



The path to video game addiction

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Once upon a not-so-distant-time, the word “addiction” would strike fear into the hearts of parents worldwide. Mothers would tell children stories of junkies and drug lords who wanted chaos in the world, aunties would whisper rumours when the friendly neighbourhood chubby kid started losing a couple of kilos faster than their perceptions of “normal”.

However the technological revolutions of today have given birth to numerous socially acceptable but wonderfully geeky drug substitutes that the hardcore party stuff just can't compete with. If you have the sudden desire to barf, please refrain, but yours truly is talking about the plethora of social media websites, smartphones, videogames, gaming consoles and apps spamming our everyday lives. They must be stopped!

Scratch that - yours truly loves posting stories on Snapchat, Instagram, Messenger, Facebook and even WhatsApp (I mean why not). He doesn't cringe or waver before spamming a random photo of some random food he really wants to show off across all forms of social media only to be overwhelmingly ignore. But what crosses the line is an addiction far worse, far more compelling and disconnecting. It's the addiction mobile games like Farmville, Candy Crush Saga and Clash of Clans and Ludo King can cause. It's the thrill online multiplayer games like Overwatch or Destiny give you every time you get a kill or finish a raid. The addiction to gaming.

It starts off small, innocently enough when it comes to mobile games. One day you're lazily scrolling through your Instagram feed, judging that one annoyingly narcissistic person you know who uploads thousands of selfies every day when a random notification pops up on messenger - an invite to a game. You're too lazy to check what it is and you clear it, but then Facebook starts spamming notifications for the same game. Before you know it, your friends start talking about it in that random group chat you've kept muted and rarely check, and it piques your

interest. Console games start off on a more sinister note, with other addicts egging you on to buy the game they're hooked to - to pull you into the abyss they're hopelessly entangled in. All you really ask yourself before falling in is “What's all the hype about?”

You decide to have a go at it. You download the app or buy the console game, play a few games, and immediately

ated but so are your arrogance and intolerability in general. Where once you'd shout encouragement, you now shout things like “You #\$\$% noob, #\$\$%^ you!” like a raging teenager. It's as if you never grew up. The game works in strange ways to keep you in, much like that hard-to-get girl you wish you never liked in school. She'll give you signs that'll keep you hooked in (when you're winning), but then she'll call you a friend from time to time when you're getting too good (and you start to lose). But no matter what, she'll never be yours, and so you'll never truly win, just have a target to constantly vie and struggle for.

But this is only the tip of the dung heap. Before long, the game starts cutting into your life, demanding more and more time like an overly attached girlfriend. You'll start missing appointments, hangouts, even dates. You start the game thinking you'll only play for 30 minutes, but 2 hours later you're still glued to the screen. You'll go about your day dreaming of when you get home and get to play. You'll form social media groups with fellow addicts that only encourage the addiction. You start to gain weight because you opt for the game over actual physical activities, and before long your significant other leaves you because you've started showering the game with more love and affection than you give to her.

Months on in, after gaming till 6 a.m. into the morning, you get off and look yourself in the mirror. Layers of fat, bloodshot eyes and shadows underneath your eyes. You reflect on your life and all the bad decisions you've made, the people you've taken for granted and the chances you've lost. You go to bed deciding to finally quit.

You get a notification from the gaming app or a text from that gaming group you're in. 5 minutes later, “PLAY OF THE GAME!”

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suck. Several questions go through your mind, along the lines of “Why am I playing this?”, “What am I?” or “What is a noob and why are they calling me one?”. If you're fortunate, you've quit at this point.

Ironically, the less fortunate improve. Improvement and progress - that's the hook. You start winning, and it changes you. For the worse. Before you know it, you've turned “pro”, a situation where your skills are accentuated