

Root Games Week 1

The roots of games!

- **Key Game:** Knucklebones: ca. 5000BCE, Unknown Developer, Dice Game, Unknown Region
 - Like Jacks, throwing dice into the air and trying to gather the dice on the ground.
 - Made out of knuckle-bones, different sides were an early random generator.
 - Very very old. As dice, they are some of the earliest game implements.
 - ca 5000BCE are just the earliest FOUND, and we don't quite know where they came from.
 - Gets us to start thinking about the long history of games.
 - § Helps us trace the histories and form a narrative of games.
 - § Unlike music and dance, games and play are not ONLY human (though same with dance and music?)
 - § We can play with other animals and they understand.
 - § Doesn't seem that amazing. Animals are smart as fuck.
- 1.8 Million years ago- Homo ergaster
 - Use tools
 - 300,000 years ago, evidence of burial rites.
 - We can see evidence of a culture in this, the dead have rights.
- 200,000 years ago Homo sapiens
 - Us!
- 150,000 years- clothing, jewelry, speech
 - Material culture starts developing
- All of human culture happens after this!
 - Before all this is games! Animals pre-date us and they play games!
 - Games exist before humans!
 - The joy of moving
- **Knucklebones** is interesting as a family of games, and also something very old and very primal and we've always figured out a way to play something.
- **Key Game: The Royal Game of Ur**
 - Ca 3000BCE, Unknown Developer, Board Game, from Mesopotamia (Iraq).
 - Also known as (AKA), the Game of 20 Squares.
 - Guesses on how it was played
 - § Race Game
- Two players probably starting on opposite sides, and race to their squares on the opposite end.
 - You had to have a level of civilization and comfort to play the game
 - § A storage place, a place to teach it

- The idea of mapping space on a board is an innovation of Ur.
 - § The idea that one space can occupy a space at a time.
 - § How space should be represented is Ur
- Played by commoners and elites
 - § As shown by gameboards scratched into the floor
 - § First evidence of modding in a game
- In addition to this being a popular game with a design language
 - § It uses dice
- How do Dice Work?
- Ur uses triangular dice, where two points of the pyramid are covered white, and two were black.
- So whatever colored tip was up decided something.
- Dice pyramid
 - The results of the dice go from uncommon to less common, to common and back down.
- Allows for the player to make a prediction based on likelihood of dice rolls.
- They are random, but they have probabilities and can make an informed guess.
 - Ur is here to remind us that the relationship an ancient person had to this game would be very different from ours. They are games, but also tools of divination, a way to see if the gods are favoring you.
 - § The relationship between dice, luck, and fate.
 - § There is no relationship between the religious and secular
- The God Marduk favored you or not.
 - A very simple game can have A LOT going on with it.
- **Key Game: Senet**
 - Ca3000BCE, Developer Unknown, Board Game, Ancient Egypt
 - § Race game, but a single track moving back and forth, unlike UR.
 - § Is both the board and the way to transport it.
 - § Very popular, people playing for pleasure, drinking
 - § Found on the tomb of an emperor, buried with set
 - Why?
 - § There's an interesting theme and mechanic to the game.
 - § Suggested heavily that it started as meaningless and then gradually accrued a theme and be *about* the journey of the soul to the afterlife.
- It was talked about and valued as a teaching tool for what life would be like and how to be a good person.
- You could sit there and play and have fun and also ponder on your place in the universe.
- **An idea of what the game was *about* grew out of the mechanics.**
- Mechanics or Game Mechanics

- **Units of gameplay**, re-combinable game actions that are often shared between different games (e.g. roll dice, move piece, capture opponent)

- **System**

- The overall game described as a collection of mechanics and the rules.

- **Theme**

- The fictional or representational aspects of the game.

- **Key Game: Backgammon**

- CA3000BCE, developer unknown, Board Game, Ancient Persian (modern Iran).

- Remained a popular game since forever.

- Super common in the middle east

- It's interesting when players have to use the same track to move.

- § Similar mechanic to Ur

- Interesting use of dice

- § Your dice can be spread out across pieces. You can use them on one piece, or split them between two pieces.

- Things younger than Backgammon:

- § The U.S.

- § The French people, language, and country

- § Philosophy

- § Unification of China

- § Older than use of Iron

- § Older than the Pyramids and the domestication of the camel.

- Why?

- § It is an immortal game that burst onto the scene and has been played ever since.

- § We'll be playing something that connects us to the past in a very visceral kind of way.

- § Has transformed today in terms of using computers to determine probabilities.

- § There's a doubling cube, added in gambling games

- We can double the amount of money, or you can pay me now.

- You can continue to double the amount of the bets

- Invented in the 1920's by an American in the East Village

- **Key Game: Mancala**

- Ca 600CE, board game, eastern Africa

- Family of games

- § I played Oware and Ayo,

- § In Kenya and Zanzibar, the most popular version is **Bao**

- Considered more in the family of backgammon and chess

- Spend your life mastering

- Mechanic is called "sowing"

- Emerged in East Africa but has boomed internationally

- Why?

- § A family of deep games.

- § The concept of “depth”

- It is a game that will support long term play and serious study.
 - Study in terms of multiple lives.
 - There is a quality in games that allows them to survive for hundreds of years.
 - When a game has that longevity, when you can ALWAYS get better, that gives the game depth.

- § Mancala has:

- No randomness
 - No hidden information
 - Not many choices per move

- § A game tree

- A game has a limited number of states, and the game tree shows that.
 - Tic Tac Toe has a limited game tree.
 - There are more states in “Chess” and “Go” than pebbles of sand on the beach.
 - Mancala has a huge fucking tree.

- Mathematicians love Mancala trying to figure out the complexity

- § There are moves in Mancala that would take 800 years to finish.

- **Key Game: Go**

- Ca 2000BCE, dev unknown, ancient china

- Played on a LARGE grid.

- § There are a lot of moves you can make

- Based on controlling territories.

- § Cutting off the players connecting lines

- Groups of pieces share liberties of other pieces in its network

- When pieces are surrounded, the pieces are taken off the board

- Any formation with two internal liberties cannot be captured

- § Strategy!

- Created by fisherman and draw the board in their hands (legend1)

- Created by Chinese emperor Yao who asked for a game to be a good influence on his son (legend2).

- Considered one of the 4 cultivated arts of the young gentleman.

- Spread to Korea from China

- Came to Japan and made its way into imperial cultures

- Why?

- § Go is what we think of as an *Elegant Game*

- **Means it has depth and simplicity**

- Simple rules lead to complex situations
- Elegance is an aesthetic value
- Linked to the idea of emergence.
 - You have a combination of rules and large complex things can happen.
- **Key Game: Checkers/Draughts**
 - France, 1500CE Board Game
 - Comes from Alquerque (aka Quirkat)
 - § 5x5 board
 - § 8x8 board introduced in 1100CE
 - International Draughts
 - § Played on 10x10 board
 - Why?
 - § Checkers is solved.
 - § English Draughts (8x8) is considered solved.
 - § When you can correctly predict the outcome of the game from any position.
 - § The makers of the program Chinook.
- **Key Game: Chess**
 - India, 600BCE
 - Four divisions of the army
 - From Persia
 - In India pieces are very iconic
 - Once it moves to middle east, the tension around icons makes the chess pieces abstract.
 - Middle East has had the largest effect on western conception of chess.
 - Chess is a bastardization of the word Shah (for King)
 - Why Chess?
 - § Chess has “stuff”
 - It isn’t very abstract
 - Enters lots of societies
 - Has “classes”
 - Each piece does something and has powers
 - That’s innovative
 - Chess makes you think like a game designer
 - Since each piece had a class, the things they do could change
 - Queen was an innovative move
 - Originally moved diagonally, one way
 - Someone came up with the idea that the queen could do whatever it wants.
- Chess has a lot of derivations and lots of things that has roots in it
- Any game with an RPG element can trace its history back to chess.
- **Key Game: Snakes and Ladders**

- 1500CE, India
- And Indian game
- Traced earlier to second century BC
- The game is considered a teaching tool for indo-religious instructions
- Connection to ethics virtues and rights
- A game about contrasting the higher and lower forms of love
 - § Squares of virtue and vice
- Introduced and taken by the Victorians
- Original was for both children and adults
- Victorians decided to make it a children's game
- Milton Bradley picked it up and changed it to Chutes and Ladders
- Why?
 - § It has a long history of moral instruction
 - § A game about living a good/bad life is a game where you're making no choices, you're at the whim of the wheel.
 - § Fascinating tension and meditation on the nature of choice and meaningful choice.
 - § The essence of the player is the ability to assume a role, they get caught in illusion, and the dice decide their moves.