

GETTING

The time I spent boosting my video game character was virtually sapping my spiritual side.

Sitting at the computer desk, I deftly steered through the colorful world of the video game I was playing. My character was in a battleground, and I was on my way to reclaim a base that the enemy had just captured.

From the kitchen, I heard my mother's voice. "Weren't you going to clean up in here?"

I broke my concentration long enough to respond, "In a minute." But a minute turned to 10, and then 30. When the match was finally over, I logged off, surprised that my mother hadn't bothered me again. I shuffled into the kitchen, expecting to find a pile of dirty dishes waiting for me.

Instead I found the sink empty, the counters wiped clear—the whole kitchen spotless. I felt guilty, knowing that my mom had cleaned it herself when I failed to appear. But I shrugged it off, telling myself I would help Mom later, and went to bed.

I can't recall if I ever made up for that broken promise, but I can remember similar instances when I chose a virtual world over the real. I played video games

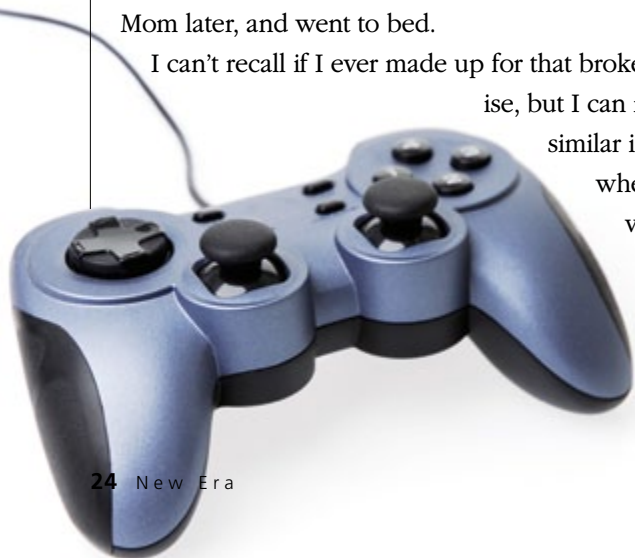
throughout adolescence but became very involved with a multiplayer online game from the age of 16 until I started college at 18. I devoted hundreds of hours to boosting my character and my virtual skill set. I spent less time with my family, opting to complete quests with my in-game friends instead.

And it wasn't just the game; I spent hours online watching videos, checking blogs or social networks, often running across or choosing to view material that I knew was below my standards.

As my virtual stature grew, my spiritual strength was shriveling. I became desensitized to living in the real world. I didn't feel good about myself, and my priorities became unfocused. The virtual world had a grip on me, and I wouldn't force myself to get real. I could sense the weakness within me but was unwilling to stop spending "money for that which is of no worth, [and my] labor for that which cannot satisfy" (2 Nephi 9:51).

I wish I could say that I eventually came to my senses and threw the game out, realizing how much of my time it wasted. Sadly, this was not the case. I stopped playing only because the Internet filter at my college dorms blocked it.

But I saw this as a chance to change. As I started my first semester, my focus shifted from building up my virtual character to realizing my true potential. Without the fantasy world distracting me, I tuned back in to the Spirit as it spoke to me of "things as they really are, and of things as



A digital illustration of a woman with long, dark, flowing hair, wearing a red dress and silver, futuristic armor. She is running towards the viewer, holding a white game controller in her right hand. Her expression is one of urgency or surprise. In the background, a small, dark robot with glowing yellow eyes is visible on a wooden floor. The overall scene is set in a warm, orange-toned environment.

REAL



they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).

In the six months or so that followed, I had the time and focus to do some incredible things. Instead of spending hours acquiring better armor, I studied my scriptures and learned to put on the armor of God (see Ephesians 6:10–17). Instead of honing skills that did me no good outside of a video game, I unearthed practical talents that allowed me to better serve others (see Matthew 25:14–29). I magnified Church callings, studied hard, and earned grades I felt good about. I made many new friends and (gasp!) even dated some.

Sometimes I missed that animated world, the competition and challenges, the in-game experience, the online friends I had made and played with. But as I thought about the changes I had seen in my life and myself, I knew I was fuller, happier, and more at peace with the things giving up the game had allowed me to gain.

When I later listened to Elder David A. Bednar give his fireside address “Things as They Really Are,” I thought back to that moment in the kitchen and other times I had disconnected from things as they really are. I had nothing

When I started spending more time living in real life instead of virtual life, I realized how much I enjoyed laughing with my younger sister.

of value to show for the time spent passively plugged in or logged on. *What if?* I asked myself. *What if I had spent more time practicing musical instruments instead? or helping my mom? or laughing with my younger sister?* I regretted wasting so much time.

I have learned that you can create true happiness, both now and as you plan for the future, only by being present and active. Invest in eternal things, and “lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,” or in video games, “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19–20). The wonderful thing about real life is that it won’t fade after a computer or console is turned off. Things we work for and gain here—like a body, memories, experiences, talents, and family—will be ours forever. As we live righteously, we are promised the ultimate level-up: *eternal* life.

That is what makes living IRL—in real life—truly great. **NE**

THINGS AS THEY REALLY ARE

“Sadly, some young men and women in the Church today ignore ‘things as they really are’ and neglect eternal relationships for digital distractions, diversions, and detours that have no lasting value. . . . A young man or woman may waste countless hours, postpone or forfeit vocational or academic achievement, and ultimately sacrifice cherished human relationships because of mind- and spirit-numbing video and online games. As the Lord declared, ‘Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment . . . Thou shalt not idle away thy time, neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known’ (D&C 60:13). . . .

“Please be careful of becoming so immersed and engrossed in pixels, texting, ear buds, twittering, online social networking, and potentially addictive uses of media and the Internet that you fail to recognize the importance of your physical body and miss the richness of person-to-person communication. Beware of digital displays and data in many forms of computer-mediated interaction that can displace the full range of physical capacity and experience.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,
“Things as They Really Are,” Ensign, June 2010, 21.