

Late into the final battle, every decision is a matter of life or death. Victory or tragedy. I, Hera, the queen of Olympus, launch bursts of energy towards all enemies in front of the opposing god's Titan: their life force. Sweat drips down my skin as I push forward fueled by adrenaline and surrounded by gods on my side of the war. Looking around, I shout out the position of the enemies as we advance in a group to attack the Titan that towers over us. The pounding of my heartbeat and the footsteps around me form the rhythm of our attack. Every beat is a slash of Thanatos's scythe striking the Titan and Neith's arrows hitting the weak spots of our objective. As I conjure a bright blue shield radiating with energy around me and companions, my ally Gilgamesh leaps forward to distract the enemy from stopping us. Tension radiates through the air, and desperation shines on the faces of my foes. However, they are too weak to stop us. Their Titan falls to its knees. The echoing boom is a testament to our triumph.

The Victory screen pulls me into reality.

I am no longer Hera, an all powerful goddess. I'm a girl desperately clutching onto my Xbox controller after a stressful ending to a match of the video game *Smite*. My heart is beating, not from having to fight for my life, but from making sure I pressed the right buttons for the perfect ability combo. Every second is one that the world comes back into focus. In reality, the mythological figures of Thanatos, Neith, and Gilgamesh were my cousin and brothers cloaked in the skin of digital characters. They are my inspiration. Growing up, I would sit and watch with child-like wonder as they slayed the monsters on the screen. One day I picked up the controller to try for myself and was captivated. Hours pass by in the blink of an eye as I'm lost in the images on the screen.

Every time I press play with the button A I'm transported into the reality of my choice. The storytelling and immersion that captures my attention combines with the connections formed

with teammates to compel me to start another match. Just like the ending to my last game of *Smite*, communication controls the outcome of multiplayer games. When one little mistake can set your team on the path towards failure, you have to work together. Constant plans are produced to defeat the enemy making it necessary to explain information as effectively as possible. The pressure of time forces me to describe ideas and enemy positions quickly and precisely. I constantly talk to my teammates to ensure our coordination is perfect. No one is left without guidance and directions. Even after a match is over, the discussion is never done. Debating what went wrong and where we could improve individually and as a group is just as important as teamwork in the middle of a fight. I thrive off of all these intricate interactions.

On a regular day with my Xbox at home powered off, the influence from video games is as bright as the screen I play on. Last school year, my best friend was struggling to understand her AP Calculus class. When I went to explain the concept and process of derivatives, the words flowed from my mouth as steady as the rhythm of a coordinated attack. There was no hesitance in my explicit responses that guided her on the path to comprehension. I will forever strive to replicate the spark that appeared in her eyes—the little bit of realization that led to improvement. It may not be a matter of life or death like for the characters I control, but clear communication can mean the world to someone just trying to understand.