

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #567
Ross Ulbricht & The Silk Road | Drugs, Bitcoin &
Digital Outlaws
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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is the start of another three-part mini-series, this time on the theme of “Young American [Outlaws](#)¹”.

[00:00:31] In this series, we'll explore the lives of young Americans whose crimes—or perhaps simply actions—have become deeply [politicised](#)².

[00:00:41] First up, in today's episode, we'll talk about Ross Ulbricht, the founder of the world's biggest drug marketplace, The Silk Road.

[00:00:51] Next up, we'll talk about Aaron Swartz, the teen [prodigy](#)³ and internet freedom activist who got on the wrong side of the FBI.

[00:01:00] And then in part three, the final part, we will talk about the ongoing case of Luigi Mangione, the man accused of murdering the CEO of United Healthcare, one of the largest health insurance providers in the United States.

¹ people who lived outside the law, criminals

² made into something connected with politics

³ a very talented child or young person

[00:01:16] OK then, let's not waste another minute and get into the amazing story of Ross Ulbricht.

[00:01:23] The professional network LinkedIn is not typically a place for [provocative](#)⁴ political statements.

[00:01:31] If you look at someone's LinkedIn page, they might describe themselves as “a passionate sales leader with 10+ years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry”, or “operations manager with team leadership experience”, or [all manner of](#)⁵ other, corporate-style sentences.

[00:01:51] In the case of one man, his LinkedIn page read slightly differently.

[00:01:56] When FBI officers [stumbled across](#)⁶ the LinkedIn page for one Ross Ulbricht, they found it to read, “I want to use economic theory as a means to [abolish](#)⁷ the use of [coercion](#)⁸ and [aggression](#)⁹ amongst mankind,” followed by. “[To that end](#)¹⁰, I am

⁴ causing strong reaction, often on purpose

⁵ many different kinds of

⁶ found by accident

⁷ put an end to, eliminate

⁸ forcing someone to do something

⁹ angry or violent behaviour

¹⁰ for that purpose

creating an economic simulation to give people a first-hand experience of what it would be like to live in a world without the [systemic¹¹](#) use of force.”

[00:02:27] It was an important clue as to the identity of the person behind what was at the time the world’s largest illegal online marketplace for drugs, weapons, pornography, and, in fact, practically anything: The Silk Road.

[00:02:45] Ulbricht first had the idea for such a marketplace shortly after finishing university at Penn State.

[00:02:53] He had always been a smart student and managed to get excellent grades without doing too much work. But after graduating, he found real life to be not quite as easy.

[00:03:07] He tried [day trading¹²](#), buying and selling stocks, as well as starting a video game company, but neither of those ideas had [worked out¹³](#).

[00:03:17] He then set up an online second-hand bookstore with a friend, based in Austin, Texas. They would buy second-hand books en masse, and sell them on other marketplaces.

¹¹ relating to a practice or set of beliefs that has been established as normal or customary

¹² buying and selling shares quickly in one day

¹³ been successful

[00:03:31] It was a [moderate](#)¹⁴ success.

[00:03:33] It never made much money, but it did teach the then 26-year-old some boring but important skills: things like [inventory](#)¹⁵ management, pricing, customer service, and the basics of running an online business.

[00:03:50] And it was while working on this project that Ulbricht had another idea.

[00:03:56] It was for a marketplace that would provide complete [anonymity](#)¹⁶, allowing buyers and sellers to [transact](#)¹⁷ anonymously, without the website or any [snooping](#)¹⁸ authorities being able to identify anyone involved.

[00:04:13] And this wasn't just a business idea; it was strongly [aligned with](#)¹⁹ Ulbricht's political beliefs.

[00:04:21] He was a libertarian and a strong admirer of the Austrian philosopher and economist Ludwig von Mises.

¹⁴ not very big, not very small, average

¹⁵ a list of items for sale or in stock

¹⁶ being unknown, not showing your name

¹⁷ to do business, to buy or sell

¹⁸ secretly looking into people's business

¹⁹ in agreement with, matching

[00:04:29] The Austrian School of economics argues, essentially, that the most effective economic system is one based on free markets and voluntary exchange, with [minimal](#)²⁰ government [interference](#)²¹.

[00:04:42] It holds that individuals act [rationally](#)²² to pursue their goals, and that central planning or state intervention [distorts](#)²³ prices and leads to inefficiency.

[00:04:56] In other words, the most efficient system is one where individuals are left to do what they want, without any state [interference](#).

[00:05:06] Ulbricht's idea of a website that allowed users complete [anonymity](#) fitted right in with this political philosophy.

[00:05:16] Now, it wasn't, and still isn't, particularly difficult to access the internet anonymously - there are plenty of ways of hiding your IP address and so on, so it's fairly [trivial](#)²⁴ to access a website anonymously.

[00:05:32] The problem was related to payments.

²⁰ minimum, littlest

²¹ involvement, intervention

²² thinking in a clear, logical way

²³ changes in a wrong or unclear way

²⁴ simple or easy

[00:05:35] There was no reliable way for one stranger to pay another.

[00:05:39] Card [transactions](#)²⁵ could be [traced](#)²⁶, as they were linked to your identity.

[00:05:44] Sending cash through the mail was [inherently](#)²⁷ risky, as the recipient could claim they didn't receive it, or the sender might claim it was sent when it never was.

[00:05:55] And saying “meet me behind this petrol station at 10 pm and I'll [hand over](#)²⁸ the cash” wasn't exactly ideal either.

[00:06:03] But Ulbricht had discovered something that solved this problem: Bitcoin.

[00:06:10] Bitcoin, as you probably know, is a cryptocurrency that can be sent digitally from one address to another without either party's true identity being revealed.

[00:06:22] It was perfect. Every [transaction](#) was public, so nobody could say, “I didn't get it”, and it was also practically anonymous, meaning nobody—not the seller, not the buyer, not the authorities—nobody would be able to see the true identity of the individuals involved in the [transaction](#)²⁹.

²⁵ business deals, exchanges of money or goods

²⁶ found or discovered

²⁷ naturally, as a basic part of the process

²⁸ give

²⁹ business deal or exchange

[00:06:44] Ulbricht got to work building the first version of the website.

[00:06:49] He built it on the Tor network, which is essentially an [encrypted](#)³⁰ layer of the internet that makes it impossible to [trace](#)³¹ individual users.

[00:07:00] It took him several months, and he did it in complete secrecy, telling only his girlfriend at the time.

[00:07:08] He had a vision for this big marketplace where anyone could buy anything, but he knew he needed to start with one product.

[00:07:18] Any online marketplace has this chicken-and-egg problem: if a buyer comes to it and sees there's nothing for sale, they'll leave, and if there are no buyers, then no sellers will bother listing anything for sale.

[00:07:34] So, Ulbricht started with something he knew there would be demand for: drugs, and in particular, magic mushrooms.

[00:07:45] He grew the first mushrooms himself, then listed them for sale on his website.

[00:07:52] Given that he was going to be selling drugs, he couldn't exactly do advertising or market his website in any way, so he had to get creative.

³⁰ hidden by using secret code

³¹ follow and find

[00:08:03] He posted on a bunch of internet forums related to drug use, **purporting**³² to be just a user, with posts like “has anyone used this website Silk Road? Looks interesting.”.

[00:08:15] The website went live in February of 2011, and soon enough, the orders came rolling in. And he was fulfilling them all himself.

[00:08:28] Just like he had done with the second-hand books, he would take the order, package it up, print off the address and **pop**³³ it in the post.

[00:08:39] It started relatively slowly, but sure enough, sellers started listing their own products for sale: cannabis, MDMA, cocaine, heroin, as well as all sorts of prescription drugs, available without a doctor’s prescription, of course.

[00:08:57] The website was structured in a very similar way to a site like eBay or Amazon.

[00:09:03] Sellers could upload pictures of their goods, a description of what was for sale, and the price, payable in Bitcoin.

³² pretending to be

³³ quickly put it

[00:09:12] As for buyers, they could [scroll through](#)³⁴ the website, [perusing](#)³⁵ different drugs, reading reviews and ratings, before deciding which one to go for.

[00:09:23] They would make their purchase, in Bitcoin of course, then a few days or weeks later, they would receive a package through the mail which would contain the drugs they had ordered.

[00:09:34] They would take the drugs, and then, being good internet citizens, they would leave a review: “really good batch”, or “the pink ones aren’t as strong as the blue ones”, or simply, “great communication, A+ seller, will buy again!”.

[00:09:50] Now, before we get into any discussion of the [morality](#)³⁶ of this, it was clearly a very good business: in the United States alone, there are 37 million active illegal drug users. And the nature of drug use and drug addiction is that it is, almost by definition, a repeat purchase.

[00:10:12] Buy, use, buy, use, buy, use.

[00:10:16] The Silk Road facilitated this [transaction](#), making ordering whatever drug you wanted as easy as clicking a few buttons on your computer.

³⁴ move up and down on the screen to look at things

³⁵ looking at carefully

³⁶ ethics or correctness

[00:10:26] The website took a fee, of course, which ranged from 8 to 15% of the [transaction](#) value, but for sellers, this was a small price to pay for the convenience.

[00:10:40] Later that year, in 2011, the website [caught the eye](#)³⁷ of an [eager](#)³⁸ journalist at the [now-defunct](#)³⁹ blog Gawker.

[00:10:49] He published an article titled, “The Underground Website Where You Can Buy Any Drug Imaginable”.

[00:10:57] It led to [a flood of](#)⁴⁰ interest in the site, and other journalists started writing up their own articles too.

[00:11:05] All this time, Ulbricht was managing the site himself, doing everything from fixing [bugs](#)⁴¹ to negotiating with hackers to providing customer service. It was consuming his life, and his long-time girlfriend decided enough was enough.

[00:11:22] She gave him an [ultimatum](#)⁴²: it’s me or the website.

³⁷ attracted the attention

³⁸ enthusiastic, very interested

³⁹ no longer existing

⁴⁰ a very large amount of

⁴¹ mistakes or problems in the platform

⁴² a final demand with a threat if not accepted

[00:11:27] Ulbricht chose the website.

[00:11:29] By this time, the Silk Road had become more than just a place to buy drugs. There was a real sense of community, of users being part of something that was bigger than a place to buy marijuana.

[00:11:43] This was a true libertarian paradise, a place where people were allowed to make their own choices about what to buy and what to put into their bodies without the government [poking its nose in](#)⁴³.

[00:11:56] Ulbricht was completely happy for people to use the website to buy drugs; he had smoked a lot of pot as a teenager; that was his decision, and he felt no responsibility to stop people from buying or selling any kind of drug.

[00:12:11] However, as the website got more and more popular, he started to see things for sale that he found more problematic.

[00:12:20] Guns with [scratched-off](#)⁴⁴ serial numbers, for example, weapons that were clearly [intended](#)⁴⁵ to be used for murder.

[00:12:29] He justified this in the name of freedom of choice, of the free market, but then things got darker.

⁴³ interfering or being involved in something that was not its business

⁴⁴ removed by scratching

⁴⁵ planned or meant

[00:12:38] People started to list things like child pornography and individuals to be sold as sex slaves—things that even the most [devoted](#)⁴⁶ of libertarians knew were a step too far.

[00:12:52] These listings would be removed, but it wasn't always particularly easy to do.

[00:12:59] In these cases, sellers would typically [disguise](#)⁴⁷ what was really for sale: there would be no direct mention of pornography, but instead normal pictures, [cryptic](#)⁴⁸ code, [codewords](#)⁴⁹, so it was identifiable to a buyer who knew what they were looking for, but harder for anyone else to know what was going on.

[00:13:22] And, as you might expect, the site had [garnered](#)⁵⁰ the attention of the authorities: the FBI, the DEA, and the IRS, who were [crawling](#)⁵¹ all over it.

[00:13:33] The problem was that it seemed unbreakable.

⁴⁶ very loyal, strongly believing

⁴⁷ hide the real appearance of

⁴⁸ secret, hard to understand

⁴⁹ secret words with special meaning

⁵⁰ collected, received

⁵¹ looking closely or stealthily

[00:13:37] It was anonymous, you never knew who the sellers were, and even if a buyer's home address was identified, they could simply say they didn't know anything about the package, and it must have been a mistake.

[00:13:50] Being sent drugs in the post, if there is no way of proving that you bought them, would not [stand up](#)⁵² in a court of law.

[00:13:58] But while this anonymity made prosecutions difficult, it also gave federal agents an opening.

[00:14:06] They could pose as Silk Road customers, or even sellers, [blending into](#)⁵³ the marketplace like anyone else. And in so doing, they discovered that the person [pulling the strings](#)⁵⁴ behind it all went by the name Dread Pirate Roberts.

[00:14:25] Now, Dread Pirate Roberts isn't a name that came from nowhere; it comes from the novel The Princess Bride, and is the title that is passed down from one person to another.

⁵² be accepted as true

⁵³ mixing in so as not to be noticed

⁵⁴ secretly controlling things

[00:14:38] It seemed like it was a clever choice of [pseudonym](#)⁵⁵, meaning that if the user acting as Dread Pirate Roberts was ever caught, he or she could claim that they weren't the person really behind it; they had [merely](#)⁵⁶ [assumed](#)⁵⁷ the role.

[00:14:54] Dread Pirate Roberts wasn't a person; it was a title.

[00:14:59] And by the start of 2013, so two years into The Silk Road, there were federal agents all over the website. Some had even gained administrative privileges and were helping with customer support, while others were simply sitting there, watching what was going on.

[00:15:21] But the true identity of Dread Pirate Roberts was still a mystery.

[00:15:27] There were a few clues: one agent went back to those first posts about the Silk Road from 2011, and saw that some had come from the username "altoid".

[00:15:41] Further [digging](#)⁵⁸ found posts on different forums from a user with this username, and then one in which he asked a programming question about Tor using his own name—Ross Ulbricht—before quickly changing it to "Frosty".

⁵⁵ false name

⁵⁶ only, just

⁵⁷ taken on

⁵⁸ searching for more information

[00:15:57] By mid-2013, the authorities were certain that Ross Ulbricht was Dread Pirate Roberts, but they couldn't exactly knock on his door and ask him politely if he was indeed the man behind The Silk Road.

[00:16:12] Yes, he had made some [slipups](#)⁵⁹, but they knew that he took security extremely seriously.

[00:16:20] He would have all sorts of [safeguards](#)⁶⁰ in place so that any evidence linking him to The Silk Road would be heavily [encrypted](#), and he would probably have “kill buttons” on his laptop to delete any evidence if he sensed that law enforcement authorities were [closing in](#)⁶¹.

[00:16:38] They knew they had to catch him in the act, with his laptop open and unlocked.

[00:16:46] In the authorities' favour was that he [tended to](#)⁶² work from public places, as using a public WiFi network gave him greater [deniability](#)⁶³.

⁵⁹ mistakes

⁶⁰ protections, safety measures

⁶¹ getting nearer

⁶² usually did

⁶³ ability to say he didn't know or weren't involved

[00:16:56] Although he had spent much of the time he operated the Silk Road on the road, travelling in places like Southeast Asia, they had tracked him down to San Francisco.

[00:17:08] And on 1 October 2013, they **pounced**⁶⁴.

[00:17:15] He was working on his laptop in a quiet area of a public library in a residential area of San Francisco.

[00:17:23] He heard people arguing behind him, almost like a fight was about to **break out**⁶⁵.

[00:17:29] He turned around to see what was going on, and before he knew it, he had been **bustled**⁶⁶ to the ground, his laptop **snatched away**⁶⁷ before he had time to close the screen or press the keyboard shortcut to delete everything.

[00:17:44] It had all been a setup; the arguing pair were federal agents.

[00:17:50] He was arrested and charged with **all manner of** crimes.

⁶⁴ jumped on or acted suddenly

⁶⁵ suddenly start

⁶⁶ put quickly and with force

⁶⁷ taken quickly and suddenly

[00:17:55] The trial started in January of 2015, and he stood accused of all sorts of things that were more than [merely](#) running a libertarian marketplace.

[00:18:06] These included [money laundering](#)⁶⁸, as well as ordering the contract killings of five people who had threatened Silk Road. Now, I should add that these killings didn't take place; it seemed that he'd been [scammed](#)⁶⁹, but the prosecution [alleged](#)⁷⁰ that the [intent](#)⁷¹ was there.

[00:18:23] He had paid for people to be killed.

[00:18:27] In May of that year, May of 2015, he was formally sentenced to double life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, plus he had to pay back just under \$200 million from his [illicit](#)⁷² [gains](#)⁷³.

[00:18:44] He was only 30 years old.

[00:18:47] Now, when this sentence was announced, it was greeted with a mixture of horror and praise.

⁶⁸ hiding the illegal source of money

⁶⁹ cheated, deceived

⁷⁰ said to be true, but not proven

⁷¹ purpose, plan

⁷² illegal

⁷³ profits

[00:18:55] To his libertarian supporters, he was a [scapegoat](#)⁷⁴; he had created an online, safer version of what people do in the real world, and were doing in the street outside the San Francisco library where he had been arrested.

[00:19:10] He hadn't forced anyone to buy or sell drugs, weapons, or anything. And as to the accusations of the contract killings, they said these had been invented by the authorities.

[00:19:24] But to anti-drug campaigners and many politicians, this was a great victory. He had made hundreds of millions of dollars from drug addiction, violence, and by creating a website that [enabled](#)⁷⁵ some of the most [vile](#)⁷⁶ behaviours imaginable.

[00:19:41] Yes, he was guilty, yes, he knew the risks, and yes, he deserved to spend the rest of his life [behind bars](#)⁷⁷.

[00:19:51] And he would most likely have spent the rest of his life in prison had he not found an unlikely [ally](#)⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ a person blamed for others' mistakes

⁷⁵ made them possible

⁷⁶ very bad, evil

⁷⁷ in prison

⁷⁸ a person who helped or supported him

[00:19:59] On January 21st, 2025, on his second day back in office, Donald Trump gave Ross Ulbricht a full and [unconditional⁷⁹](#) [pardon⁸⁰](#).

[00:20:12] On the [campaign trail⁸¹](#), he had promised Libertarian voters that he would free Ulbricht, and on the day he announced it, he posted that, “the [scum⁸²](#) that worked to [convict⁸³](#) him were some of the same [lunatics⁸⁴](#) who were involved in the modern-day weaponisation of government against me”

[00:20:31] So, today, after 11 years behind bars, Ross Ulbricht is a free man.

[00:20:39] His case, and the debate about his sentence, became about more than him as an individual; it became about the role of government, the individual’s right to choose, and the society we want to live in.

⁷⁹ without any limits or rules

⁸⁰ official forgiveness for his crimes

⁸¹ the period of travel and speeches before the election

⁸² very bad or dirty people (insult)

⁸³ declare guilty, sentence

⁸⁴ crazy people

[00:20:53] Where do we [draw the line](#)⁸⁵ between personal freedom to choose and the government's [obligation](#)⁸⁶ to protect?

[00:21:01] Should someone be punished for building the tool, or only for how others use it?

[00:21:06] Was Ulbricht sentenced for what he did, or for what he represented?

[00:21:12] In the end, was he a dangerous criminal, a victim of the system, or its most dangerous critic?

[00:21:21] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Ross Ulbricht and The Silk Road.

[00:21:26] As always, I would love to know your thoughts. Do you think he deserved to walk free, or do you think he should still be behind bars?

[00:21:34] Just head to community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away with other curious minds.

[00:21:40] And as a final quick reminder, this was part one of the mini-series on “young American outlaws”.

⁸⁵ set a limit, decide what is not ok

⁸⁶ duty or responsibility

[00:21:46] Next up, we'll be talking about Aaron Swartz, the boy genius and co-founder of Reddit, whose crusade for internet freedom brought him up against the FBI, and cost him his life.

[00:21:57] And then in part three, we will be talking about the current case of Luigi Mangione, the young man who stands accused of murdering the CEO of one of America's largest healthcare insurance companies.

[00:22:10] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:22:15] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

| Word | Definition |
|-----------------|---|
| Outlaws | people who lived outside the law, criminals |
| Politicised | made into something connected with politics |
| Prodigy | a very talented child or young person |
| Provocative | causing strong reaction, often on purpose |
| All manner of | many different kinds of |
| Stumbled across | found by accident |
| Abolish | put an end to, eliminate |
| Coercion | forcing someone to do something |
| Aggression | angry or violent behaviour |
| To that end | for that purpose |
| Systemic | relating to a practice or set of beliefs that has been established as normal or customary |
| Day trading | buying and selling shares quickly in one day |
| Worked out | been successful |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Moderate | not very big, not very small, average |
| Inventory | a list of items for sale or in stock |
| Anonymity | being unknown, not showing your name |
| Transact | to do business, to buy or sell |
| Snooping | secretly looking into people's business |
| Aligned with | in agreement with, matching |
| Minimal | minimum, littlest |
| Interference | involvement, intervention |
| Rationally | thinking in a clear, logical way |
| Distorts | changes in a wrong or unclear way |
| Trivial | simple or easy |
| Transactions | business deals, exchanges of money or goods |
| Traced | found or discovered |
| Inherently | naturally, as a basic part of the process |
| Hand over | give |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Transaction | business deal or exchange |
| Encrypted | hidden by using secret code |
| Trace | follow and find |
| Purporting | pretending to be |
| Pop | quickly put it |
| Scroll through | move up and down on the screen to look at things |
| Perusing | looking at carefully |
| Morality | ethics or correctness |
| Caught the eye | attracted the attention |
| Eager | enthusiastic, very interested |
| Now-defunct | no longer existing |
| A flood of | a very large amount of |
| Bugs | mistakes or problems in the platform |
| Ultimatum | a final demand with a threat if not accepted |
| Poking its nose in | interfering or being involved in something that was not its business |

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Scratched-off | removed by scratching |
| Intended | planned or meant |
| Devoted | very loyal, strongly believing |
| Disguise | hide the real appearance of |
| Cryptic | secret, hard to understand |
| Codewords | secret words with special meaning |
| Garnered | collected, received |
| Crawling | looking closely or stealthily |
| Stand up | be accepted as true |
| Blending into | mixing in so as not to be noticed |
| Pulling the strings | secretly controlling things |
| Pseudonym | false name |
| Merely | only, just |
| Assumed | taken on |
| Digging | searching for more information |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Slipups | mistakes |
| Safeguards | protections, safety measures |
| Closing in | getting nearer |
| Tended to | usually did |
| Deniability | ability to say he didn't know or weren't involved |
| Pounced | jumped on or acted suddenly |
| Break out | suddenly start |
| Bustled | put quickly and with force |
| Snatched away | taken quickly and suddenly |
| Money laundering | hiding the illegal source of money |
| Scammed | cheated, deceived |
| Alleged | said to be true, but not proven |
| Intent | purpose, plan |
| Illicit | illegal |
| Gains | profits |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Scapegoat | a person blamed for others' mistakes |
| Enabled | made them possible |
| Vile | very bad, evil |
| Behind bars | in prison |
| Ally | a person who helped or supported him |
| Unconditional | without any limits or rules |
| Pardon | official forgiveness for his crimes |
| Campaign trail | the period of travel and speeches before the election |
| Scum | very bad or dirty people (insult) |
| Convict | declare guilty, sentence |
| Lunatics | crazy people |
| Draw the line | set a limit, decide what is not ok |
| Obligation | duty or responsibility |

Language spotlight

1. Stumbled across

- **Meaning:** to find something by chance, without looking for it
- **Synonyms:** come across, discover, run into
- **Antonyms:** search for, look for, miss
- **Examples:**
 - I **stumbled across** an old photo album while cleaning the attic.
 - She **stumbled across** a new café on her way to work.

2. Caught the eye

- **Meaning:** to attract attention
- **Synonyms:** stand out, draw attention, get noticed
- **Antonyms:** go unnoticed, blend in, be ignored
- **Examples:**
 - The bright red dress **caught the eye** of everyone at the party.

- His unusual artwork immediately **caught the eye** of the gallery owner.

3. Poking its nose in

- **Meaning:** interfering in something that is not your business
- **Synonyms:** meddling, interfering, intruding
- **Antonyms:** minding one's own business, ignoring, leaving alone
- **Examples:**
 - The government is always **poking its nose in** people's private lives.
 - She hates it when neighbours **poke their nose in** her family matters.

4. Pulling the strings

- **Meaning:** secretly controlling events or people
- **Synonyms:** controlling, influencing, manipulating
- **Antonyms:** powerless, uninvolved, being controlled
- **Examples:**
 - Everyone thought the manager was in charge, but it was the owner who was really **pulling the strings**.

- He pretends not to care, but he's always **pulling the strings** behind the scenes.

5. Draw the line

- **Meaning:** to set a limit; decide what is acceptable and what is not
- **Synonyms:** set boundaries, refuse, limit
- **Antonyms:** allow, accept, tolerate everything
- **Examples:**
 - I don't mind helping with your homework, but I **draw the line** at writing the essay for you.
 - She supports freedom of speech, but she **draws the line** at hate speech.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What was Ross Ulbricht's LinkedIn page unusual for?
 - a) It had no work experience listed
 - b) It contained a political statement about economics and freedom
 - c) It only had a photo and no description
 - d) It described him as a "video game entrepreneur"

2. What solved the payment problem for the Silk Road marketplace?
 - a) Credit cards
 - b) Sending cash in the mail
 - c) Bitcoin
 - d) PayPal

3. What product did Ulbricht first sell on Silk Road?
 - a) Cannabis

b) Magic mushrooms

c) Prescription drugs

d) Cocaine

4. Why was the FBI's work made easier when investigating Silk Road?

a) Ulbricht never used encryption

b) The site was very small and easy to manage

c) He told journalists his real name

d) He left mistakes and clues online

5. How was Ulbricht finally arrested?

a) At his home by surprise

b) In an airport while travelling

c) In a library, when agents distracted him and took his laptop

d) During a meeting with hackers

True or false

6. Ulbricht was a supporter of the Austrian School of economics. (True/False)

7. The Silk Road worked like Amazon or eBay, with reviews and seller ratings.

(True/False)

8. Ulbricht used the alias “Dread Pirate Roberts,” taken from the film The Princess Bride.

(True/False)

9. Ulbricht’s long-time girlfriend supported his work on Silk Road until the very end.

(True/False)

10. Ross Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison, but later received a pardon.

(True/False)

Fill-in-the-blank

11. If you look at someone’s LinkedIn page, they might describe themselves as “a passionate sales leader with 10+ years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry”, or all _____ of other, corporate-style sentences.

12. He tried ____ trading, buying and selling stocks, as well as starting a video game company.

13. And this wasn't just a business idea; it was strongly _____ with Ulbricht's political beliefs.

14. And saying "meet me behind this petrol station at 10 pm and I'll _____ over the cash" wasn't exactly ideal either.

15. Yes, he was guilty, yes, he knew the risks, and yes, he deserved to spend the rest of his life behind _____.

Vocabulary practice

16. What does **anonymity** mean?

- a) Being rich
- b) Being unknown, not showing your name
- c) Being powerful
- d) Being illegal

17. What does **ultimatum** mean?

- a) A final demand with a threat if not accepted
- b) A friendly suggestion

c) A secret plan

d) A small mistake

18. What does **scapegoat** mean?

a) A leader of a group

b) A person who escapes from prison

c) A very stubborn person

d) A person blamed for the mistakes of others

19. What does **illicit** mean?

a) Legal and accepted

b) Popular and famous

c) Illegal or forbidden

d) Expensive and rare

20. What does **pounced** mean?

- a) Moved slowly
- b) Jumped on suddenly or acted quickly
- c) Ignored
- d) Escaped

Answers

1. b) It contained a political statement about economics and freedom
2. c) Bitcoin
3. b) Magic mushrooms
4. d) He left mistakes and clues online
5. c) In a library, when agents distracted him and took his laptop
6. True
7. True
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. manner
12. day
13. aligned
14. hand
15. bars
16. b) Being unknown, not showing your name
17. a) A final demand with a threat if not accepted
18. d) A person blamed for the mistakes of others
19. c) Illegal or forbidden
20. b) Jumped on suddenly or acted quickly