

GAME OVER

A DOCUMENTARY MISSION



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GAME OVER

SOUND: *Video game sound*

BROOKES: Wow. It feels like I'm in some kind of virtual world. Well, of course I am... I mean I'm here talking to you, but I'm not really with you, right? I'm on the radio, with a bunch of cheesy sound effects. In fact here comes one now, a virtual helicopter, virtually overhead! Duck!

SOUND: *helicopter passes*

BROOKES: Just kidding. But this is weird. It's like the start of a video game or something. What am I doing here?

COMPUTER: You are on a mission.

BROOKES: I am?

COMPUTER: That response is incorrect.

BROOKES: Oh. Okay, I'm, um... on a mission, um... What is it?

COMPUTER: You are to find out if videogames can be used for educational purposes.

BROOKES: Wow. A task to be accomplished! With several levels of difficulty, I bet. How will I do that?

COMPUTER: You are armed with the following butt-kicking weapons: Curiosity, Research, a limited Attention Span, and a small-to-middling Intelligence.

BROOKES: Gee. I sound like the lion in "The Wizard of Oz!" ...or was it...the Tin Man?

COMPUTER: It was the Scarecrow.

BROOKES: Oh. Yes of course. Um... is that all?

COMPUTER: No. You are also provided with an automatic pistol, an assault shotgun, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, a three-barrelled "ripper" machine gun, some laser mines and a selection of pipe bombs.

BROOKES: That'll be very helpful, thanks. Anything else?

COMPUTER: You get extra points for stealing cars, running over pedestrians, shooting cops, and beating up women and old people with a baseball bat.

BROOKES: Uh... this is public radio. I don't know if I can do that.

COMPUTER: Why not ? You can do it on your home computer, on a Playstation Two, the Nintendo Game-Cube and the Microsoft X-Box. Anybody can.

BROOKES: But...how do I...?

COMPUTER: Just shoot anything that moves.

SOUND: *Videogame and interview voices:*
"You are about to embark on a great crusade. The eyes of the world are upon you"
"If you're going to make an educational documentary, it's got to be a good documentary. Not just educational."
"The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you."
"You must not feel fear. The fate of the world in your hands."

SOUND: *Thunder & lightning crash*

BROOKES: Wow.

SOUND: *effects from "Duke Nukem" videogame*

DUKE NUKEM: What are you waiting for? Christmas?

BROOKES: But how do I start?

COMPUTER: Attention span dangerously low.

DUKE NUKEM: Come on.

SOUND: *beeping*

COMPUTER: Attention span dropping.

BROOKES: Okay, okay.

COMPUTER: Attention span timing out.

SOUND: *faster beeping*

BROOKES: No! Wait! I... look! There's an alien coming to get me!

SOUND: *videogame alien sound*

DUKE NUKEM: Ha ha. Payback time

SOUND: *shooting, screams.*

DUKE NUKEM: Hahahaaa. Wasted.

COMPUTER: Attention span restored.

BROOKES: Well, okay. But it seems like a pretty cheap way to do it.

SOUND: *beeping*

COMPUTER: Attention span dropping.

BROOKES: Again? Oh... okay! Forget it! I'm just going to shoot my way into Chapter One. Here I go!

SOUND: *shooting, screaming*

BROOKES: *(panting)* Wow! Made it!

SOUND: *cavernous effects*

BROOKES: Hey! What's this place?

COMPUTER: Level One. The Videogame Museum.

BROOKES: Ohhh! This is like videogame paleontology! Hey, look over here, here's the very first video game!

SOUND: *Pong sounds*

BROOKES: Wow, this looks positively prehistoric! I'll just brush the dust off the label here.... something called "pong." Dates back to... 1975! Wow, I mean that's eons ago! Why, that's back when you were listening to:

MUSIC: *"...Look at me, I'm the Disco Duck..."*

BROOKES: Scary! And you were probably listening to it on something called a "record player." Imagine, a world without mp3! Anyway, how would you even begin to describe this ancient game?

COMPUTER: Pong. Description: a digital ping pong ball bounces off walls in slow motion.

BROOKES: Oh. Thank you.

COMPUTER: You're welcome.

BROOKES: And you know, you played this game in bars and cocktail lounges. Why? Because back then there was no such thing as a home computer! Haha! Believe it or not! Well, if "Pong" is the kind of game you remember, you're going to have to do a little bit more work to understand a modern videogame like, say, Everquest.

EVERQUEST PLAYER: Now see how that guy is offering a Res? That's a resurrection. If you die, you go back to your bind spot. Told you about that, did I? Once you die, you either have to go back to the zone where your corpse was, and find it, or you can get a cleric to cast resurrection on it which brings you back there. And once you die, you lose a certain amount of experience. But with these certain types of resurrections, the higher power they are, the more experience you would get back.

BROOKES: This is like a university course or something. How long did it take you to learn all this stuff.

PLAYER: Oh man, this took me a month, to actually learn all the basics.

BROOKES: Only a month?

PLAYER: I'm a quick learner at this. *(he continues playing game)* At certain levels, you get spells...

BROOKES: I hope you were taking notes.

PLAYER: ...I get Level One spells. As a "Pure-caster", for every four l;levels afterwards...

BROOKES: Okay. Okay, I get the point.

PLAYER: ...up to like, level 22 or something...

BROOKES: ...I get the point. It's complicated!

PLAYER: ...but every four levels I get the...

BROOKES: Okay! That's enough! Stop!

PLAYER: ...but I got to get money for spells...

BROOKES: ...Somebody stop him!

DUKE NUKEM: Hahaaaa. Payback time!

SOUND: *machinegun, scream*

DUKE NUKEM: Damn, I'm good!

BROOKES: You know, I don't know if we should be shooting people like this.

DUKE NUKEM: Yeah! Piece of cake!

BROOKES: Well, I was just trying to make the point that videogames have come a long way since Pong.

VOICE: Really since the mid-1980's the industry hasn't looked really back. In 2002 in North America alone the industry did about seven billion dollars in revenue.

BROOKES: Uh... just a second. Excuse me. Uh... help?

SOUND: *bleep*

COMPUTER: This is the help menu. Need help?

BROOKES: Yes. Who's this guy?

COMPUTER: Douglas Lowenstein, president of the Digital Interactive Software Association, the organisation representing videogame manufacturers.

BROOKES: Thank you. Go ahead, Mr. Lowenstein.

LOWENSTEIN: Uh... well I think if you look at the people playing games today, we have a generation between 18 and 35 years old who grew up with computers. really the first generation to grow up with that technology as a central part of their lives. And then the generation right behind them, 13-18, is the first generation to grow up with the internet. So for both of these generations, increasingly interactivity is something that they're very comfortable with.

BROOKES: And "interactivity" -- is that the quality that makes videogames so compelling?

LOWENSTEIN: Well, I think there are a number of reasons the games are engrossing. If you look at them today, they're graphically very realistic. Secondly, they're very immersive. They really take you into places that in your own daily life you're not likely to go. Whether it's on a sort of mythological quest or being in a racecar, it allows you to experience things in a very, very real way. In a very meaningful way that nothing else does.

BROOKES: "Allowing you to experience things in a very real way." Hey, this is good news for our mission. Or bad news, depending on your perspective. But "news" it is.

SOUND: *Newscaster: Good morning. In the news of this hour, a controversial videogame arrives today in stores across North America. It's the sequel to one of the most [popular and violent games of the past year. Grand Theft Auto II is a game where you can steal cars, beat up women, and wreak havoc...*

BROOKES: Now, about this mission we're on.

COMPUTER: You are to find out if videogames can be used for educational purposes.

BROOKES: Right. And the interesting thing is: the reason videogames hit the headlines is because of their potential for education. Some people argue that games like Grand Theft Auto teach. They say they teach violence.

VOICE: Exposure to violent videogames causes an increase in aggressive behavior. there's no doubt about it.

BROOKES: Help, again?

SOUND: *bleep*

COMPUTER: This is the help menu.

BROOKES: This voice belongs to...?

COMPUTER: Craig Anderson, chair of the department of psychology at Iowa State University. He testified at the Senate Committee Hearing on the Impact of Interactive Violence on Children.

ANDERSON: In playing a violent videogame, you have to choose to behave aggressively.

SOUND: *video karate game*

ANDERSON: In other words, as a player you get practice making the decisions to pull the trigger or to throw the punch, or to launch the grenade. And that act of participation itself may in some sense be a more complete learning tool than simply watching characters behave aggressively on a television show or in a movie.

SOUND: *video karate chops and grunting*

ANDERSON: In a lot of the games, some of the first-person "shooter" games there's a narrator that will; say things like "impressive!" or "Very good!" when you blow someone up with a good rifle shot. You get, in one game, if you run over pedestrians in a particularly flashy way, you get extra bonus points, or "splatter points." And so if the content that's in the videogame teaches how to think aggressively and how to decide to behave aggressively, and then how to actually carry out the act, then that's what going to get learned.

SOUND: *first-person "shooter" videogame. Shooting, cries.*

NEWSCAST: *Schools in the Denver area reopened today, but Columbine Highschool remains closed. Fourteen students and a teacher died at the school Tuesday when two of the students fired more than...
...Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were dedicated computer game players. The Littleton massacre has raised new concerns about the effect of violent video and computer games on children.*

SOUND: *Gun cocks, fires, man screams.
Videogame hitcount counts to five.*

COMPUTER: Targets eliminated: seven. Bonus points: five.

SOUND: *Videogame hitcount counts three.*

DUKE NUKEM: Piece of cake!

BROOKES: So it's that simple! Playing **Duke Nukem** and **Doom** caused the Columbine shooting. Ergo: videogames have an educational effect, and my mission is accomplished!

COMPUTER: That response is incorrect.

BROOKES: You mean, it's not that simple?

COMPUTER: Douglas Lowenstein.

LOWENSTEIN: I mean, that is such a simplistic understanding of human nature., Because there's a big difference between people understanding a moral environment in which they live... you play a videogame, "Oh, gee, I guess it's okay to get my Dad's gun and go down the street and shoot all my friends." Well, people understand that's wrong! They live in a culture and a society and a value system that makes it absolutely clear how that is, and people kind of make believe none of that exists. And so to say that "Gee, if you play a videogame it teaches you how to kill people." I mean, that just defies common sense when you think about it.

BROOKES: That's what makes this not so simple. Learning doesn't take place in a vacuum. And videogames, just like homework, exist within a wider environment that colours their effectiveness as teaching tools. This means that using videogames for education may be harder than I thought. Craig Anderson.

ANDERSON: The content doesn't automatically make it either a good or a bad teaching tool. so the same kinds of process that we worry about in terms of violent games should in fact make videogames a very effective way of teaching certain kinds of content. Unfortunately there isn't a whole lot of research on the educational aspects. So it would be a good starting point to say "Yeah, we know it has these effects. Now lets see if we can design some games that have a positive effect, that teach people how to cooperate, or how to do math problems, or how to read."

BROOKES: You know, this mission is turning out to be more complicated than I figured. Now I've got to track down games designed to have a positive educational effect. I guess this probably means...

COMPUTER: Congratulations. You've completed Level one.

BROOKES: Thank you. I just figured that out for myself.

COMPUTER: Would you like to move on to Level Two?

BROOKES: Beam me up, Scotty!

COMPUTER: Level Two.

MUSIC *Intro from the videogame **Civilisation**.*

JENKINS: I'm Henry Jenkins, I'm the director of the Comparative Media Studies program at MIT. I don't believe that games will turn kids into scientists, artists, or historians any more than I think games will turn kids into psycho killers. What I believe is that games give people an experience, and that what happens with that experience is shaped profoundly by their larger surroundings. But I mean it's abundantly clear that kids will stay up all night to solve a problem in a game, and will spend about ten minutes scrawling on a piece of notebook paper to solve a problem they see in a textbook. The problem is when people use the term "educational games" what they have in their mind is something that's dull as dishwater, and no, it's not going to sell.

SOUND: *Math Blaster videogame music.*

"Welcome to Math Blaster. To win, zap the answer to the math problems. And they're off!"

(Videogame cartoon chase music)

"Seven minus Two equals? Five!"

(buzz sound)

"Two minus Two equals..."

LOWENSTEIN: A lot of the early educational videogames were very drill-oriented.

BROOKES: Doug Lowenstein.

LOWENSTEIN: They took their multiplication tables from the piece of paper that you had to write with, and the put them into an electronic environment. And maybe they had some characters there that made it a little bit more fun to do it, and you got some rewards. But ultimately, I think they weren't very terribly engaging.

SOUND: *"Six plus One equals? Seven!"*

LOWENSTEIN: I mean, one of the things that I've said over the years when people ask, "Well gee, the commercial educational games market is really soft." Well, it is. It's really, you know, not been a very successful marketplace. And the reason is that, you know, when was the last time that your average ten-year-old asked Mom or Dad to get them "Math Blaster"?

SOUND: *(Math Blaster voice) "Well short my circuits. You've placed second! That's worthy of a trading card!"*

DUKE NUKEM: You suck!

SOUND: *Machine gun fire, a scream.*

BROOKES: Now just a minute! I thought we left you in Level One!

NUKEM: Come on.

BROOKES: No! We're not talking about shooter games now. We're talking about games that build, okay? Like this:

SOUND: *Music from videogame **Civilisation***

CHILD: You get to decide. Will your world size be tiny, or huge? You can have pangeas, continents....

BROOKES: You're looking over the shoulder of Will Powelson. The game he's playing is called "Civilisation."

CHILD: ...that determines the number of mountains...

BROOKES: This game challenges you to build up a civilisation over a period of 6000 years.

CHILD: Clearing this forest will increase production...

BROOKES: "Civilisation" is a commercial game. It was designed to be used the way Will is using it here, not in a school classroom. But it's more like the kind of educational game that MIT's Henry Jenkins talks about.

JENKINS: Something like *Civilisation 3* or *Sim City*, these are the some of the most successful franchises in game history. They also happen to have embedded in them things that the designer wanted to teach: models of how historical change built on the availability of resources. These were powerful lessons that were taught through commercial games. The paradox is that every time we get an educational game that sells extremely well, people stop thinking of it as an educational game.

SOUND: *Blurp*

COMPUTER: Bonus point opportunity.

SOUND: *bell*

BROOKES: Oh! Great. I'll take advantage of this opportunity to find out the secret of this game's success from the guy who designed it: Sid Meyer, of Fireaxis Software.

MEYER: Well, I think it's a matter of priorities. When we do a game, our first priority is: fun. We've found, especially with our game *Civilisation* that people enjoy the learning process. And we really make a distinction between "learning" and "education." It's kind of funny for us. People enjoy learning but they don't necessarily enjoy being educated. The distinction we make is that learning is something that happens at your own pace, following your own interests; education is probably more of a curriculum format-driven process. A game essentially has to be fun, and if learning can be part of the fun process than that's a great feature, but we don't sacrifice any of the fun elements of the game to make it an educational process.

SOUND: *Blurp*

COMPUTER: Bonus points: One.

SOUND: *bell*

BROOKES: The only problem is, you may or may not get educational bonus points when you play a commercial game outside of a structured learning environment. It really depends on what you bring to it. For example, remember Will Powelson, the 13-year-old playing *Civilisation*? Well, here's another of his favorite games: *Final Fantasy*. It's not even designed to be an educational game but in his case...

WILL: This game is really what taught me to read. I got a PlayStation and I got this game. Only problem was I couldn't read, and there was too much text. I eventually learned to read because I hated having to always have my Dad read everything. Since then my ability to read has gone way up. I can just skip through all this, and... I can just read it. I can read a book like the 4th Harry Potter, about 400 pages, in a day or two.

BROOKES: In Will's case, *Final Fantasy* motivated him to read, but it didn't happen in a complete vacuum -- his Dad was involved, for instance. For someone else, in a different home environment, it might be another story altogether. Henry Jenkins.

JENKINS: Games by themselves are simply an experience that kids will make sense of in a variety of ways, and in all likelihood that experience by themselves will be treated like any other fantasy. That is, something largely removed from the realm of their normal activity. So what we know when we think about games for education is that the game by itself may teach relatively little without the reinforcement of curricular activity in the classroom. The challenge is not simply to design games to teach, but to design curriculum that allows teachers to use those games effectively in a learning context.

SOUND: *Classroom sounds.*

BROOKES: This is the Grade Five health-education class at the Smalley School in Boundbrook, New Jersey. The students are hunkered around computer monitors, playing an educational game called *Hungry Red Planet*. A videogame within the larger learning context of a school curriculum.

STUDENTS: ...click on a hard-boiled egg, it'll tell you how much fat, calories and sodium it has...

BROOKES: This game is designed to teach basic nutrition, a lesson that class teacher Greg Mott taught last year by standing in front of the class and lecturing.

MOTT: When I approached my students in November, saying we're going to be piloting this program, and it's a game, a videogame, they just went "ah!" They got all excited. "Oh, we're going to do a game?" I said "yes, but you're also going to learn, you're going to have basically learn all the way through to get through this game." And now they all come back: "I can't wait to go back, I'm learning so much about it." I had a couple of parents actually come to me and say "My child's telling me I have to change my diet because I'm not eating the right foods" and obviously it's working. So I'm very happy with it. It's better than last year.

STUDENTS: ...and the more you play it the more healthy you learn how to eat...

BROOKES: Now, this mission that we're on...

COMPUTER: To Find Out if Videogames Can be Used for Educational Purposes.

BROOKES: Yes, in terms of that, this classroom looks pretty interesting. But I wonder if there isn't still a real gulf between a game like *Hungry Red Planet* where you plan dinner menus in the classroom, like this:

SOUND: *(Videogame music and voice)*
"Here is the menu-planning screen. You can serve pizza and candy, or tofu and broccoli. It's all up to you..."

BROOKES: And a top-selling commercial game like *Grand Theft Auto*, where you shoot cops and hijack cars like this:

SOUND: *(Videogame voice) "I am an officer of the law. Stop!"
(sound of punching, sirens, traffic)*

BROOKES: Part of the difference between these games is money. The development budget for a game like *Grand Theft Auto* runs to several million dollars. And that's nowhere near the money going into games for the education market. But I wonder if money is only part of the story. Because over at MIT Henry Jenkins and his colleagues are looking at other qualities that give some commercial games the edge.

JENKINS: For one thing, most educational games on the market today are utterly humourless, and that's part of the reason they totally fail with kids. The games that kids like have a sense of excitement. They tap deeply into the pulp roots of American popular culture, and any educational intervention needs to do that. There needs to be, not out-and-out violence and brutality that people are frightened of about games, but certainly a sense of mild transgression.

BROOKES: Transgression. That would be when you kind of cross into forbidden territory by doing things in the virtual reality of a game that would be unacceptable out in the real world. For example, saying things like...

DUKE NUKEM: Damn, you're ugly!

BROOKES: Right. Or...

DUKE NUKEM: What are you, some kind of bottom-feeding, scum-sucking, algae-eater?

JENKINS: No! I'm Henry Jenkins!

DUKE NUKEM: You're going to die for that!

BROOKES: Stop that! Wait!

SOUND: *gunshots*

BROOKES: Now wait just a minute! I won't have you shooting my interviewees!

DUKE NUKEM: Come on.

BROOKES: Henry Jenkins is a highly respected academic!

COMPUTER: That response was invalid.

BROOKES: I'll show you invalid! I'm unplugging your weapons right now!

SOUND: *trashing metal*

COMPUTER: Look, Chris. I've still got the greatest confidence in the mission.

BROOKES: This is my documentary, not yours!

COMPUTER: Chris. Stop. Stop. Will you?

BROOKES: Too late! There goes your assault shotgun!

SOUND: *trashing metal*

BROOKES: There goes your rocket-propelled grenade launcher!

COMPUTER: Stop. Chris.

SOUND: *trashing metal*

BROOKES: There goes your 3-barrel ripper machine gun, too! What do you think of that?

COMPUTER: I think I'll sing a little song.

BROOKES: Fine, you go right ahead and do that. While I take out every last one of your pipe bombs.

COMPUTER: It's called "Daisy."

SOUND: *trashing metal*

COMPUTER: Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true... *(voice slows down and goes away)*

BROOKES: There. That's done. I'm terribly sorry Dr. Jenkins. Dr. Jenkins? Are you okay?

JENKINS: I think so.

BROOKES: Oh good. I'm really sorry, I'm just having a little trouble here in the virtual documentary world. Can I ask you to pick up where you left off?

JENKINS: Yeah, it would be wonderful.

BROOKES: You were talking about the "transgressive" quality and how it works in some of the commercial videogames.

JENKINS: Okay. The problem is that we've allowed that sense of transgression to be co-opted mindlessly toward criminal elements, toward fantasies of just blowing people away, when in fact what kids want to play with is a sense of power, a sense that their actions in the world matter and have consequences. A sense that they have a certain autonomy from the people who control and regulate their lives. And there are ways of channeling those fantasies that make games a very effective technology for teaching. You know, on the one hand, if it feels too much like green vegetables -- if it feels like something that's purely good for you -- then kids are not going to engage with it with the same level of passion as they engage with the games that they stay up all night playing. If on the other hand it is too transgressive, if it looks too popular, then educators are going to have stronger challenges from parents and from school boards about using those games in the classroom. So you've got to find that middle ground, and that's going to take some effort.

SOUND: *(videogame voice) "Welcome. You've entered the world of electromagnetism..."*

BROOKES: This may be that middle ground. One of half a dozen games being developed by Dr Jenkins' *Games to Teach* project at MIT, it's designed to teach electromagnetism. Not by sugar-coating a lesson with videogame effects, but by building principles of electromagnetism into the very way you play the game.

SOUND: *(videogame voice) "Look ahead! That looks like a charged particle..."*

BROOKES: The aim of the MIT project is to invent games like this and then partner with commercial game manufacturers to develop them. And as they design these educational games of the future, Henry Jenkins and his colleagues may be finding clues to the nature of the learning process itself.

JENKINS: Some of it is as simple as: there is an emotional stake in the game problem. It's something we care about. It's something that feels real to us. We're really there, we're really doing something, there's some risk that we're facing. There's some challenge that we're trying to overcome. There's some reason we're doing what we're doing. I think what's interesting about what we've discovered about building games to teach, is that the very first step is to ask "what is this information is good for? What does it allow you to do?" Because in order to turn a problem into a game you have to give a purpose, a motive, a set of challenges that the player wants to accomplish in that game space. And that forces us to think about why we're learning what we're doing. And that may be the most fundamental lesson to come out of games in education.

COMPUTER: *(slowing down)* ...But you'll look sweet..... upon the seat... of a bicycle... built...
for....twoooooooooo.

SOUND: *Beeping stops.*

BROOKES: Uh oh. Now what?

MISSION CONTROL COMPUTER: Chris. Brookes.

BROOKES: Hello? Yes?

MISSION CONTROL COMPUTER: This message was programmed into the onboard computer before the
start of your mission to be played back at this time.

BROOKES: Wow!

MISSION CONTROL COMPUTER: The time allotted for the mission has now expired. You must make a
choice. Press the "escape" key to exit gracefully, or press "restart" to begin again.

BROOKES: Thanks, I think I'll quit while I'm ahead.

MISSION CONTROL COMPUTER: Congratulations. This documentary is now ended.

SOUND: *Blurp.*
 Fizzle.