Video Games: When Worlds Collide

By: Claire Alexander

My brothers tell me that as their fingers twitched and tapped furiously while playing the latest fighter game, their Nintendo controllers rattling and clicking away, that as a little girl I would bounce next to them, literally hopping mad as I screeched "Finish him! Finish him!" in encouragement. Or that as my brother Grant calmly navigated his way through the world of Legend of Zelda that I would sit quietly nearby, watching in wide eyed rapt attention while he solved puzzles and defeated monsters in a fantasy world. I don't remember this, but I'll take their word for it. What I do remember is their chuckles as my character would run off road (again) in Mario Kart, and how my brother Blake patiently and accommodatingly taught me how to use the Nintendo controller until I could button-mash my way through a fight well enough to beat the computer a fair amount of the time. In the meanwhile since I acquired this knowledge though, I haven't made much use of it. As a child, and even to this day, I prefer out door pursuits or ink and paper to lights and sounds that I could control on a screen. With the exception of Dance Dance Revolution, I never made much use of my brothers' XBOX, and so it lay quietly collecting dust during their periods of absence while they were away at college. And while watching me attempt to play a video game of any sort will be either the funniest or saddest thing you see that day, I still enjoy (watching others play) video games, and see the positive aspects of them.

> *"What? You too?*
> *I thought I*
> *was the only*
> *one."*

Many argue that video games and their virtual worlds are a waste of time and while I used to partially agree with them, I now see things differently. As I grew older and watched my friends play video games as well, I began to have a new appreciation

for them not only as a source of entertainment, but as having other positive potentials as well. Especially with certain games acting as a series such as Final Fantasy, Assassin's Creed, and the Legend of Zelda, among others, video games, much like movies or books have great story telling potential. And quite frankly, it's amazing how people will come together over a story. It is a common bond over stories which often bring people, even strangers, closer together than they ever imagined, feeling a kindred bond, knowing they are not quite so estranged in their passion anymore. C.S. Lewis put it aptly when he said, "The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.'" There is a surprisingly great potential for this kind of interaction, both on and off screen, whether you're playing as a team, or meeting strangers at a convention who share your interests.

Understanding the thought and detail that goes not only into the plot, if there is one, and the art, but even the logistics behind making everything on the screen move and react properly is incredible, greatly raised my respect for those who create the games. With the development of games like Dance Dance Revolution, and sports activities on the Wii, video games also don't have to just be about sitting for hours at a time exercising only your thumbs anymore, a long time concern that is often raised over potential health impacts that games could have. Video games also play a more serious role in their usefulness though than just exercise and fun. They can also be used to train professionals, particularly in the military, as a safe way of simulating a dangerous situation to better prepare combatants.

Like everything, particularly everything having to do with technology, video games also have their dark side. While there are a few active options such as those previously mentioned, the fact is that the majority of video games do require you to sit for hours, or even days, at a time in order to finish them, depending on how strong your dedication is. This does nothing to improve our already rather sedentary lifestyles, particularly
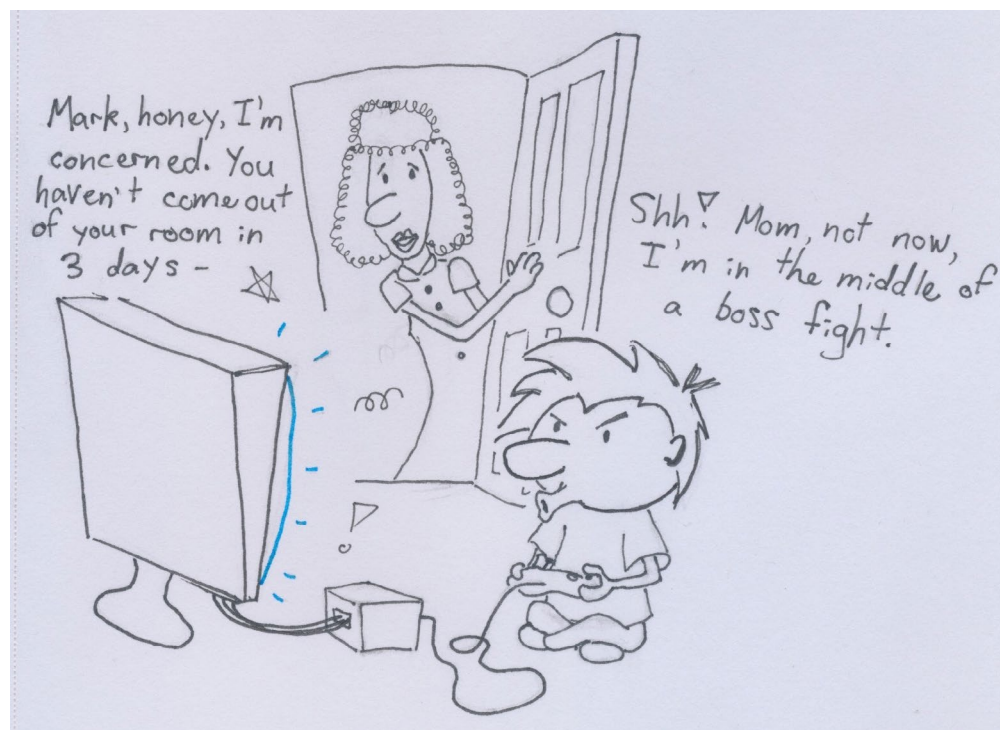
when medical and fitness professionals are advising us not to sit for long periods of time. Like begets like, and the more sedentary you become, often the harder it is to break the pattern. For many people, particularly teenagers and young adults, video have become a problem as serious as any other addiction. More than once, I've seen a video or an article about how there are literally rehabilitation centers for kids with internet and video games addictions, particularly in China and Japan, and the extreme situations such as stealing for money to play the games, or not leaving an arcade for days, that led their desperate parents to send them there. Much like a drug, the immediate feedback and gratification is addictive, and some get so hooked that they need outside intervention before they can stop. Spending so much time parked in front of a screen also raises social development concerns as well, fueling the fear that these kids will become more sociopathic. Rather than forging friendship through hangouts and other face-to-face interaction, they face terrors in dungeons and build their status and strength "kill" by virtual "kill", depending on the game. Many psychologists have also raised the issue of whether playing video games makes the players more violent, but no conclusive end has been established on the subject. These extreme cases though are uncommon outliers, and we should not let a disturbed few ruin the fun the vast majority who have a healthier interaction with video games.

I don't think it's fair to say that restrictions or regulations on games will solve problems such as these cases. If you want it badly enough, you usually find a way to do it not matter what the obstacle. And anyway, much like fine wine, video games are meant to be enjoyed. Giving someone a controller doesn't guarantee they will become an addict anymore than giving someone a glass of Chardonnay guarantees that they will become an alcoholic. The statement itself is an immoderate one, but "all things in moderation" is a fair approach to live by when it comes to video games. After all, it's just a game.