am very interested to hear from you.

I think that's pretty much in for this episode, and, you know, I sincerely hope that if you are not a fan of games I hope that you haven't found this to be too dull and boring, but you know, maybe if you are not a fan of games you might have learnt one thing or two, just from listening to me telling you my own personal story of my game playing experiences, who knows? Leave your comments below the podcast. Thanks again for listening to this episode of Luke English Podcast, visit the web page, either one teacherluke.podomatic.com or teacherluke.wordpress.com, visit one of those because you should find some notes I hopefully I am going to write some bits of vocabulary and some other things that you can use possibly to pick up some of the language that I used in this episode. If you have any questions, for example, if you heard me say certain things, just post those questions in the comment section and I'll be able to get back to you there.

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Don't forget, if you like you can give me a donation, just click the button that says "donate" on the website. I would appreciate it very much, your donations keep this podcast alive and allow me to keep doing it. So, I'd appreciate, even the smallest donation you could choose how much to give, from 1 dollar to 1 billion dollars. It's up to you, I am sure that you won't give me 1 billion dollars, but who knows, maybe there is some kind of multimillionaire, kind of criminal gangster, who for some reason decide the best way to invest his money would be to give it to me. Highly unlikely, but you never know. If I did get a million dollars I think I would make my own computer game, it would be called Luke's English Game. And it would involve kind of going to a language school and, you know, you have choices, you can either learn English or you can kind of, I don't know, blow the school up. I don't recommend blowing the school up by the way, only in the form of a computer game, because if it is in a computer game that's all right, you can do what the hell you want, in the real world though, please, you know, comply with all of the laws and regulations which prevent horrendous things like school being blown up. Obviously you should just have your own sense of morality which tells you not to do those things, not just the laws or the land, but your own sort of inherent sense of ethics. Right, that's the end of the episode, thanks very much again for listening and have a fantastic day or a fantastic night or wherever time is. Whatever time it is. Thanks a lot. Bye, bye...

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