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**ENGLISH/ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
HIGHER TIER  
UNIT 1 (READING)**

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**Resource Material**

# At war with *World of Warcraft*: an addict tells his story

*Former video game addict, Ryan Van Cleave, almost lost everything as his life became consumed by gaming.*

At the height of his addiction Ryan Van Cleave had little time for his real life. *World of Warcraft*, a fantasy role-play computer game, dominated everything: his wife and children, his job as an English teacher. Before classes or late at night while his family slept, he would squeeze in time on his computer. He would often eat alone at the computer. Meals often consisted of microwave packets, energy drinks, foods that needed only one hand, leaving the other free to work the keyboard and mouse.



To Ryan Van Cleave, *World of Warcraft* seemed better than everyday life, especially when that life involved constantly arguing with his wife about how much time he spent on the computer. "Playing *World of Warcraft* made me feel like a god," Van Cleave wrote. "I had total control and could do what I wanted with few real consequences. The real world, in comparison, made me feel useless ..."

*World of Warcraft* had entered Van Cleave's life seven years before. Life for the Van Cleave's should have been perfect. He had landed his dream job and his wife, Victoria, was pregnant. But already gaming was taking its toll: he and his wife were late for her first scan because Van Cleave was playing a football game.

Soon, Van Cleave played *World of Warcraft* for entire weekends, stealing away to the computer while his family were sleeping or while his parents played with his daughter. Victoria was disgusted that her husband could abandon her and their new baby for a computer game.

Eventually, Van Cleave's life began to fall apart. He began to feel that people at work disliked him and wanted him gone. But he didn't try to make things better, he buried himself in *World of Warcraft*, the only place he felt he could control.

For millions who play, games like *World of Warcraft* are hard to resist. Playing makes the gamer feel like a star in a science fiction movie. But *World of Warcraft* doesn't end. It goes on and on, with characters roaming through different worlds and meeting new characters along the way. To Van Cleave, the game became an obsession. "When I reached the top of one exciting world, the game makers offered new characters and more items to collect. You can never get enough."

The effects of some computer games are not to be taken lightly. Over the past five years, stories in the media have described people suffering from exhaustion and eyesight strain after playing games like *World of Warcraft* for 50 hours straight. On rare occasions, gamers have suffered from obsessional behaviour patterns such as paranoia and insomnia. In some sad cases, addicted parents have neglected their children while mesmerised by computer games.



Van Cleave insists that video game addiction is similar to gambling addiction. By the time his second baby was born in 2007, Van Cleave was playing for 60 hours a week. A few months later, his employers did not renew his contract and he found himself out of work.

It was New Year's Eve 2007 when Van Cleave finally acknowledged something was wrong. He had been gaming for 18 hours straight and was not feeling well. That night he decided to take control of his life. He immediately deleted the game from his computer. For the next week his stomach and head hurt and he was drenched in sweat – like an addict withdrawing from drugs.

Staying away from *World of Warcraft* was difficult, but he did not reinstall the game. Once the withdrawal symptoms and headaches stopped, he started rebuilding his life. His wife said, "At first I didn't believe him. I had heard it all before and had no confidence that he would stop."

Van Cleave started to focus on his professional life. He wrote poems and books for young adults. He wrote the story of his addiction, *Unplugged*, which was published last year. Now he works at a top university for video game designers. Van Cleave knows his students spend much of their lives online and he worries about them. "I don't think video games are evil," he said. "That's not what I'm saying at all. I think games are fine but only if they are part of a balanced life."

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