

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

IN THE NEAR FUTURE, VIRTUAL REALITY IS GOING TO MAKE YOU WORK UP A SWEAT

▶ A few years ago, a team of scientists set out to prove a stereotype: Gamers are all fat, depressed losers. This was during the stratospheric rise of *World of Warcraft*, a game so consuming and addictive that players barely left their computers. The video game industry tried honorably to fight the

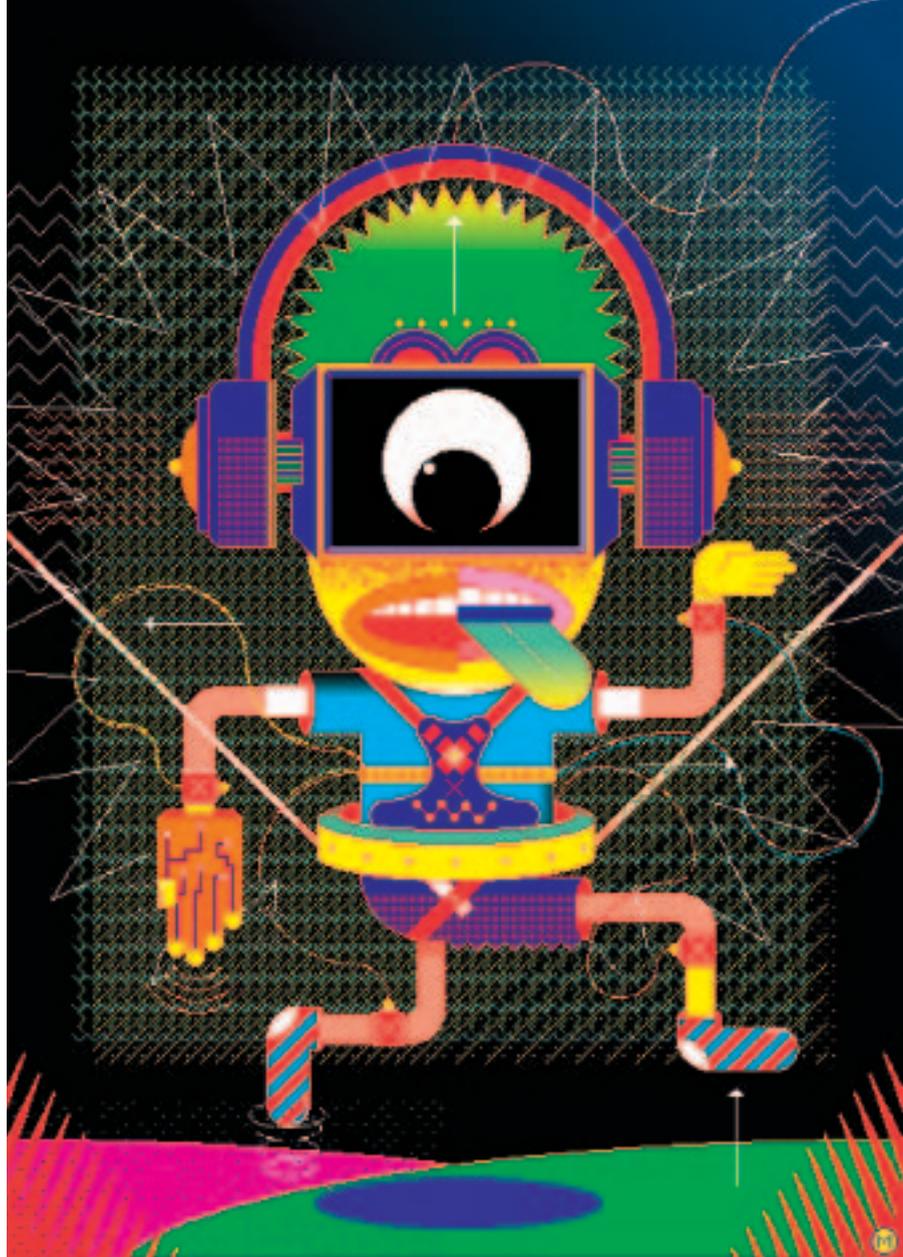
if you didn't reach your goals, your adorable avatar would simply stare back at you, hands on hips, reflecting years of self-loathing in its wide, lifeless eyes. But what if you could combine the thrill of playing *Call of Duty* (or a zombie slayer or gun-toting theoretical physicist) with physical exercise?

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The first step is the Oculus Rift, a virtual-reality headset created by Oculus VR, a company Facebook acquired for \$2 billion. The headset hasn't hit shelves yet, but it has already inspired independent developers to create accessories for it. The most promising is the Cyberith Virtualizer, an omnidirectional treadmill equipped with motion sensors. Instead of hitting keystrokes, you control a character's actions with your movements, allowing you to jump, crouch or fire a weapon in your living room.

trend with such products as Nintendo's *Wii Fit*, an exercise game aimed at combating this sedentary life-style and getting you off your lazy ass. The problem, though, was that playing *Wii Fit* felt like exercise, and

"Games have always stood apart from other media as a way



to interact with fictional worlds instead of being a passive observer," says Oculus VR co-founder Palmer Luckey. "In the more distant future, the majority of games will be designed with VR in mind." He isn't talking

sci-fi. Sony, Microsoft and HTC are already gearing up to release their own virtual-reality products in the next year or so, and for other indie developers such as Sixense and PrioVR, the creation of full-body motion controllers—either handheld or strapped directly to your body—is the next step. Soon you'll be able to kick and punch through games like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty*. In effect, you will become the simulation.

"For many years we've defined our experience as the piece of geometry in front of us," says Ted Schilowitz, a futurist

who is creating virtual-reality experiences for 20th Century Fox. Schilowitz predicts a time when there will be no physical displays, only virtual ones. We'll be wearing our technology, barely aware it's there. "In a few years it will be hard to separate if this is really happening to you or if it's something artificial," he says.

The future sounds exciting—and a little terrifying. Let's hope the machines don't take over when we're living in the Matrix. Spending our lives strapped to a chair definitely doesn't sound like the best workout regimen. —Katherine Brodsky

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something close to Ultra. The 55-inch model (\$999, vizio.com) is the best bargain, but the

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