

A close-up photograph of a person's face, showing their mouth and chin, with their hands holding a black video game controller. The person is wearing a black t-shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

cyber junkie

escape the gaming and internet trap

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Editor's note:

The stories in this book are true. Names, locations, and other identifying information have been changed to protect confidentiality; in some cases, composites have been created.

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*To my mother.
You have always believed in me.*

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foreword

Only in recent years have we realized how prevalent addictions are in our modern society. We have progressed in our awareness from the abuse of alcohol and other substances, through countless sexual practices that may leave us both bereft of satisfying love and/or with profound feelings of shame, and we're now discovering new ways to bedevil ourselves with behavioral addictions, such as compulsive shopping or gambling.

Kevin Roberts herein adds another behavioral addiction to this growing list. Of greater importance is his success in taking us inside the mind of an addict. There we can develop both empathy and foreknowledge as we read explicit details of how people can become addicted in the cyber world.

Some may laugh, saying that nowadays everything is being labeled an addiction. Yet a reading of the first few chapters is likely to change one's mind, as Roberts takes us in heart-wrenching detail through the progression that left him a true addict. He also gives us a window into the cyber world to appreciate its vast and multifaceted appeal. We gain a valuable perspective into a form of recreation and communication that captivates tens of millions.

Essential to recovery is to talk with rigorous honesty about one's own struggles, and Roberts admirably demonstrates this practice throughout the book. In addition, the author shows how common it is becoming for cyber activity to lead to true addiction—something probably unsuspected by many who become addicts. Forewarned is forearmed.

I have personal knowledge on this subject. Since my retirement, I have spent lots of time playing bridge and solitaire games on the computer to soothe feelings of anxiety and shame. It's a short-term fix, which makes matters worse in the long run. Roberts's book helps me to see the consequences of this behavior when it becomes compulsive. And calling it by name—an addiction that "medicates" unwanted emotions—is a potent way of reducing its power to control our lives.

Like many addicts, I have traded one addiction for another throughout my life. I've struggled for fifty-five years with compulsive eating. I used food to cover up unpleasant feelings and constant anxiety. For the last twenty or so years, I have learned to resist my addictive food impulses by bringing the situation into the light of honest examination and even lighthearted humor, just as Kevin Roberts does in this remarkable book.

John Everingham, Ph.D.,
editor of *Men Healing Shame: An Anthology*
and *Breaking the Shackles: Bringing Joy into Our Lives*

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introduction

The Western world is in the midst of a cultural shift. Electronics and the Internet have transformed the way we live. Just a decade or so ago, devices such as computers, cell phones, and iPods were relative luxuries that made our lives easier or entertained us. For most people, these items are now nearly indispensable in both their work and their personal lives. The Internet and video gaming, likewise, are no longer used primarily for research or for occasional amusements. More and more, they are our main source of recreation.

For many people, video and computer games and other forms of digital technology are harmless. They offer convenience or a way to relax or have fun with friends and family members. Unfortunately, all of these devices also carry the potential to become addictive.

Users or players sometimes become compulsive in their use of these technologies. They may game excessively, turning away from family, friends, and the other activities they once enjoyed. Or they may become ensnared in social networking to such an extent that their forays into the cyber world become substitutes for real human contact. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, online chat engines, and simply surfing for information can turn into all-encompassing obsessions. Relationships, health, and jobs may all suffer as a result—and yet the behavior continues. Though users may be highly intelligent and creative, they turn their backs on reality, absorbed in a world of imagination and fantasy. I used to be one of these people.

Video games and many Internet activities have taken their toll on my mental, physical, and spiritual health. Excessive playing and Internet usage have given me carpal tunnel syndrome and persistent back pain. They are the primary factor in missed appointments and have even cost me jobs, not to mention a whole lot of money. They have been a significant barrier that has gotten in the way of friendships and relationships. I have

chosen video games over virtually everything and everyone close to me. I would chat all night online with “friends” all over the world instead of going out with friends in the here and now. For much of my adult life, video games, and then later the Internet, assumed a place in the forefront, inexplicably drawing me away from social outings, dinners with friends, and even time with my family.

Video games and the Internet are not the problem, however. I am the problem. I do not blame these industries. I blame myself. I loathed myself in those moments when I would finally emerge from a video game flurry. In those times of reflection, I would wonder how I could possibly have been so weak as to fall under the gaming spell once again. The disgust would rise up within me, and I would swear to myself that I had learned my lesson. I would rid the house of all games. I would resolve to quit chatting online. But eventually, the urge would resurface and overpower my best intentions. There’s no other way to describe it: I was a video game addict, a cyber junkie.

Today, I am proud to be in recovery. I wasted years of my life staring into a computer screen, failing to achieve the goals I had set for myself. Although I felt pangs of guilt and sadness after gaming binges that lasted for weeks, it was not enough guilt to get me to stop. I hid my gaming from everyone for almost ten years and was in denial that I even had a problem. In 2003, I finally hit bottom and realized my life was out of control. I needed to make a change.

My road to recovery was long and hard, and I repeatedly relapsed into gaming. Playing video games heightened my senses, making me feel totally alive, while Internet chatting with friends around the world allowed me to unplug from the difficulties of my real-world relationships. It is not surprising that I suffered for years with cravings. Sometimes, they still haunt me. Through therapy, friends, and support groups, I have managed to stave off the cravings and stick to my recovery plan.

A few years into my recovery, I began working to help others learn how to escape from the claws of gaming and Internet ob-

sessions. I befriended fellow cyber addicts and tried to offer the kind of support that my friends had offered me. My assistance was informal at first, but slowly I began to organize and facilitate support groups for cyber addicts. Today I run numerous such groups for people whose lives have been swallowed up by their insatiable urge to game, surf, and chat online. These groups offer the support addicted individuals need to turn away from compulsive behavior within the cyber world, which empowers them to channel their energies in positive directions.

This book grew out of my journey through cyber addiction. Throughout the book, I recount my personal experience, describing how an innocent pastime turned into fifty-hour gaming binges and all-night online chatting, and how I found a new focus for my life that did not involve these obsessive activities. I also share stories about people I have helped professionally. The experiences described in the book are real, though names and identifying information have been changed to protect privacy. In a few instances, I have combined stories to form composite characters.

Although I have vast personal experience with a variety of games and Internet activities, I needed to augment my understanding through research. To this end, I visited gaming forums and talked with players from around the world. In addition, I delved deeper into Facebook, MySpace, and other such networking sites, and I studied professional literature on the science of compulsive behaviors and addiction.

This is a book for anyone affected by overuse of the Internet, video games, or other electronic devices. The problem may be your own and you're struggling to understand why this is an issue for you and how to solve it. Or the problem may be with someone you love, a partner or child perhaps. That person may realize his or her activity is a problem; on the other hand, the person may not give a second thought to how much time and energy he or she is spending online and/or gaming. Cyber addiction is a new phenomenon, and thus, the research on the topic is limited but growing.

Here's what you'll find in these pages:

- Chapters 1 and 2 take you behind the scenes and enable you to peer into the cyber world. You will come to understand the allure of games and the Internet as well as attain a broad understanding of the different types of video games and cyber activities and the kinds of people drawn to them.
- Chapters 3 and 4 take a scientific and behavioral look at addiction, revealing how excessive Internet use and video gaming exhibit many of the telltale signs of addiction. A list of warning signs that your cyber use may be spinning out of control is also included, as are stories of others who have spiraled down into cyber addiction.
- In chapters 5 and 6, I recount stories from my recovery process and those of addicted individuals with whom I have worked. I also discuss relapse and how to create a healthy relationship with technology that adds to the quality of your life, not subtracts from it.
- Many readers are likely at wit's end trying to help a loved one who overuses technology. Chapter 7 can help family and friends understand how best to help a loved one who is a cyber addict, whether that person is a child or an adult.

You are about to embark on a journey into the cyber universe. Keep an open mind, and remember that there is nothing inherently wrong with playing video games or using the Internet. However, some people—like me—can't help but engage in these activities in unhealthy ways. The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way—recovery is possible. To help us, you must first understand us. I hope that this book provides that understanding.

welcome to the cyber universe

“Understanding can overcome any situation, however mysterious or insurmountable it may appear to be.”

Norman Vincent Peale

The phone rang, and I initially didn't answer. The caller was persistent, however. I finally decided to pick up because the ringing was breaking my gaming concentration. I had told all my friends that I was out of town, so I couldn't imagine who it might be.

“Hello,” I barked into the phone.

It was Doug, a friend of mine since childhood. He and I had grown up on the same street, and he had recently started renting a room in my next-door neighbor's house. Doug declared, “I am fully aware of what's going on over there.”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” I righteously asserted as my right hand continued to work the computer mouse (I had turned down the volume to avoid detection).

“Well, you might have had me fooled into believing that you actually were up north like you said, except for one miscalculation on your part,” Doug told me in the tone of a clever detective.

“I don't know what you mean,” I continued my deception.

Seeming almost disappointed at my lack of foresight, Doug responded, “You should have turned down the speakers. I can hear the

catapults destroy the city walls because the sound's traveling through your walls and through mine." He was mad not only about the noise, but also because I had lied to him.

"How long have you been playing?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied—truthfully, because I really did not know.

"It's noon right now." He went on, "Have you been to bed yet?"

I confessed, "Actually, I haven't. I've been up for twenty-two hours straight, and most of that time has been spent on the computer."

What is it about video games and the Internet that would lead a grown man to become consumed to this point? Video games and computers are not new inventions. The first game was introduced in 1958 at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. The game, Tennis for Two, prefigured a game that became widespread in the early 1970s, Pong. In the late 1970s, Tandy came out with the first mass-produced home computers, a development quickly followed by more complex game consoles such as Atari. Still, times have obviously changed and the role of technology in our lives has expanded greatly. In addition to incredible growth in the number of technological devices we encounter daily, the type of technology and games has also changed. While it was easy to walk away from the simplistic video games of my youth, the new games offer much more that captivate players and hold their interest. Likewise, the Internet in general and other various digital technologies are constant companions and an integral part of our modern world. The benefits of this technology are many, and yet such progress comes at a price. The number of people with a problem related to gaming and use of other devices is growing exponentially in the United States and around the world. A May 2009 study reported in *Psychological Science* found that 8.5 percent of young video gamers exhibited signs of addiction to gaming.¹ Maressa Hecht Orzack, director of the Computer Addiction Study Center at Harvard, says that her research shows that between 5 and 10 percent of Web users suffer from a Web dependency.² Clearly, the problem is already out of control.

Often, the reality of this problem leaves loved ones dumb-

founded. Family members and friends can hardly believe it when they discover that their loved one prefers playing a game to almost every other activity, and would rather network online than spend time with people in the real world. They want to help their loved one but struggle to understand what compels someone to throw away so much. The apparent waste of time and energy shocks and even offends. Why would anyone do this? We know that alcohol, food, drugs, and gambling can overtake a person's life and become addictive. But video games and the Internet?

Indeed, the intricacies of the cyber world, and the allure of it, remain a mystery for many. Each one of the thousands of video games on the market speaks its own jargon, making it exceedingly difficult for a nongamer to achieve even a rudimentary comprehension of the particulars of a game. The Internet carries its own sort of confusion as well. Although many people use Internet networking and chat sites, the majority struggle to make sense of how an individual could stay up all night chatting with friends or customizing a MySpace page. Parents, friends, and loved ones suffer confusion because cyber junkies seem to live in a different world, which they cannot penetrate. They want to help their loved one, but they do not know how.

What are we talking about here, a bad habit or an addiction? Experts disagree on whether such a thing as cyber or gaming addiction exists. The American Psychiatric Association has been debating whether compulsive Internet use and video gaming meet the accepted criteria of addiction and whether it should be listed as a "disorder" in the next edition of its diagnostic book. I'm not a scientist and I don't claim to be an authority when it comes to alcohol or other drug problems. What I do know are the ins and outs of cyber and gaming problems and how those problems can destroy a person's life. I'm not alone in recognizing this problem. In the United States, newsgroups, community activists, government officials, teachers, and throngs of concerned parents have come together to agree that a problem exists and that solutions have been difficult to find. Other parts of the world have already accepted the existence of cyber addiction and have begun

to take action. In Japan, Taiwan, Holland, China, and South Korea, the problem is widely recognized and treatment centers are well-established. South Korea considers Internet addiction a serious national health crisis and has taken an active approach toward both treating and preventing the problem.³ In the end, then, it doesn't really matter what you call it—compulsive use, problem use or abuse, or addiction. It exhibits many similarities to other behaviors that have already been officially classified as addictive. In my mind, that's what it is, and so this book will use the terms *cyber addiction* and *gaming addiction*.

This chapter provides an overview of the cyber world. It explores who we cyber junkies are and what motivates us to spend hours and even days in front of a computer screen. In addition to discussing the drawbacks of digital technology, it describes how these technologies affect our lives in positive ways.

A New World Order

VIDEO GAMES

The world of recreation and entertainment is in the midst of a cultural shift, which purports to offer many advantages, but likewise puts many individuals in peril.

In recent years video gaming has become the primary source of entertainment for hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, worldwide sales are on target to top \$50 billion by 2011. Younger folks are more likely to play video games than to participate in organized sports, and studies show that the average child in the developing world spends well over forty hours per week in front of a screen. In the United States, a staggering 83 percent of children own a video game console.⁴ Yet gaming is by no means a pastime only for kids. On the contrary, today's video games increasingly appeal to adults. Some studies set the average age of video gamers at a surprising thirty-three.⁵

Douglas Lowenstein, founder and former president of the Entertainment Software Association, issued a statement that

captures the scope of the shift that video gaming is bringing to modern society:

The video game industry is entering a new era where technology and creativity will fuse to produce some of the most stunning entertainment of the 21st Century. Decades from now, cultural historians will look back at this time and say it is when the definition of entertainment changed forever.⁶

I do not dispute Lowenstein's assertion, but many folks find themselves gripped by growing pains as these monumental changes in the entertainment world take root. The compelling nature of many games leads players into excess. As a society, we are only beginning to recognize that this problem exists and consequently have not figured out a way to deal with it.

Many features of video games tap into the compulsive side of human nature. I can personally attest to this. On Christmas and at other family gatherings, I often beelined for the computer or nearest video game system. In spite of my gregarious nature, some great magnetism seemed to draw me into the speechless communion I had with the cyber world. Somehow I always found a game or Web site that entranced me. I seemed to crave the multisensory stimulation. The crash, the bleeps, the constantly changing screen all melded with my psyche. In those sweet moments I was transported to a different universe.

New technologies have steadily heightened realism and allow players to feel more a part of the game, thereby increasing the potential for addiction. Excessive play impedes social and academic development. It damages relationships and, in some cases, exhibits the hallmarks of addiction. Parents, spouses, and friends of gaming addicts are searching for ways to deal with a problem that significantly disrupts addicts' lives. Few options are widely available at this point, although centers for Internet-based compulsion are beginning to crop up all over the country and around the world. Some people are forging ahead and creating their own unique pathways into recovery.

THE INTERNET, SMARTPHONES, TEXTING, AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES

As with video games, we've seen an explosion in the development, variety, and availability of other forms of electronic devices. At last count, there were more than 4 billion cell phone users throughout the world⁷ and almost 1.9 billion computer users.⁸ More than 1.75 billion people regularly use the Internet. The cyber world is still experiencing exponential expansion in the number of people who make use of it and in the number of services and activities it offers.

Although not yet as ubiquitous as video games, Internet social networking sites are changing the way people connect and stay in touch. There are now thirty countries around the world that have amassed more than one million Facebook users.⁹ Facebook is dominant around the world with 78 million regular users, MySpace with 67 million, Twitter with 17 million, and LinkedIn with 11 million regular users.¹⁰ (Due to the rapidly shifting and expanding nature of social networking sites, these numbers change on a daily basis.) Industry standards define a regular user as someone who checks his or her account at least once every thirty days. These sites, along with cell phones, BlackBerrys, email, and texting, have transformed the way people stay in touch. Communication is instantaneous and constant.

Sharing ideas and artistic creation has also been facilitated. The Pew Internet and American Life Project published a study in 2009 that found that 61 percent of adults had accessed the Internet to find information related to their physical and mental health.¹¹ Rather than lumbering to the library to do a research project, children can access most of what they need online. Twenty-three-year-old Adam Young, an electronic music artist, had very little luck getting his music out to the public until he started using MySpace, on which his music has generated a whopping 42 million plays.¹²

While facilitating artistic exposure, communication, and networking, social networking sites can, like video games, elicit compulsive behavior. While the vast majority of users employ

these sites to expand and augment their personal and professional relationships, some use them at the expense of real-time human contact. Likewise, many use Internet chat engines to keep up with cyber friends to the detriment of one-on-one human interaction.

Just as social networking allows people the sense of being plugged-in, smartphones (Internet-capable with games), PDAs (personal digital assistants, which have mostly been superseded by smartphones), texting, and compulsive email checking provide the potential to stay connected with the Internet and other people without interruption. None of these technologies are bad, and can actually be quite useful in business and relationships, but they easily lend themselves to compulsion. There is the “reward” and social satisfaction of getting a text or an email. People look forward to it, and to some extent, it can make them feel important and connected. For people who are more vulnerable to addiction, the slight psychological boost that most of us feel when we get a friendly text or email may instead be intensive and can become all-encompassing, causing them to neglect or not fully engage with responsibilities and important people in their lives. When a compulsive email checker with a smartphone is in a business meeting, for example, he or she is probably not paying full attention to the information being conveyed because the urge to check email yet again is irresistible. When a text-adept teen has a phone in school, he or she can become so skilled at concealment and “blind” texting that this activity can go on throughout the whole school day, constantly distracting and ensuring academic underperformance or even failure. Many students with ADHD who attend my ADHD study groups compulsively send text messages; some students send over one hundred a day.

Surfing the Internet can itself become excessive and compulsive. Some folks find great joy in discovering new information, especially the unusual and arcane. A nineteen-year-old who I coached came to me because he was spending six to eight hours a day searching for unusual videos. He had dozens of sites he would search, and when he happened upon a video he particularly

enjoyed, he would email the link to friends and family, most of whom, he later learned, never watched these videos. The search for these videos was so engaging to him that it swallowed up his life.

Most of us use the Internet and our cell phones to stay in touch and find useful information from time to time, but cyber addicts become consumed by these technologies and end up not being able to use them responsibly or in moderation.

A Sedentary Lifestyle

Video games, like television, often function as a babysitter because of their capacity to capture attention over long periods. Many parents accept video games as a way to keep their children out of trouble. Children congregate around a game console much more often than they do in parks or vacant lots. They do not venture outdoors for pickup basketball, street hockey, or touch football because they can play these and other games in the virtual world. As a result, physical activity among children has declined.

The massive popularity of video gaming and the Internet exacerbates the disturbing sedentary trend among American youth and consequent rise in obesity. With parents working longer hours and two-income families the norm, parents are not around as much to ensure healthy choices. In my professional experience with young people, excessive gaming, in-school texting and Internet use, and obsessive social network use often accompany poor performance in school. Many children choose video gaming and their Internet pursuits over physical activity, chores and other responsibilities, homework, or friends.

Why We Play—the Allure

In South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and now even the United States, video game adepts attain celebrity status. They prepare for com-

petitions like athletes train for the Olympics. Always searching for an edge over their opponents, they strive to perfect their grips on their controllers and fine-tune hand and arm posture. They choose one game and devote their lives to mastering it. These world-class gamers can look forward to prizes ranging from \$10,000 to upwards of \$250,000. They appear in magazines and on radio and TV interviews, and they are seen as role models. They game for greed, glory, and fame. The rest of us, however, game and use the Internet for reasons that are not so cut-and-dried.

No one model encompasses the wide array of reasons that we are consumed by our games or other digital technologies. Through working on myself and with other addicted video gamers and cyber junkies, I have discovered some common threads that link us together. Most gamers and cyber users I have encountered exhibit a combination of motivations, some of which, of course, overlap. There is nothing inherently unhealthy or wrong with any of these until the person's behavior tips toward addiction. When cyber activity becomes a substitute for material and relationship success, it also is becoming a potent means of evading what the individual sees as unpleasant realities.

FINDING COMMUNITY IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

The lack of community stands as one of the great sicknesses of the modern world. When I was growing up in the 1970s and early 1980s, people knew their neighbors. If one mother needed to run out to the store, her kids would simply go over to someone else's house until their mother returned. People would borrow an egg or a cup of sugar when they were making a cake. Most parents don't bake cakes anymore, and running out of a specific ingredient certainly means a trip to the store rather than a short walk to the next-door neighbor. We have become more self-sufficient, but also more separate.

Cyber junkies have developed our own remedies for this sad state of human interaction. On a daily basis, we chat with people in our cyber communities. We join gaming clans that

have members in Taiwan, India, Europe, Africa, and Australia. We become cyber friends with people from all over the globe. A friend of mine was a member of a Counter-Strike clan. A clan is a team of gamers who typically meet online at the same time every night to play together and challenge other clans. Some clans spend more than twenty hours a week “together,” making the contact time much more intensive than most real-time relationships. Although most of the people in these social relationships never meet in person, this is not always the case. My friend’s clan planned trips together all over the world, and although many of them had previously lacked social skills, somehow the game brought them together and allowed them to form tight bonds. This friend even took Spanish classes so he could communicate with a clan member from Spain. For him, the game was a source of inspiration.

Certainly this anecdote paints a rosy picture, but it demonstrates the communal and international nature of the cyber world. The absence of community in modern society motivates some of us to seek it online. For many, our cyber relations represent the first time that we have genuinely felt part of a group. Without some significant substitute, we will not easily relinquish these hard-earned connections.

Not only do online multiplayer games and social networking sites help us find a sense of community, but forming such relationships in the virtual world eliminates most of the effort required to create and maintain social networks. Gamers come home, log on to the computer, and have multiple messages waiting for them from their online buddies. They discuss strategy, and even support each other through life’s many difficulties. Some cyber users turn away from family and real-world friends to indulge online relationships, while others with poor social skills avail themselves of anonymous connections so that they do not feel isolated and alone. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with having online friends, but many cyber-addicted folks become far too dependent on connections with people they have never actually met. Their social skills stagnate.

ACHIEVEMENT

Video games provide many possibilities for success and triumph. Many who are drawn most strongly to gaming are those who lack other opportunities for achievement. We seek power and status from our games. We hunger for advancement through the different ages and levels. We want to progress with lightning speed. Our goal is beating the game as quickly as possible. For some people, creating a huge Facebook friend list can be seen as an achievement, while some MySpace users obsess on the achievement of having the “coolest” profile.

Gamers tend to be hypercompetitive, constantly on the lookout for a forum to prove ourselves. In my childhood years, exercising this competitive urge required foraging through the neighborhood to round up enough kids to play touch football, street hockey, or baseball. But now, millions of playmates are available simply by logging on to the computer. Players can now be “rounded up” from the entire world! For hours every night, competitive gamers test their skills repeatedly.

We often measure our self-worth against our performance in a certain game. One young man, Jay, came to see me in my capacity as an ADHD life coach. This troubled nineteen-year-old had extraordinarily low self-esteem. “I will never be what my parents want me to be,” he tearfully admitted during one of our sessions. “They think I’m going to become a doctor, but I’ve flunked calculus three times,” he said. Jay had failed to live up to just about every expectation his parents had for him. He considered himself a complete failure. His face would light up, however, when he recounted his streak of victories in Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart, two Nintendo 64 games he had completely mastered. I, too, am good at those old school games, and on several occasions, we played together—a technique I use to break the ice and create a bond. As we played, an arrogant and trash-talking young man emerged.

I only beat him once, but this event unsettled him. “You only beat me because I’m having a bad day,” he snapped. “I’ll come back tomorrow and show you how it’s done.” We never played

after that. His fragile self-esteem would not let him risk losing to me again. Video games gave him perhaps the only success he had ever had. He was a “somebody” in those games and had no intention of giving up that hard-earned status.

For players such as Jay, winning is the very definition of success. Other gamers measure accomplishment by accumulating the in-game symbols of wealth and rank, like gold, top-tier armor, or magic spells. They maintain interest in a game as long as the possibility for increasing status continues. In-game money is made by defeating monsters, mining and farming, or buying and selling goods. Players use the money to purchase upgrades and items that will be useful in later quests.

Some players short-circuit the arduous process of progression in the game by purchasing a game’s currency online with real-world money and using it to inflate their character’s power, status, or experience level. Several in-game currencies trade on eBay against the United States dollar. In the Far East, cyber entrepreneurs have established a sort of video game “sweat shop,” in which gamer-workers sit at computers and perform repetitive tasks in certain online games to amass virtual currency. This money is traded for real money online. Thus, players may buy their way to the top.

ESCAPE

The endless possibilities for achievement in today’s video games allow gamers to escape the sad lack of success or meaningful relationships in their lives. “I come home from work, plug in my PlayStation, and killing the bad guys lets me let go of the frustrations of the day,” said one participant at my cyber addiction group as he began his weekly personal inventory, which we call a check-in. “The trouble is that I can’t stop playing once I start.”

Online social networkers and Internet junkies can also be motivated by escape. Many who lack social skills and contacts throw themselves into the cyber world, amassing “friends” while they have little contact with real humans. But social networking and

the Internet provide some comfort and soothing. This comes at a price, however, because their focus on the Internet is an escape from dealing with the issues that prevent them from having the kinds of social lives they would really like to have.

For example, the man mentioned previously was able to release his stress through his PlayStation gaming, but he already had a troubled marriage and he stayed on his game instead of interacting with his wife. He found her to be very demanding. He told the group that she constantly needled him about doing household chores, making more money, and going to church. From his perspective, complying with one of his wife's requests only led to a host of others. Instead of counseling, he chose the cyber-male-bonding experience of *Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood*, a World War II squad-level simulation game. As he fought in the crumbling ruins of Bastogne to keep the Nazis at bay, his marriage crumbled. He escaped into a new reality instead of combating the difficulties in his own.

To some extent, all the gamers I see at my groups and in my coaching practice have issues in their lives that the cyber world helps them avoid. These issues are not the result of their excessive cyber activities, but rather are the factors that drive them to those activities in the first place. Many of these people never developed problem-solving skills. Others simply prefer a make-believe world.

MY STORY: STUCK IN A WORLD OF FANTASY

As a boy, I was usually bored out of my mind while sitting in school. I spent most of my time in a world of fantasy and imagination. Most of my flights of imagination revolved around being a military hero who saved the innocent or liberated the oppressed. Taking over the school was the theme of my self-aggrandizing daydreams. I played many characters. They interacted with each other in my mind; my thoughts switching from one persona to another.

continues

“Joe, how are we going to get through Sister Carol’s defense perimeter?” one of the commander’s underlings asked. “We’re going to have helicopters drop us on the roof,” Joe answered confidently, “and then we’re going to break through the skylights. They’ll be forced to take notice of us and meet our demands for longer recess and less homework.” I had conversations like these in my mind all day long. I believe this tendency underlies my strong attachment to video game playing. I believe video games represent for me, as for many, an attempt to escape from the dullness of everyday reality.

ROLE PLAYING

Most game enthusiasts thrive on fantasy. They increasingly identify with the characters they create and mold. Their online persona often possesses attributes that they wish they had in real life. An introvert lacking social skills allows him- or herself to be gregarious with a large group of in-game acquaintances. A physically weak individual controls a strong and powerful character. People who feel that their lives lack meaning perform with purpose in the game, defeating the wicked to protect the innocent. Fantasy is the addictive juice for role-playing-oriented individuals. They are driven by the opportunities to become someone else, to exist in a different time, or to live lives filled with meaning.

Role players often possess infinite patience, because acquiring interesting and advanced character attributes entails mind-numbing repetition. One may have to wander around one level and kill the same monster in the same way three hundred times to get enough experience to move up a level or enter a new maze. They gladly suffer the tedium because of the deep satisfaction the game gives them. “Instead of just watching a movie,” one rather philosophical role player told me, “I’m in it! What could be more exciting than that?”

Role players not only derive excitement from their games, they come to rely on them for social interaction.

Role playing, however, is not only a component in video games, but also in social networking. In social networking, users craft their profiles to project the image they want, and perhaps to which they aspire. Such an image may be very different than who they really are. Since much communication in social networking takes place not face-to-face but through technology (Internet, online chatting, texting), this image can be maintained until such time as an in-person meeting is arranged. Role playing is also often used during Internet dating. People use outdated pictures and lie about everything from weight and age to occupation and marital status. When it comes to Internet communication, deception is easy.

CONTROL

One of the ironies is that many cyber junkies who make their way to me and my support groups are the products of strict, albeit well-meaning, parents. “We really regulated computer and video game use when he was growing up,” a sixteen-year-old video game addict’s father earnestly told me. “And then around the age of thirteen, he started staying in his room by himself all the time, glued to RuneScape,” the boy’s father said, as he struggled to understand where he and his wife had “gone wrong.” Many teenagers evade excessive parental control by losing themselves in the alternate reality that video games provide. When we find a situation to be hopeless or beyond our powers to influence, we dissociate from that situation. We shut ourselves off from others in order to exist in a world where we have complete autonomy.

The cyber world is often a refuge for those whose lives have gone off track. Kyle’s parents came to see me after their bright and athletic son had slipped into depression. “He used to be so vivacious and involved,” his mother told me during a meeting I had with the whole family. “Now, his whole life centers on that game.” Kyle once participated in high school musicals, often landing the starring role because of his incredible voice. He played sports and was active in his family’s church.

Kyle went off to college, and shortly thereafter an illness prevented him from playing sports. He determined around the same time that he was never going to be a professional singer, so he gave up the theater. Stripped of the two loves of his life, he fell into depression and started playing an online game called *A Tale in the Desert*. In this game, set in ancient Egypt, players cooperate to build a civilization from scratch.

“The game made me feel like I was doing something, and I didn’t know what else to do,” Kyle told me. His former life in shambles, the game gave him a sense of power and purpose. As we discussed the situation, it became clear that Kyle wanted the same sense of flow and excitement that he had had in high school, but felt unable to forge a new chapter in his life. This lack of control lay beneath his addictive gaming binges. His healing process involved taking control of his life once again.

OUTLET FOR AGGRESSION

Many people maintain that video games produce violence. I believe, in contrast, that video games simply provide an outlet, albeit a sometimes unhealthy one, for preexisting aggressive tendencies. Many video games bring out traits that might otherwise lie dormant. I have witnessed, for example, seemingly calm teens turn irate and nasty while playing online shooting games such as *Call of Duty*. They talk trash, insulting their opponents (from the safety of their headsets) and attempting to incite them to anger. They hope that these tactics will throw opponents off balance and give them an edge. I know of several teens who enjoy the opportunities to talk trash more than they like playing the game itself. “It’s the only way I can get my anger out,” eighteen-year-old Victor told me. “I feel better after I play.”

Some players engage in a disturbing practice called *teabagging*. When killing an opponent’s on-screen character, they have their own character kneel down on top of the other character before the body disappears from the screen in a move designed to show dominance and, of course, to humiliate. I have

found several Web forum listings that offer advice on how best to perform this maneuver.

One fourteen-year-old, Tyler, admitted to me that he engaged in this practice. “I never had a way to get my anger out before,” he told me. “People make me so angry sometimes, but I never say anything. The game lets me get it out without actually hurting anyone.” I eventually learned that Tyler felt socially isolated and had been picked on a great deal in grade school. Video games did not produce his anger but rather gave him a way to express it.

Many of the young people who come to my groups—especially the males—have anger management issues alongside their excessive video gaming habits. Parents tell me stories of bashed-in walls, broken windows, and screaming episodes that occurred after a particularly poor performance in a video game. Although many parents blame video games for their child’s anger, I firmly believe that the anger existed long before they found a game that allowed them to focus and release it. Certain games give gamers an outlet for their anger, but unfortunately, most never develop the ability to express it in a healthy way. I have referred dozens of clients to therapists for anger management.

While those who excessively use social networking sites and the Internet do not, in my experience, suffer as a group from excessive anger issues, they do generally suffer from emotional avoidance. The obsessive behavior is done, in many cases, to avoid dealing with unpleasant emotional realities.

DISCOVERY

Chris does not care if he wins, loses, or draws. Satisfaction for this man comes from finding new twists to a game or uncovering a glitch that no one has yet discovered. Chris is the consummate observer and delights in discovering new sources of stimuli. As an example, he got fulfillment in the game *Legend of Zelda*, where he found that playing a flute in front of a certain stone in the game caused a fairy to appear who could heal his character. His find left him elated for a week.

Discovery-oriented gamers are engaged by novelty. They pursue every nook and cranny of the game to tease out any possibility of something new. This type of individual attains a certain achievement from having completed every possible permutation of the game. A discovery-oriented gamer is less concerned with quick completion of a game, but obsessed with attaining certainty that he or she has performed every possible task, quest, and challenge the game has to offer.

Chris, for example, does not rush through a game, but rather savors every opportunity to learn something new. A daydreamer in school, Chris spent little or no time on his homework, but was absorbed by *Legend of Zelda* for up to eight hours daily. His exploits became so well known in his neighborhood and at school that neighbor children and schoolmates used to drop by his house simply to watch him play. He visited realms in the games the other kids did not even know existed. He had hopes of becoming a professional gamer.

When tested by a psychologist, Chris's full-scale IQ was found to be 135, clearly in the gifted range. Unfortunately, his superior intelligence and penchant for discovery have not translated into success in real life. At the age of twenty-five, Chris lives at his mother's house and works at a movie theater. He is working with me on a plan to achieve some of the long-held aspirations that excessive gaming has prevented him from attaining.

For people such as Chris, video gaming is a substitute. Chris wants to feel fully alive, but he doesn't take the steps to make that happen. The fulfillment that he derives from games is actually an approximation of what he wants out of life. This fact can be applied to all addicted gamers. Our individual motivations for gaming may differ, but the root of why we game is the same. We seek games that give us some semblance of what we do not have in our real lives. Finding the right game for each individual's addictive profile gets easier and easier every year as the number of new games increases exponentially.

Like many video gaming addicts, Chris also spends a lot of time discovering "neat" things on the Internet. He is motivated

by the possibility of finding unusual Web sites, videos, and “little-known” information. Discovery is also a key element for many who obsessively surf the Internet.

Who We Are

It’s important to understand the types of individuals who are drawn to cyber activities. I ask you to suspend for a short time the effects of what the cyber world has done to your life or to your loved one. Step into our world for a brief time, and walk with us in our shoes. Cyber addictions are phenomena best understood from the inside.

WIZARDS OUT OF WATER

“The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper.”

—Eden Phillpotts

Many people write off cyber junkies as unproductive losers and perhaps even brand us as stupid. Quite the contrary, we are creative and imaginative souls. However, we fail to uncover a way to productively channel our gifts and form the human connections we crave. We dream of dynamic, purposeful, contact-filled, and exciting lives, but we just do not put together the steps needed to fulfill our vision. Movies such as *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter* strike a chord deep within us because we long for magic, an infusion of energy and focus that would allow us to actualize the brilliance we are certain we carry within.

Over years of working with cyber addicts, I have come to the conclusion that could-be future Nobel laureates are right now planted in chairs expending all of their intellectual and emotional resources into fruitless screen time. If you could peer into our minds, you would discover them bubbling over with insights and ideas. Find someone addicted to the cyber world, and you will often discover a person of superior intelligence. Many gaming

addicts I have encountered have a genius-level IQ. When this intelligent person was a student, you probably would have described him or her as an underachiever and perhaps peppered him or her with subtle but frequent shaming: “You’re so smart. I can’t believe you’re not getting all As in school.” You might have provided a litany of career choices you considered appropriate for someone with so much potential: “You should become a doctor, lawyer, or maybe even a nuclear physicist.”

Many of us, though, end up working menial jobs just to pay the bills so we can maximize cyber time and feel that connected surge within ourselves and the profound bond we experience with other players and “friends” from all over the world. Many of the adults among us are actually gainfully employed, only to come home to ignore our families, because to us they are annoying distractions. We shrink from career or relationship opportunities, but in the game we are smack dab in the middle of an international community, relating and connecting to others. We feel part of something larger than ourselves.

AN ALTERNATE REALITY

We are willing to go in any direction that takes us away from the dreariness of reality. For those of us who overindulge in online networking and communication such as email and texting, our real-world relationships leave us unsatisfied, so we prefer the ones we cultivate in cyberland. Since most of our online friends live far away, there is little chance that we will meet them and thus ruin the fantasy.

This alternate reality is most poignant when it comes to video games. Video games supply players with a parallel universe that allows us to indulge fantasies, fly off on imaginative tangents, and exercise supreme control over other worlds. We hunger for the feeling of being fully alive that eludes us in reality. When we are in the “game zone,” however, we enthusiastically enter a different dimension.

Time stands still for us as the challenges of the game inspire

us to bring forth our arsenal of exceptional abilities. With super-human perception, we identify the minutest of changes on our map board or gaming screen. We are capable of nonstop play for ten, fifteen, even twenty-four hours at a time. Although we have trouble organizing our bedrooms and closets or keeping track of important papers, we successfully manage entire economic systems in our games. We exercise steadfast patience as we lie in wait for our virtual adversaries to stumble into our clutches. We doggedly pursue the next reward or level in our games, sometimes taking months to achieve our goal. We gloss over many crucial details in our real lives, yet exhibit laser-like concentration on our electronic battlegrounds. We are the stars, the geniuses, the saviors of our cyber universe.

ASPERGER'S, ADHD, AND OTHER COMORBIDITIES

A high percentage of the folks I work with possess artistic and creative powers. They waste them, of course, sitting in front of a computer screen or television. An equally high percentage have either Asperger's syndrome (AS) or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I have found that both of these conditions seem to lend themselves to excessive video gaming.

When an addicted video gamer comes to one of my groups, 90 percent of the time there is a *comorbidity*, a fancy term meaning that two or more conditions exist in the same person. I have had a number of young people with AS, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and clinical depression attend my support groups.

Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism, is generally characterized by difficulties in social interaction as well as by restricted or limited areas of interest. Individuals with AS often have troubles in school similar to those with ADHD: organizing, maintaining focus, and long-term planning. The singular interest of many Asperger's kids I see is video games. I see them in action because we take video game breaks during my study groups.

Young people with AS experience a significantly greater intensity when playing video games than any other individuals I have

seen. When they play, they often breathe heavily. They gyrate in their seats and make jerky movements with their legs and arms when they get to crucial parts of the game. Their intensity while playing is often enough to unnerve other kids. They seem literally to merge with the game.

Given that AS folks usually struggle with social interaction, obsession with games is particularly troubling. One bright spot in this situation, however, is that if we can enter into their video game world, we have an opportunity to connect with them in a deep way.

An exciting study recently emerged from the annual meeting of the British Psychological Association. According to Dr. John Charlton of the University of Bolton in England and Ian Danforth of Whitman College in Washington State, "Gamers who appear to be addicted to playing computer/video games show some of the same negative personality traits as people with Asperger's syndrome."¹³ The main traits seen were neuroticism, and lack of extraversion and agreeableness. The researchers believe that these people do not have Asperger's syndrome but exhibit some of the same characteristics because they find it easier to empathize with computer systems than other people.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is a condition usually characterized by difficulty in a few key areas, such as maintaining concentration over long periods, planning, organizing, and completing tasks. Since these areas are all important for academic performance, those with ADHD often struggle in school. In my role as an ADHD coach, I help these individuals develop programs for success in school and their careers.

Given that approximately one-third of individuals with ADHD will eventually have a problem with substance abuse, it should come as no surprise that many of the people with ADHD whom I work with also suffer from video gaming addiction.¹⁴ Those with

ADHD have great difficulty with repetition and routine. Without going into a lot of neurological details, the baseline of activity in the ADHD brain is lower for routine and repetition. What is often termed distractibility comes from the fact that a person with ADHD quickly gets bored with stimuli and seeks new sources of stimulation. Edward Hallowell, in his book *Driven to Distraction*, explains how individuals with ADHD get distracted because they need to constantly seek new stimulation to keep their brains active.¹⁵ Video games provide a reliable source of constantly changing stimuli. Those with ADHD often become reliant on them.

Interestingly, I have been gathering data on how medication for ADHD impacts excessive cyber behaviors. Although more formal research is needed in this area, my initial findings through conversations and interviews with more than fifty students over the past four years strongly suggest that medication reduces excessive and compulsive cyber use among those with ADHD. One sixteen-year-old student of mine said, “When I take my meds, my hand-eye coordination is not as fast, so I don’t enjoy playing as much. Like when I play Blitz 2000, I get sacked a lot more when I’m on Adderall. I also don’t have the urge to play as much when I am on my meds.”

Bipolar disorder is a serious condition marked by highs and lows of mood, and serious swings in one direction or the other can be accompanied by hallucinations, delusions, sleep disturbances, psychosis, and extremely erratic behavior. Experts worry that the symptoms of bipolar disorder can be exacerbated by excessive video game play. I have had no less than a dozen clients come to me for excessive video gaming who later were diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Potential Benefits of Cyber Technology

The cyber world offers many positive aspects. I believe we need to learn to live with today’s technology, not banish it. Contrary to much of the recent negative press, video games, social networking, and other cyber activities offer many advantages.

VIDEO GAMES

“What we’ve found is that success as a business leader may depend on skills as a gamer.”

—Jim Spohrer, IBM research director

The world seems to be changing in favor of those who love video games. Our game skills correlate to heightened abilities in many fields. In a 2004 study of surgeons, for example, those who played video games for more than three hours a week were 37 percent less likely to make mistakes during a specific operation and finished the procedure 27 percent faster.¹⁶ This is no wonder, since many surgical techniques rely on a video interface to guide the surgeon’s hands. Laparoscopic surgery, for example, involves using a small camera and devices controlled by joysticks. Obviously, video game play enhances hand-eye coordination as well as visual precision and perception. Electronic battlefield monitoring makes video gamers ideal soldiers or sailors. Recruiting officers around the country have realized this fact for a decade, and the U.S. Army has designed its own video game to teach soldiers and prospective soldiers valuable military skills. Air Force predator drones are controlled from bunkers by operators using technology that looks and feels very much like a video game. As more jobs and tasks involve the worker interfacing with a screen, video game adepts will enjoy greater appreciation of their abilities.

Educational researchers tout the benefits of simulation and role-playing games because of the vocabulary, reasoning, and social skills they boost.¹⁷ Many teachers across the country now use educational video games in their classrooms as an interactive way to convey information. They have recognized the potential of this medium to more fully engage students in the learning process.¹⁸

Additionally, oncologists have tapped into the power of video games to get their young patients more involved in curing their disease. The game Re-Mission was developed specifically for young cancer patients. It is the first video game scientifically proven to improve therapeutic adherence and treatment success

for young people with cancer.¹⁹ Young people who played this game maintained higher blood levels of chemotherapy drugs versus the control group, as well as higher rates of adherence to cancer treatment regimens. Many studies show benefits for video games for elderly folks in maintaining physical and mental agility, as well as the potential for online social networking to help them keep in touch with friends and family and even make new friends. Possibilities for positive applications seem endless.

Most excessive gamers, however, fail to develop a positive and balanced relationship to games. Some of us temporarily stop gaming, but to keep from returning to games, we must find an adventure in the real world that is worthy of our skills. Luckily, the business environment is in the midst of change, and it may be that the world is starting to realize that it needs many of our abilities.

America's business leaders are beginning to take notice of the leadership potential of many online gamers. Millions of gamers play daily and compete in multifaceted virtual surroundings. These players organize, build skills, and function in many different roles. Leaders come forward who are competent in "recruiting, organizing, motivating, and directing large groups of players toward a common goal." They develop the ability to make decisions quickly, with imperfect information.²⁰ These individuals regularly take calculated risks based on information supplied by their team. Some corporations, seeking to develop more effective managers, already have virtual training modules designed to exploit these facets of online gaming. Geneva Trading, a stock and commodities firm in Chicago, uses video game simulations to assess potential recruits. Company president Mary McDonnell said, "It is unlikely that we would hire someone who didn't show good proficiency at a Game Boy or online poker or similar video-type game where hand-to-eye coordination is important."

Corporate environments also demand that managers skillfully diffuse conflict, as well as create an atmosphere of bold openness. Although excessive gamers often struggle socially, through online games they do develop these capacities as a matter of course:

In online games, perhaps because players are represented as avatars and are not face-to-face with each other, heated disagreements are common and accepted. Players even claim to become desensitized to group conflict over time. Perhaps this kind of passionate honesty has a place of value in the modern enterprise as well.²¹

This conclusion was reached by an intense study performed by none other than IBM, an icon of American business. Those who excel at video games have useful skills to offer the world. My work with addicted video gamers centers on helping them apply these skills in productive ways.

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Most people use social networking sites, texting, and online chatting (Yahoo!, MSN, and AOL instant messengers) simply to keep in touch with close friends. Families with loved ones fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan no longer have to wait for days or weeks to hear from them. Soldiers in the field often update their Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter accounts on a daily basis. This certainly makes it easier to bear the burden of long-term separation.

These tools make it easier to maintain and expand one's group of friends and contacts. Studies suggest that people with high self-esteem use these sites to communicate more effectively with their peer group, while those with lower self-esteem often use them to try to make their way into new social groups.²² Many succeed in achieving social compensation through social networking sites.

Emerging adults are using social networking sites to maintain large, diffuse networks of friends, with a positive impact on their accumulation of bridging social capital. Although it is tempting to consider these large networks of acquaintances as shallow, in reality these connections have true potential for generating benefits for users. Moreover, online social net-

work services appear to offer important [relationship-building potential], especially for those who otherwise face difficulties in forming and maintaining the large and heterogeneous networks of contacts that are sources of social capital.²³

People with no trouble making friends and those with social difficulties both use social networking sites to enhance their interpersonal connections. Nonprofit organizations use them to build their fundraising and volunteer networks, while politicians build electoral and donor followings through these media. Business people offer their services and find appropriate consultation through sites such as LinkedIn. University freshmen employ social networking sites in the weeks and months into their first term to find like-minded individuals with similar interests and values. Social networking sites offer almost limitless potential for bringing and keeping people together as well as enhancing preexisting relationships. For better or worse, they are revolutionizing human interaction.

The Next Step

Digital technology is here to stay, and its potential to transform many parts of our lives in positive ways is immense. Cyber obsessions, on the other hand, drain the world of vast reserves of talent. Our country currently lacks the understanding that would allow it to help the cyber-oriented individual take his or her rightful place as a responsible, respectable, and contributing member of society. Our goal must be not to simply get these folks to stop their excessive behavior, but rather to assist them in channeling their enormous potential into exciting and worthwhile pursuits.

In the next chapter, we go behind the scenes to learn more about the world that cyber junkies find so compelling.

choose your poison

“Why is it drug addicts and computer aficionados are both called users?”

Clifford Stoll, astronomer and writer

The title for this chapter includes the word *poison*, which is a reference to the fact that while the massive diversity of electronic devices carries many benefits, for some these devices become toxins that invade people’s lives and prevent them from growing, developing, and being happy. This chapter takes you through some of the ways that the cyber world becomes poisonous as well as discusses the reasons that predispose some individuals to this toxin.

Social Networking Basics

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites are generally offered free to users and generate income from advertising. They typically consist of a profile that contains personal information about the individual as well as a list of his or her extended network of friends on the system. High-tech sites such as Facebook also have a host of applications that users may use to develop their profiles. Many of these enhancements are zany and fun. On my Facebook profile, for example, I used an application entitled, “Which Theologian Are You?” I answered a series of questions which then determined that I was most like Menno Simons, the founder of the Mennonites. So his picture now figures on my Facebook profile.

About the Author

Kevin Roberts is a recovering video game addict who runs support groups to help cyber addicts who struggle to get their lives back on track. He is a nationally recognized expert on video gaming addiction and a regular conference speaker. His background is in education, and for the last eleven years he has been an academic coach, helping folks dealing with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder succeed in school and life. He is the curriculum developer and a board member of the EmpowerADD Project, which uses a sixteen-module program that is designed to give individuals with ADHD the skills they need to succeed.

Kevin speaks many foreign languages fluently and performs stand-up comedy at conferences and conventions. He is presently putting the finishing touches on a one-man show about his life. He speaks around the country about cyber addiction and ADHD.

Hazelden, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden offers a comprehensive approach to addiction that addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

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More and more people are isolating themselves, turning their backs on reality, ignoring their family and friends, and even losing their jobs due to their excessive use of video games and the Internet. In this groundbreaking book, Kevin Roberts gives compulsive gamers and surfers—and their family and friends—a step-by-step guide for recovery.

"With insight, compassion, and hope, Kevin Roberts helps us dive into the depths of the minds of these twenty-first-century addicts, and shows us how easily an innocent pastime can take control of your life, become your alternate reality, and make the real world your fantasy."

ARTHUR ROBIN, PH.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, Wayne State University School of Medicine

"If you've ever worried that you or another is spending too much time, energy, and money on video games, then *Cyber Junkie* is a must-read. Roberts will help you reconnect with reality, confront addiction, and avoid financial ruin, alienating your family, and wasting your potential."

GERALDINE MARKEL, PH.D., Author of *Defeating the 8 Demons of Distraction: Proven Strategies to Increase Productivity and Decrease Stress*

"Roberts clearly shows that the skills and aptitudes that make an individual a cyber adept can also lead to lucrative and challenging careers."

JOHN EVERINGHAM, PH.D., Co-editor of *Breaking the Shackles: Bringing Joy into Our Lives*



Kevin Roberts is a recovering video game addict who offers help through support groups to assist others struggling with cyber addiction to get their lives back on track. He is a nationally recognized expert on video gaming addiction and a regular conference speaker. *Cyber Junkie* is his first book.

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