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Matthew Jungsuk Howard

May, 2018

ESPORT: PROFESSIONAL *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS* AS CULTURAL HISTORY

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in History

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## Abstract

This thesis offers a preliminary cultural-historical investigation of professional *League of Legends* using Tygielian sport history methodology. *League*'s massive popularity brought esports greater visibility, and laid bare cultural-historical currents that explain the current historical moment. The game's global nature, enabled by Web 2.0's globalizing effects and breakneck speed, makes it a powerful lens for cultural-historical analysis. First, *League* confirmed South Korea's status as the center of the esports world, and the state of the game reflects certain Korean cultural and economic cultural currents. Second, *League*'s pros go by usernames that they choose. These names follow naming traditions that are established across esports through gaming subculture, enabling the mapping of cultural connections through their cultural weight. Thirdly, *League* sheds light on the roots of sexism in geek and gaming culture, which manifests in the form of assumptions about women's roles and abilities in-game. Finally, *League*'s community illustrates the problem of censorship that Web 2.0's convenient distribution platforms and sharing culture have created. Community centralization has made it easy for journalism and content creation to be compromised by corporate interest and community hostility.

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“You must understand, young Hobbit, it takes a long time to say anything in Old Entish. And we never say anything unless it is worth taking a long time to say.”

-J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

## Introduction

### A Competition: The New Spectator Sports

*“It’s not a sport – it’s a competition...Mostly, I’m interested in doing real sports.*

*-John Skipper, CEO of ESPN on esports*

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012, before the eyes of 1.15 million concurrent viewers, a miracle was unfolding. An unheralded team from Taiwan was facing off against a star-studded squad from South Korea with a world championship on the line. The Koreans were widely lauded for their superior teamwork and the quality of their roster. Their Taiwanese opponents had enjoyed an unheralded start to their miraculous run to the finals. They finished it as champions, crushing their heavily favored Koreans 3-1 in a best-of-five series. The underdogs ruled the day.<sup>1</sup>

Those 1.15 million people were watching the World Championship for developer Riot Games’ *League of Legends* (2009), a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) computer game. While its viewership was nowhere near American football’s Super Bowl, the *League of Legends* World Championship in 2012 almost doubled the previous record for esports (pronounced E-sports),<sup>2</sup> or professional competitive video gaming, viewership with 1.1 million peak concurrent viewers.<sup>3</sup> A year later, “Worlds,” as it is known among *League of Legends* viewers, drew 8.2 million unique viewers for its finals, a 713% increase from the year before. In 2014, the finals drew 11.2 million, and in 2015 that number climbed to 14 million people, which was comparable

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Breslau, “League of Legends Season 2 Championships most watched eSports event of all time,” *Gamespot*, October 22, 2012, <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/league-of-legends-season-2-championships-most-watched-esports-event-of-all-time/1100-6398663/>.

<sup>2</sup> I will be spelling “esports” without a hyphen or lowercase e and uppercase s, as this falls more in line with current iterations of the spelling. It is by no means standardized, and may yet change several times before a consensus spelling is reached.

<sup>3</sup> 567,000 people concurrently watched the Valve’s *Dota 2* event, The International, a few months earlier.

viewership to game 5 of the 2015 World Series of Baseball that year. October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012 clearly marked a watershed moment for this kind of spectator sports: the esports.<sup>4</sup>

It seems inevitable that video games would eventually become spectator sports. Many of them, such as those based on traditional sports like football or basketball, encourage direct competition between players. Other games with scoring metrics, such as pinball and other arcade classics, encourage indirect competition via leaderboards listing the top scores ever recorded. The central truth is that despite the prevalence of classic single-player games like *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), video gaming has a pronounced competitive streak. Esports are simply the next step in upping that competitive ante and reflect the historical evolution of spectator sport in the Web 2.0 era.

*League of Legends* was not, however, the first esports by any means. High level competition had been around since id Software's *Quake* (1996), which pioneered internet-based multiplayer and spawned a grassroots esports of its own, constructed and supported by enthusiastic fans.<sup>5</sup> Esports that involved players from across the world were pioneered by Blizzard Entertainment's *StarCraft: Brood War* (1998), which at its peak was broadcast live on Korean television channels in both Korean and English. What set *League of Legends* apart from

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Pallotta and Brian Stelter, "Super Bowl 50 audience is third largest in TV history," *CNN Money*, February 8, 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/02/08/media/super-bowl-50-ratings/>  
Rod Breslau, "Money, fame, and Dota 2: An interview with Valve's Erik Johnson," *Gamespot*, September 27, 2012, <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/money-fame-and-dota-2-an-interview-with-valves-erik-johnson/1100-6397263/>  
Dustin Beck, "One World Championship, 32 million viewers," *League of Legends*, November 19, 2013, <http://na.leagueoflegends.com/en/news/esports/esports-editorial/one-world-championship-32-million-viewers>  
Riot Games, "Worlds 2014 by the Numbers," *Riot Games*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.riotgames.com/articles/20141201/1628/worlds-2014-numbers>  
Whalen Rozelle, "Worlds 2015 Viewership," *LoL Esports*, December 9, 2015, [http://www.lolesports.com/en\\_US/articles/worlds-2015-viewership](http://www.lolesports.com/en_US/articles/worlds-2015-viewership)  
Dominic Patten, "'World Series' Ratings Hit 12-Year Game 5 Viewership High, 'SNF' Wins Night With 23M Viewers," *Deadline*, November 2, 2015, <http://deadline.com/2015/11/world-series-ratings-royals-mets-sunday-night-football-broncos-packers-nbc-fox-1201603452/>

<sup>5</sup> T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 6.

either of its predecessors was its role in the more recent explosion in the popularity of esports.

The esports world is now home to many games, such as Blizzard's *Overwatch* (2016) and Valve Software's *Dota 2* (2013) and *Counterstrike: Global Offensive* (2012). The esports of today are broadcast internationally to audiences that at times number tens of thousands of live spectators and millions online. *League* was at the forefront of this surge.

I call the most recent surge in esports popularity, signaled by Worlds in 2012, the Third Wave of Esports. The First Wave was the largely grassroots movement pioneered by *Quake* fans in the late 1990s, and the Second Wave was the height of *StarCraft: Brood War* and its successor *StarCraft II*'s popularity from 1998-2012. All of these waves bleed into each other. QuakeCon, the biggest *Quake* tournament in North America, for example, still occurs annually, and *StarCraft II*'s World Championship Series is still a relevant esports league, but each of the iconic games of the first and second era have taken a back seat to *League*'s popularity and visibility. The game has reached heights as a spectator sport of which its predecessors could not have dreamed.

The popularity of esports like *League of Legends* was reflected in a survey by market research firm, Newzoo, which specializes in research on the video game, esports, and mobile industries. On October 12, 2016, the firm reported that 22% of male millennials, in a sample of 60,000 people from 27 countries, watched esports at least once per month.<sup>6</sup> This was substantially more than those who watched ice hockey regularly and only marginally less than those who watched baseball regularly (Figure 1). Newzoo's report also stated that 40% of esports viewers do not play the games that they watch. Further, if esports made as much revenue

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<sup>6</sup> Millennials refers to people between the ages of 21 and 35.

per fan as basketball does, they would make up a 2.5 billion dollar industry.<sup>7</sup> The rise in popularity has resulted in a rise in the visibility of esports as well. Esports journalism is now represented on large websites such as *ESPN*.

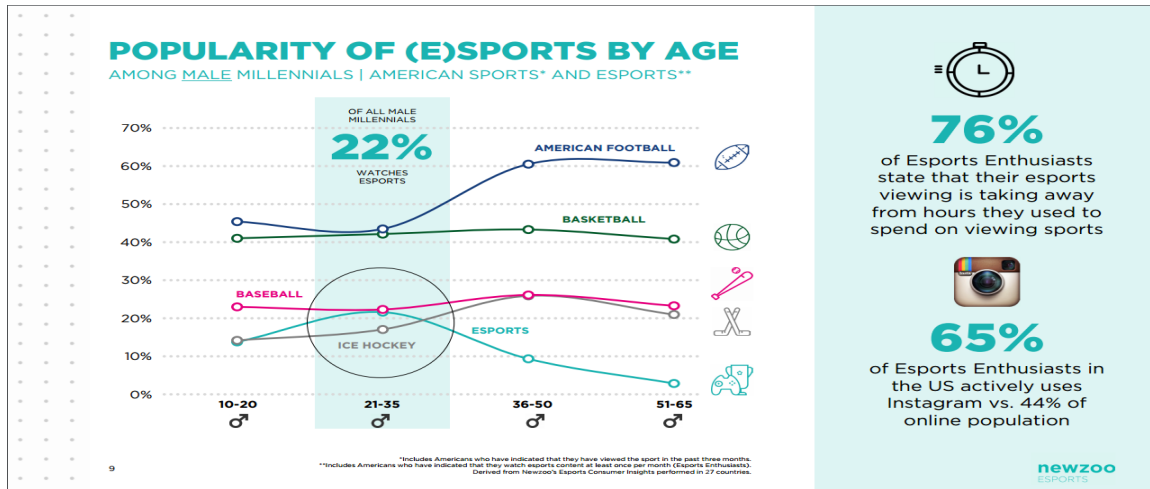


Figure 1.1: An Excerpt from Newzoo's Market Research on Esports

The explosion in esports viewership has also triggered a surge in debate over whether or not esports qualified as sports. While I personally have very little interest in the debate itself, a simple Google search illustrates its pervasiveness, yielding millions of results from a range of sources, including *CNN* and the *BBC*. The arguments revolve largely around the physical demands of esports, the amount of practice required of esports players, and differing definitions of sport and leisure. However, the debate is also colored by a combination of nerd shaming and strong desires to maintain a barrier between traditional sports, such as soccer or basketball, and esports. Notably, *ESPN* president John Skipper bluntly stated in 2014 that, “[Esports is] not a sport—it’s a competition. Chess is a competition. Checkers is a competition. Mostly, I’m

<sup>7</sup> “Newzoo | Games, Esports & Mobile Market Intelligence,” *Newzoo*, Accessed October 22, 2016, <https://newzoo.com/>.

“NEWZOO\_Why\_Sports\_and\_Brands\_Want\_to\_Be\_in\_Esports.1.0,” *Newzoo*, October 12, 2016.

interested in doing real sports.” Ironically, these comments parallel the place of sport history within the historical field. University of Queensland social historian Martin Crotty astutely wrote in the *Journal of Sport History* that, “...it is rather easier for social/military historians than for sports historians, as very few people question the worth of looking historically at a people at war, but plenty still, regrettably, question the worth of looking at people at play.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, in studying *League of Legends* historically, I recognize that I am undertaking a task whose relevance is filtered through many layers of subjective judgment, and whose place, even in the social landscape of play, is still greeted with a sort of incredulity that leans toward contestation in the public sphere. Despite their success as spectator sports, it is clear that esports continue to battle with their proximity, real or perceived, to the embattled past of video gaming.

Social stigma or no, *League of Legends* can be approached historically by using a combination of traditional sport history methodology and theories from other disciplines like communications and rhetoric. The late baseball historian Jules Tygiel wrote in his book, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (2000), that that game, “...has reflected broader changes in society and maintained a special place in American culture.”<sup>9</sup> In a similar way, the emergence and history of *League of Legends* illustrates an entirely new phenomenon whose current level of popularity and polish is only possible through Web 2.0, the second iteration of the internet, which is characterized by the overwhelming presence of social media and user-generated content like blogs and YouTube channels. *League*’s emergence reflects the evolving means of

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Young, “Seven-figure salaries, sold-out stadiums: Is pro video gaming a sport?” *CNN*, May 31, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/31/sport/esports-is-professional-gaming-a-sport/>. iWonder, “Is computer gaming really sport?” *BBC*, accessed November 4, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zygq2hv>.

Dawn Chimielewski, “Sorry, Twitch: ESPN’s Skipper Says eSports ‘Not a Spot,’” *recode*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.recode.net/2014/9/4/11630572/sorry-twitch-espns-skipper-says-esports-not-a-sport>. Martin Crotty, “Sport, Popular Culture, and the Future: Some Commentary,” *Journal of Sport History* 40, no. 1 (Spring, 2013), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000) xi.

expression, the construction of new cultural identities and stereotypes, and the continuing evolution of spectator sport as a whole.

In order to conceptualize the history of a video game spectator sport, I consulted a variety of secondary sources. While there were only a handful of books that dealt with esports specifically and only one that dealt tangentially with *League of Legends*, there were numerous works very useful to the investigation. The first two were traditional sport histories: Christopher S. Thompson's *The Tour de France* (Second Edition, 2008) and Tygiel's *Past Time: Baseball as History* (2000).<sup>10</sup> These two books are both works that illustrated the ways in which spectator sports are shaped by the societies that they inhabit. For Thompson, this meant showing the Tour de France as a reflection of the evolution of French masculinity, heroism as suffering and sacrifice, and rising political and economic currents in the sporting news industry. For Tygiel, this meant an examination of the evolving relationships between players and owners as workers and bosses, the creation of geographical ties between teams and populations, and the place of baseball at the center of racial tensions in a slowly desegregating America. Importantly, both of these works cited evolutions in communication technology and methods that shaped the way that baseball and cycling evolved as spectator sports. This last point provides a vital link between traditional sports as they evolved in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and esports like *League of Legends* that flourished during the age of the recreational internet.

Another key field of study was memetics, or the study of the dispersion of culture through societies in the form of memes – small packets of cultural information passed between individuals, such as ideas, tunes, or techniques. While the term “meme” is certainly recognizable to the Web 2.0 audience, the field of memetics actually began with the publication of Richard

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher S. Thompson, *The Tour de France* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2006, 2008).

Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976).<sup>11</sup> In it, Dawkins laid out a model of cultural change based on genes and DNA.

“I think a new kind of replicator has recently emerged on this very planet...It is still in its infancy, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup, but already it is achieving evolutionary change at a rate that leaves the old gene panting far behind.

The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*...I hope that my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*.

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions...Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”<sup>12</sup>

Memetics is the study of this imitation process and the propagation of memes throughout societies. Dawkins' work provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which the more familiar memes, typically pictures with funny captions that are imitated and redistributed through the internet, are passed along. His model also stipulates that genes, and thus memes, are propagated not by the species, but by the individual. While the abstract nature of such a claim makes it a bit difficult to follow, it does still hold water in examinations of the cultural twists and turns of *League*. Catchier or funnier jargon, for example, typically becomes accepted vernacular and reflects the tastes and dispositions of the larger community of discourse.

While Dawkins' work provided the raw theory that helped shape parts of my examination of *League* subculture, it was actually a much smaller, less renowned book on memes that proved most useful to this investigation. Limor Shifman, a communications and journalism professor at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, published *Memes in Digital Culture* in 2014.<sup>13</sup> Shifman,

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Second Edition 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Dawkins 192

<sup>13</sup> Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014).



in examining internet memes in particular, stated that Web 2.0 society operates under a “hypermeme logic.”

“Like many Web 2.0 applications, memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets. The term describes cultural reproduction as driven by various means of copying and imitation – practices that have become essential in contemporary digital culture. In this environment, user-driven imitation and remixing are not just prevalent practices: they have become highly valued pillars of a so-called *participatory culture*.”<sup>14</sup>

This argument proved extremely important for understanding *League* subculture. As Web 2.0 entities, *League* and its spectator sport exist within a framework of jargon and vernacular that changes rapidly as older memes become less ironclad. One example is the case of the North American team, Counter Logic Gaming, which had many memes associated with it because of their status as a team with dubious management and poor showings in pressure situations. When the team won back-to-back North American regional championships, however, much of that old meme-based jargon disappeared because it was no longer relevant.

Shifman also succinctly summarized one of the key governing concepts of *League* culture during her introduction: “In a time marked by a convergence of media platforms, when content flows swiftly from one medium to another, memes have become more relevant than ever to communication scholarship.”<sup>15</sup> This conclusion is also useful to this study because *League* reflects such a convergence. This next step in the evolution of communications media directly connects the current history of *League of Legends* to the rapid transformations in traditional sports seen in Tygiel and Thompson’s works.

The spectator sport, *League of Legends*, and by relation, this work, illustrate this convergence of media writ large. The majority of my own primary research is a result of content

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<sup>14</sup> Shifman 4

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 7

analysis on a variety of media that fall outside of the typical historical body of research. In my bibliography, you will find discussion forum posts from Reddit and the *League of Legends* website, blog posts, articles in online publications, images, social media posts, and a large number of YouTube videos whose content range from speculation to interviews to debates, talk shows, and video blogs (or vlogs). This mixed bag of media reflects the communications connection to this spectator sport.

The mass of converging media does not, however, signal a complete drought of scholarly work on esports. While I have yet to uncover a book that has dealt exclusively with *League of Legends*, two notable scholarly books and one other book are key to this study. The first scholarly work is Simon Fraser University communications professor Jin Dal Yong's<sup>16</sup> *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* (2010).<sup>17</sup> This book was written two years before *League's* explosive entry into the international esports scene, but is valuable for Jin's examination of the place of online gaming, and by necessity esports, in South Korean culture and politics. His painstaking outlines of the integration of media and online video gaming, as well as Korea's rapid adoption of new trends and technologies, provide a strong basis for this thesis' examination of South Korean esports and *League of Legends*. Jin's work's usefulness is limited, however, by its tangential connection to esports. While professional gaming appears in the work, his actual scope is online gaming as a whole.

The second scholarly book that I used in this study was T.L. Taylor's *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (2012).<sup>18</sup> Whereas Jin examined esports as a symptom of Korea's fascination and specialization in online gaming, Taylor

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<sup>16</sup> This is a Korean name, so I have taken the liberty of reordering it to match Korean naming conventions.

<sup>17</sup> Dal Yong Jin, *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Taylor

examined esports for esports' sake alone, delving into the world of the professionalization of video game players and the development of fan bases within the spectator sports. The MIT professor of sociology delved into many facets of esports, from the debate over their validity as sports, particularly as it related to the development of specialized skills and professionalization, to the ethnography of esports players, gender, and the technical aspects of the industry itself. However, the most important thing that Taylor examined was the identification of a particular set of geek values based on deep passion for and mastery over a skill in science, technology, or gaming that formed the basis of many social phenomena in geek communities, like that of *League*. These values are a useful lens through which to consider the formulation of celebrity within the *League* community – an essential aspect of this study. Taylor's depth of work is a compliment to her work ethic, particularly, as she wrote herself, "This work has also been challenging in terms of my own relationship with the field. Unlike my prior research on virtual worlds and massively multiplayer online games, I never felt myself become a natural inhabitant of the e-sports community."<sup>19</sup> The distance between Taylor and the larger esports community was key to her investigation, as it prompted her to ask questions that an industry insider might not.

However, it is ironic, and unfortunate, that Taylor's work was published in 2012, just months before the record setting *League of Legends* world finals in October that heralded esports' Third Wave. She wrote in her introduction that, "Indeed, writing a book about professional computer gaming at the same moment in which casual and Facebook games are all the rage is perhaps wildly out of step with our cultural moment."<sup>20</sup> It is clear now that Taylor was simply just a bit too far ahead of the cultural moment for which she was searching. Her first

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 29

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 2

stated purpose in the book was to determine, "...whether or not this is a story about a phenomenon in ascendance, a wave of the future for media, leisure, and indeed sports in general, or if we are witnessing a significant downturn in a domain that will pretty much always remain a niche activity for a small portion of gamers."<sup>21</sup> That uncertainty, colored by the timing of her research, was assuaged some months later, and perhaps would have very much changed the tone of her book.

All in all, the body of literature for the sport history of *League of Legends* is rather scattered. The lack of a scholarly work specifically on either esports or *League of Legends* as history has afforded me the opportunity to go bravely where no historian has yet gone. As such, I have endeavored to historically orient the phenomenon that is *League of Legends* esports within a sport historical framework that reflects Web 2.0's cultural changes.

In order to do this, I have split this work into two parts. The first part is focused on the extraordinary case of Korea's rise in the esports world and how its relationship with the games it dominates reflects and expresses particularities of Korean culture and economy. In addition, Korea's dominance created an esports whose international ecosystem responds to the actions and advantages of one of its many regions over all others. No other part of the world affects professional *League* as much as Korea does.

Part II focuses on *League* as cultural history, and tackles the way that culture functions in an online Web 2.0 subculture. This includes an examination of usernames as the unique points of contact between players and their audiences, as well as the sexism and underrepresentation from women in *League*'s esports community. Finally, Chapter 5 examines journalism and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid 2

censorship in *League*'s esports coverage, as well as uneven power dynamics that Web 2.0 helped create in this community.

These five chapters will, I hope, represent a first, tentative step into a more academic approach to understanding *League of Legends* and other esports in the Web 2.0 world. This is, I believe, an area of study that can impart great insight into the societal changes that mass media and the internet have stimulated. Further, as my conclusions will show, the study of esports as a subsection of sport history is also indicative of changes in the field of spectator sport as a whole. It is, however, ironic that it is the widespread adoption of a completely artificial spectator sport that has become the natural progression.

## **A Brief Overview of *League of Legends***

I recognize that *League of Legends* is not a widely recognized game in the larger academic realm. Despite its massive popularity, it remains a subculture that appeals to a particular group of people, and as such, it is necessary to provide some context on how the game works.

*League* is a five-versus-five, team-based game that, at the professional level, is played on a single map called Summoner's Rift. The map is populated by a pair of structures called nexuses, and each team's objective is to destroy their opponent's nexus while protecting their own. There are three main pathways between the nexuses, called lanes, and each of these lanes is defended by three towers per team. The nexuses periodically create weak units called minions that move through the lanes toward the enemy base, stopping to fight other minions, enemy players, or enemy towers. Beyond the lanes, there is an area of the map called the jungle, where stronger monsters appear. These remain in place unless attacked. The map also has a Fog-of-War effect, by which players cannot see whether or not enemy champions are lurking in parts of the map that they, a teammate, or a friendly minion cannot see.

Each player selects a unique character, called a champion, which acts as their avatar in the game for its duration. At the professional level, there is a snaking draft before each game in which each team takes turns banning and choosing five champions each. Between the five bans and five picks per team, twenty champions are chosen during this draft, either to be designated off-limits or chosen for the team.

In-game, players can make their champion stronger by slaying enemy minions, the jungle monsters, towers, or enemy players. All of these award in-game gold and experience points,

similarly to rewards in a tabletop game like *Dungeons & Dragons*, which the player uses to level up and buy items that enhance their chosen champion.

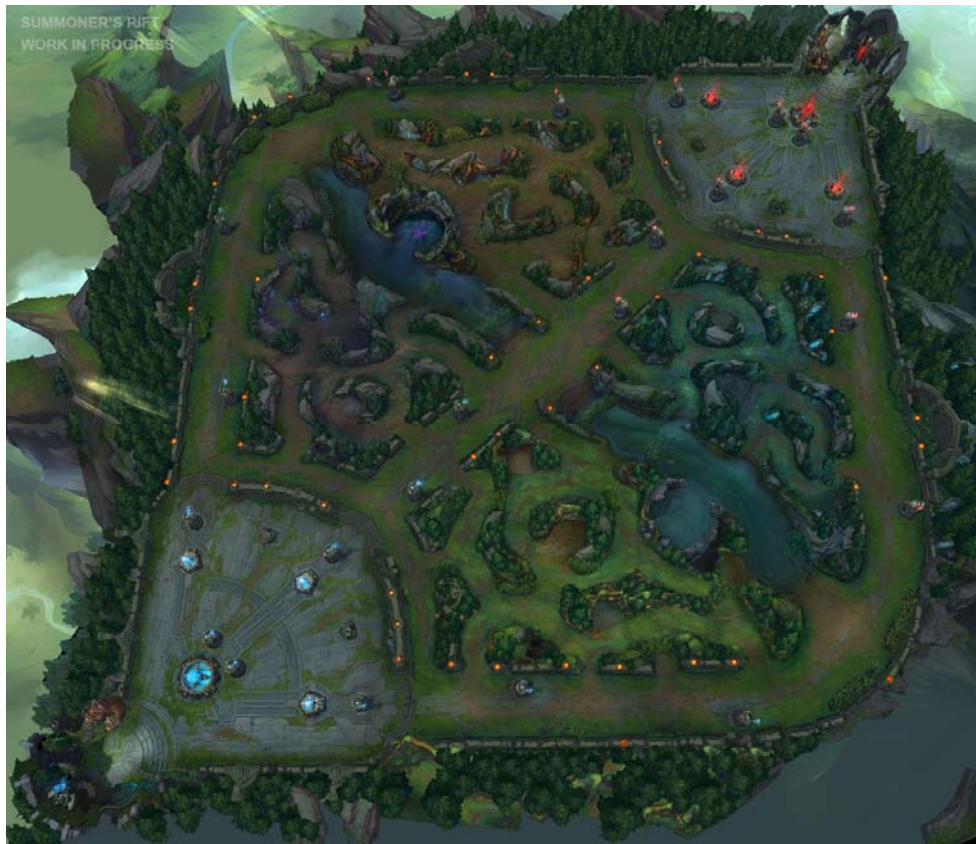


Figure 1.2: Summoner's Rift (top) and an example of a League of Legends draft phase during a professional match.

Typically, the five players on each team are assigned positions based on the champion that they play, as each champion fulfills a different role on the team and has specific strengths and weaknesses. The usual composition is two players in the bottom (right) lane, one each in the middle and top (left) lanes, and one player in the jungle, whose job is to be the free radical on the map and set up ambushes.

To play the game, players can either queue up for games on their own, with a single partner, or with multiple partners in either normal or ranked matches. The normal games count for nothing in the grand scheme of things, but the ranked games award players points that are qualified in a specific rank that is designated by a tier and a division that allow players to compare their skills to each other. The ranked tiers are, in ascending order, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, Master, and Challenger, each with five divisions that are sorted in descending order. Therefore, a player in Gold I is better, at face value, than a player in Gold IV. The majority of professional players are *at least* Master rank, and typically fall into Challenger.

Skill in *League* is really more about information than anything else, and the best players have actionable knowledge of the damage, resource costs, and attack range of most champions in the game, as well as how each of those champions match up against one another. Further, based on the Fog-of-War, good players can tell where enemy players are without actually seeing them and can make larger team decisions based on that knowledge.

Professional matches have been played in a number of ways over the years, but these days typically feature a combination of single games, which typically come during regular seasons and whose average time is about forty minutes, and match series, which are typically best-of-five and occur during playoffs. Most teams will play two matches per week in seasons that last for nine weeks, as of 2017. Teams are awarded circuit points based on their



performance during regional playoffs – non-playoff teams are not awarded points – and the top point holders are awarded either a seed at the annual World Championship or the opportunity to play in a mini-bracket to determine a third seed for that region in those regions that are awarded three seeds.

The World Championship itself is played in varying locations from year to year, typically in *League*'s major regions of North America, Europe, South Korea, China, or Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau. The tournament has traditionally featured a Group Stage double round robin, where each of the teams in the groups play two single games against each group opponent. The best teams from the Group Stage then enter the Finals Bracket, which features eight teams that play in single elimination, best-of-five series to determine that year's World Champion.

The quest to become a professional player is grueling, and many Challenger rank players have many hundreds of *League* games played outside of whatever professional obligations they have. Becoming a world champion is even more difficult, as it would require a team to win nine games against three of the world's very best teams. Therefore, that quest lies at the very heart of *League*'s appeal. The regional leagues really act as the first stage in a global drama about each team's journey toward the eventual goal of a World Championship. The balance of this work is an examination of what that drama means in the larger context of the Web 2.0 world.

## **Part I: South Korea, Esports Mecca**

## Chapter 1

### Welcome to Esports Mecca: Cultural and Economic Ties Between Korea and *League*

*“Most Asian cultures are extremely group-oriented, it's been that way all the way back in their sorted histories. Unlike Europe and USA whose cultures and histories are very individual-oriented.”*

*-Gabelous, LoL Forum User, on why Korean League teams are so successful*

It is impossible to talk about *League of Legends* without discussing South Korea. No other region<sup>1</sup> has had as large an impact on the professional level of the game. That success has made Korea *League*'s biggest exporter of game strategy, infrastructural framework, and players. So how did a tiny peninsular nation with a sixth of the population of the United States outstrip the rest of the world in professional *League*? While the quote above is an oversimplification, distinct features Korea's past help explain the present. *League of Legends* and South Korea reflect and express one another, particularly through the country's postwar economic model, corporate culture, and preference for rapid adoption and change.<sup>2</sup>

This entanglement of sport and nation is an old phenomenon. In the United States, baseball has periodically shaped and reflected the biggest cultural moments and trends of the nation's past. The late Jules Tygiel, a sport historian from San Francisco State University, illustrated the ways in which baseball and America intersected. Individual champions became icons of their cultural moments, such as Jackie Robinson during the fight for integrated baseball,

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to South Korea as a region because that is its designation within the esports. The regions in professional *League* are divided based on servers. Because Korea has its own server, it is its own region in the subcultural vernacular. I merely follow this convention.

<sup>2</sup> South Korea will henceforth be referred to simply as “Korea.” Needless to say, North Korea currently has no esports presence.

or the dynamic front office mavericks Larry MacPhail and Branch Rickey, who still stand as examples of the iconic American entrepreneur through the American pastime.<sup>3</sup>

A huge part of baseball's rise was the way that these champions interacted with new media at the time. MacPhail was the first baseball mogul to invest heavily in radio and television, and every team he touched seemed to turn into a financial success because of it. Cultural icon Babe Ruth became baseball's first truly national celebrity, driven into the American consciousness by the first radio sportcasts until he became one of the faces of the 1920s. Examples like these illustrate the ways in which baseball became a concrete part of American culture and life.<sup>4</sup>

Celebrities like MacPhail and Ruth embodied their cultural moments and national identities, and baseball was not alone in this. In France, the Tour de France embodied, reflected, and created new kinds of celebrities based on French anxieties, values, and historical currents. Foremost among these was the post-World War I survivor hero. The race, which was meant to assuage French anxieties about the nation's virility and power, became increasingly brutal, to the point where simply finishing became a herculean feat of endurance. The race's severity, which led to the 1919 race having only eleven finishers, embodied a French spirit of endurance in spite of incredible suffering. Ball State's Christopher S. Thompson noted in *The Tour de France* (2006) that the finishers of the Tour were referred to as, "survivors" rather than "finishers," and this birthed a particular French cultural hero whose power and masculinity were derived from the ability to endure extreme suffering.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Tygiel 72-76, 97-100, 104

<sup>5</sup> Christopher S. Thompson, *The Tour de France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 113-114.

Beyond national borders, the University of Pittsburg's Rob Ruck, author of *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game* (2011), examined the ways in which the United States' place as baseball's holy land affected the world around it. Ruck wrote that, "...although Major League Baseball's workforce has a new international complexion, its globalization has come at the expense of baseball beyond U.S. borders, especially at the game's withering grassroots."<sup>6</sup> He argued that American baseball, whose character had become global, was crushing nearby international leagues by importing all of their best players – a sort of twisted, baseball imperialism. In many ways, this mirrors other, more familiar forms of Western imperialism, in resource-rich regions of the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East, where imperialist powers have manipulated colonized holdings quite destructively for profit. The key is that in baseball, the players are the raw materials that make the finished product, so this exploitative system of importation is simply draining a different resource from other nations in order to perpetuate the American league.

Korea's relationship with esports rivals both America's with baseball and France's with cycling. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, South Korea experienced a similar media revolution that paved the way for its esports icons to emerge – only, they were not the embodiment of the traditional athlete. Where the U.S. produced MacPhails and Ruths, Korea produced gamers called "Flash," "BoxeR," and "Faker." Where France and America adopted radio and television, Korea adopted broadband internet connections and other telecommunications breakthroughs that enabled and immortalized their gamer celebrities, building a new culture predicated on technical skill and accomplishment in computer games. Finally, where the rest of the world built masculinities around physical athleticism, these gamers created a culture in which technological

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011), viii.

prohess could not only be turned into social capital, but masculine capital for a group – geeks – who have traditionally been treated as an effeminate lower class in hegemonic masculinity. Much of this hinged on the gamer’s aptitude for change and adjustment at rapid pace, a trait as uniquely Korean as endurance was uniquely French.

The international implications of Korea’s imprint on *League of Legends* are comprehensive. In *League*, Korea is Mecca. The small, peninsular nation has achieved incredible international success during esports’ Second (1998-2012) and Third (2012-Present) waves. This massive footprint mirrors the country’s economic and cultural history, as well as its footprint in consumer technology. Economically, Korea’s success in *League* – an American-made game – mirrored both the power of regional tech and telecommunications companies and the postwar Korean economic model, which was characterized by the importation of foreign parts to build finished products locally for international export. Korea’s most famous esports scenes – *StarCraft*, *StarCraft II*, *League of Legends*, and *Overwatch* (2016) – are all American games Korea imported and turned into functional, popular, and incredibly successful professional esports industries. These locally constructed leagues produced players that not only succeeded locally, but also expanded their influence on the international level by winning tournaments and signing with teams abroad.

A large part of Korea’s success comes from rapid adoption and large-scale sponsorship of esports by big corporations. As a number of leading *League* personalities have mentioned, the lack of powerful sponsors has historically impaired the growth of the Western esport industries. However, in Korea, savvy market knowledge and a willingness to risk rapid change allowed the country’s esports industry to reach ascendant status quickly. Powerful telecommunication and technology companies like Samsung, SK Telecom, and KT Rolster identified esports as a way to

reach the young people that made up a huge proportion of their consumer base. They acted quickly, sponsoring teams and leagues while also harnessing national media. The rapid adoption of esports by Korean corporate interest, media, and advertising played a massive role in the rapid advancement of the country's esports addiction, providing the fledgling industry with a rock solid foundation.<sup>7</sup>

Corporate mobilization provided Korean esports teams with advertising on both cable and internet television, resulting in popularity that created incentive for continued investment in professional gaming. This, in turn, gave Korea its long-term esports dominance. In *League* alone, SK Telecom's teams won three world championships in four years from 2013-2016. The Samsung organization is a two-time world champion and three-time top-three finisher at Worlds. In six years of true World Championships, a Korean team has won the title five times.<sup>8</sup> This top-down approach to esports was motivated by simple economics and advertising strategies in the technology market. It was very different from the First Wave of Esports, which was largely the product of grassroots tournaments put together by enthusiasts. However, despite, and likely due to, its divergence from the traditional roots of esports, the Korean scene came to involve not only top tech companies, but also local businesses, mass media, and the national government. Esports like *League of Legends* have a cultural footprint in Korea that rivals that of many traditional sports in other countries.

That esports cultural footprint reflects Korea's postwar obsession with rapid change, reflected in the nation's subcultural place as the cutting edge of pro gaming. The Korean population, according to data cited by Simon Fraser University's Jin Dal Yong, fundamentally

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<sup>7</sup> ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Relegations, Franchising, and the Team Revenue Problem in eSports," *YouTube*, August 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVXnZcr7-ws>.

Dal Yong Jin, *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 62-64.

<sup>8</sup> Korea did not have its own server until 2012 and was not invited to the Season 1 World Championship in 2011.

changed over the last few decades. While a half-century ago, the people of the peninsula were characterized as even-keeled and measured – a characteristic of many countries that took in Confucian ideals from China – Korea became obsessed with rapid change and dynamism soon after, making it one of the least Confucian countries in East Asia now. In more accessible terms, this means that other, more Confucian countries, like Japan, place greater emphasis on changing slowly, while Koreans by and large demand and laud rapid, almost frenetic, change.<sup>9</sup>

Korean success in *League* expresses this cultural shift. Rapid change is a central aspect of the game itself, as developer Riot Games releases regular patches that change the balance of the game in various ways, including making certain characters stronger or weaker, changing aspects of the map, or tweaking other aspects of the game's design that can affect the efficiency and effectiveness of certain strategies. This constantly shifting landscape forces players – especially at the professional level, where every weakness is punished faster and harder – to adapt almost constantly, so Korean emphasis on perpetually seeking the next best way of doing things has made them the cutting edge of the pro game. Most other regions of have been left playing catch-up and copycat.

Because of their role as innovators, Korea's affinity for change is one of the most powerful influences on the character of the *League of Legends* community. The success that came with a change-first mentality has spawned endless theories on how, when, and whether the rest of the world would close the gap between themselves and the esports holy land. Korean players are generally treated with awe, and the rising number of international transfers between regional leagues in North America, Europe, China, and Southeast Asia primarily involve the

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<sup>9</sup> Jin 27.



importation of Korean talent. This last piece of the puzzle Korea's place in the *League of Legends* ecosystem expresses and reflects Korean values, and

The Korean esports footprint has also had an impact on both the structure of the regional leagues and the changes that Riot Games makes to *League of Legends* itself during their regular patches. Riot has implemented rules that limited the number of possible international players on regional teams to two, and, more recently, introduced in-game changes aimed at curtailing the effectiveness of the game's most efficient strategy – one of Korea's earliest innovations.<sup>10</sup> The results remained very much the same, but these two structural changes, in particular, illustrate the ways in which Korean dominance directly affected the shape of the entire, global *League of Legends* ecosystem, plainly illustrating the intimate ties between the East Asian peninsula and Riot's game. Much like Ruck's *Raceball* example, Esport Mecca has profoundly affected the spectator sport on a global scale.<sup>11</sup>

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## A License to Print Players

As a whole, esports dominance is the deliberate product of facets of Korea's economic evolution, both from small business development and grassroots and an almost completely unique top-down push for esports on a highly developed, professional scale that involved the country's government and corporate conglomerates. This comprehensive integration only really

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<sup>10</sup> Rhea "Ashelia" Monique, "Riot Announces New Rules About Regional Movement," *Redbull Esports*, September 6, 2014, <http://www.redbull.com/us/en/esport/stories/1331676933955/riot-announces-new-rules-about-regional-movement>

Patrick "Scarizard" Scarborough, "Pre-Worlds Early Game Update," *League of Legends*, July 20, 2016, <http://boards.na.leagueoflegends.com/en/c/developer-corner/B2y4p4vE-pre-worlds-early-game-update>

<sup>11</sup> I will not, in this chapter, have access to Korean language sources due to my own lack of linguistic proficiency in Korean or Hangul. I have relied instead on the findings of other scholars that have already done admirable work in examining Korean society in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

awakened in the West in the latter part of the 2010s. The particular character of Korea's prolific esports industry reflects various aspects of the Korean economy over the past half-century, and its roots lie in the nation's postwar capitalist surge that peaked first in the 1980s and again in the 2000s. Further, Korea's esports explosion is the product not only of circumstance, but of active decisions at all levels of Korean society.

Surprisingly, Korea's most famous and popular esports have never been domestic products. Most of Korea's domestic online games have been, according to Jin, in the roleplaying or casual genres, both of which are harder to pitch as esports. Casual games fail to engage the hardcore player base necessary to produce an audience interested in seeing top tier play. The failure of Korean roleplaying games, especially massively multiplayer (MMOs) ones is harder to explain. Jin acknowledged that Korean MMORPGs like *Lineage* (1998) and *Lineage II* (2003) did succeed in garnering global audiences, but it is likely that the games simply were not as successful overall with global audiences. *Lineage II*, for example, holds a very average 62/100 rating on aggregate game rating site, Metacritic. Further, the games were based on a subscription system, which made their cost of operation higher than the single purchase that popular esports typically required. Ultimately, however, Koreans chose imported games as their esports over domestic products.

*StarCraft: Brood War* (1998), *League of Legends* (2009), *StarCraft II* (2010), and *Overwatch* (2016) – all games in which Korea leads all countries in tournament winnings – are all American-made games.<sup>12</sup> However, despite being, at best, the second country to get a hold of these games, Koreans rapidly adopted and dominated the professional scenes for all of them, which has made Korean players the most highly demanded in all the world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Both *StarCraft* titles and *Overwatch* were made by one company: Blizzard Entertainment.

<sup>13</sup> Jin 123-124

In broad strokes, this import/export dynamic in the international esports industry mirrors the basic model of Korea's export economy after the Korean War (1950-53). According to Hattori Tamio in *Economic and Political Weekly* (1999), Korea's export economy in the second half of the twentieth century functioned by importing foreign components, which were assembled into finished products on the peninsula before being exported. Of course, this model changed over time as Korean industries have become much more independent – which occurred largely due to the recession of the 1990s – but the broad strokes of that postwar export economy survived in the Korean esports industries. Korea's most successful esports have all been imported foreign games – a component, in this analogy – which were used to build a finished product – a highly successful Korean professional scene. That product is Korea's primary esports export: its players.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, the catalyst for the birth of the Korean esports machine was the recession of the 90s. Despite success with their export model, the Korean economy came crashing down after years of unprecedented growth. Hattori theorized that this was the product of constantly changing technologies abroad that made Korean fixed costs so prohibitive that Korean industries could no longer maintain internationally competitive prices, which strangled sales. With the

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"Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle," *Metacritic*, accessed April 5, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/lineage-ii-the-chaotic-chronicle>

"Lineage II: awesome views, rave reviews!" *MCV*, 26 June 2007, <https://www.mcvuk.com/press-releases/29838/Lineage-II-The-Chaotic-Throne-Interlude>

"Top Countries for Overwatch," *E-Sports Earnings*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/426-overwatch/countries>

"Top Countries for StarCraft: Brood War," *E-Sports Earnings*, October 23, 2016, <http://www.esportsearnings.com/games/152-starcraft-brood-war/countries>

"Top Countries for StarCraft II," *E-Sports Earnings*, October 23, 2016, <http://www.esportsearnings.com/games/151-starcraft-ii/countries>

"Top Countries for League of Legends," *E-Sports Earnings*, March 10, 2018, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/164-league-of-legends/countries>

<sup>14</sup> Tamio Hattori, "Economic Development and Technology Accumulation: Experience in South Korea," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 22 (May 29-June 4, 1999): M79-M80.

global markets outpacing Korea's ability to adopt new technology, the nation's businesses had to change what they were doing.<sup>15</sup>

According to Jin, Korea's economic crisis, and the widespread unemployment, corporate bankruptcies, and decline of the stock market that accompanied it, forced Korean companies to shift their emphasis from heavy industry to an IT-centric economy centered on telecommunications and computers. However, it was not only industrialists who changed the shape of the economy. The Korean government also got involved in this shift, and laid the groundwork by investing billions of dollars into broadband services, accelerating the nation's journey into the future of the internet and communications media by building the infrastructure necessary to support such an economy. This caused the domestic telecom market to explode. Korea quickly became the world's most thoroughly integrated broadband country, with 95% of its households connected to broadband as of December, 2008, whereas the United States, one of broadband's pioneers, boasted a mere 60% that year. Widespread access to high-speed internet was one of the decisive factors in Korea's early esports dominance, as the nation's professional industry simply had access to a larger percentage of its gaming-inclined population.<sup>16</sup>

The government's effort to normalize broadband integration was only one step on Korea's esports journey, however. There was also significant pressure to bring professional gaming into the social norm from the upper levels of the Korean economy. Spectator sports are, fundamentally, tied to communications media, and it was the media that shone the spotlight squarely on gamers. This symbiotic relationship appears many times in sport history. In 1902, for example, Henri Desgrange and Géo Lefèvre discussed the idea of a Tour de France, a cycling

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Jin 20-21

race of unprecedented length, as a boost to the sales of their magazine, *L'Auto-Vélo*.<sup>17</sup> Three decades later across the Atlantic, brash baseball man Larry MacPhail ignored the hostility of his fellow team owners and turned first to multi-year radio deals to help his teams turn a profit during the Great Depression, and later to the television during the 1940s.<sup>18</sup> The esports that Korea championed were not so different. They were tied to the media of the era.

For esports like *League of Legends*, the connection to communications media is more direct than in baseball or cycling because the rise of the internet and Web 2.0 was necessary for the existence of esports in the first place. Only through harnessing and adding to the dynamic content environment of Web 2.0 could esports flourish. In Korea, the connection between communications media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and esports represented a synthesis of our two earlier examples from traditional spectator sports, colored by the televised spectator sport world that we now inhabit. Jin wrote in *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* that, “The rapid growth of esports is closely related to the media, particularly broadcasting...game players involved in professional gaming often become celebrities, supported by major corporate sponsorship and a loyal fan base as though they were television talents or movie stars.” Korea had nine different channels, both online and through cable, that broadcast esports. The games had come in full force, and the media were on board.<sup>19</sup>

The key to the marriage between esports and communications media in Korea came from economic interests. Major companies, particularly those in the telecommunications industry like SK Telecom, KT Rolster, and Samsung, got heavily involved in Korean esports because of market pressures in their own industrial fields. In a very successful attempt to better reach the

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson 17-19.

<sup>18</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97-98, 104.

<sup>19</sup> Jin 59-60

youth of Korea, which comprises a major portion of their customer base, these companies maximized their profits by sponsoring teams and video game channels. Jin proposed that this built a twofold integration between gaming and older forms of entertainment. The first level was integration between electronic games and sport, and the second was between those games and digital media. He explained that the rise of esports represented the maturation of the video game industry as a business, as well as a sport. Following the rapidly changing tastes of their customers, these companies harnessed the entertainment potential of esports to better promote their own products, effectively bringing online gaming, and thus esports, deeper into the Korean industrial fold.<sup>20</sup>

This corporate connection between Korean communications media and Korean esports was the first step on esports' road to becoming fully global spectator sports. In Korea, there were two major video gaming television channels, Ongamenet (OGN) and MBC Game, whose content was specifically aimed at a gamer audience, and they made their market global by offering English language broadcasts for viewers abroad.<sup>21</sup> This extra effort to bring the world's best *StarCraft* to a global audience was a watershed moment for esports. During the Third Wave, English language casts of Korean *League* became a staple of the community's entertainment palette, alongside similar initiatives for the Chinese and Taiwanese leagues, which coalesced into a globally integrated esports industry. Further, the Korean channels also used Twitch.tv, an American platform, to broadcast these international streams, essentially taking another American-made component to produce their finished product. Twitch.tv, a live streaming website catering specifically to video gaming content that has since become the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid 62-64

<sup>21</sup> Spencer, "Starcraft Channel MBC Game Begins Its Final Month On TV," *siliconera*, January 2, 2012, <http://www.siliconera.com/2012/01/02/starcraft-channel-mbc-game-begins-its-final-month-on-tv/>

primary broadcasting site for all esports content in the West, played a huge role in bringing Korean regional play to a truly global audience, not only acting as a free-to-use platform, but also providing a familiar space for viewers, who were likely already using it to watch other esports and gaming streams. That global audience made Korean *StarCraft* and *League of Legends* players into legitimate *global* celebrities in a way that was unparalleled at the time. Without Korea's integration between communications media and esports, the emergence of the professional gamer as a celebrity would not have been possible.

This integration between media and gaming that resulted in global esports relied entirely on a ready audience of young people. Luckily, Korea's youth were well-versed in online gaming by the time communications media began to pick up esports because Korean small businesses had also championed the rapid changes in technology. The comprehensive integration of broadband internet into Korea's infrastructure normalized access to the web at incredible speed, opening the way for the savvy entrepreneurs to capitalize on an emerging business: the *pc bang*, or PC room – the famous Korean computer gaming café. The original *pc bangs* were general-use internet cafes and hubs for Korea's online stock traders. However, the *pc bangs* of the new millennium quickly became hubs for online gaming that kept large numbers of computers and copies of various games on hand. Most importantly, *pc bangs* allowed customers to play for an affordable hourly fee, which was quite often affordable to young people who were still living off their parents' generosity or part-time employment.<sup>22</sup> *Pc bangs* democratized the computer game in Korea by making computer gaming accessible to much wider audiences without the monetary barriers associated with computer gaming in other countries, particularly in the West, where a solid gaming rig might cost upwards of \$1000 USD. The result was that Korea's younger

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<sup>22</sup> Jin 23-26

generation developed a powerful attachment to online gaming as a social experience, rather than an isolated one.

According to a report by *Business Insider*'s Will Wei, the majority of *pc bang* clientele spend an average of five hours playing computer games there. The *pc bang* not only provided a democratization of the computer game pastime, but also acted as a social networking space in which gamers could come together and build relationships with other like-minded individuals.<sup>23</sup> Instead of a stereotypically isolated or individual experience, the *pc bang* made gaming a hub-based cultural fascination, much like the street corner basketball courts of New York City. This meant that the *pc bang* acted as a catalytic vehicle for the maturation of an esports-friendly culture in 21<sup>st</sup> century South Korea. The similarities between the esports industry and Korea's larger economy did not stop at the broad strokes of the export model or the trends in small business ownership, however. There were also much more intimate aspects of Korea's economy that were reflected in the early days of truly professional esports.

Ultimately, Korea's economic nexus is also reliant on heavy government involvement in economic change, and the blossoming esports industry was no different.<sup>24</sup> Korea's government was one of the most essential agents in the creation of Korean esports as a product, enacting policies and building oversight that would entrench gaming as a cultural attraction on the peninsula, rather than leaving it a popular pastime. Beyond setting the foundation of Korea's esports industry through broadband integration, the government designated the game industry as a cultural industry, promoted professional game investment associations, introduced a Game Industry Promotion 5-Year Plan in 2004, and created an oversight body for esports called the

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<sup>23</sup> Will Wei, "What it's like inside a 'PC bang' in South Korea," *Business Insider*, October 18, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/south-korea-gaming-pc-bang-2015-10>

<sup>24</sup> R.R. Krishnan, "South Korean Export Oriented Regime: Context and Characteristics," *Social Scientist* 13, no. 7/8 (July-August 1985): 91.



Korea e-Sports Association (KeSPA), which operates as a branch of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.<sup>25</sup> The Korean government, therefore, took an active role in supporting the early Korean esports as a way of rebranding and shaping Korean culture in a rapidly globalizing, internet-based world.

The close ties between the esports-inclined corporations and the Korean government helped solidify online gaming as a staple of the nation's economy. Investment in the esports industry helped solidify the online gaming market as a viable Korean export, both in intellectual properties and spectator sports. While the nation had struggled to remain competitive using the import-export model in heavy manufacturing, the model still worked perfectly in this new, information age industry. Soon, according to Jin, online gaming became one of Korea's most prolific industries and, "...has become a central part in the economic system. The Korean...industry is large enough to be spotlighted in terms of its market volume and technological development; it is already a battleground for transnational corporations and is increasingly a part of a global game market."<sup>26</sup> Integrating online gaming into Korea's economy effectively promoted the knowledge and familiarity necessary to allow Korean companies to act on the opportunities presented by formalized esports. Without that close nexus between government and corporate interest, it is unlikely that the Korean esports scene would have emerged in its now familiar form.

There are, however, also less laudable sides to the esports industry in Korea, particularly for its most important workers: professional players. Esports have reflected particular characteristics of the Korean economy insofar as they have historically suffered from weak labor

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<sup>25</sup> Jin 66-67  
Taylor 19-21

<sup>26</sup> Jin 8.

organization, low and/or inconsistent wages, and long work hours – not to mention a lack of work-life balance.<sup>27</sup> The most obvious manifestation of this is the Korean gaming house – when multiple players share living space during their time competing professionally or working their way up to the professional level. This started as a simple financial measure for aspiring pros trying to get by in Seoul, according to John Paolo Bago of *Inquirer.net*, but soon became formalized by team owners as a means of maintaining player focus on the game through communal living and strict training regimens. “As the early days of the *Brood War* competitive circuit in Korea turned into a lucrative business model, organizations began taking in small squads of talented players, housing them so that they can train under strict regimens in the heart of Seoul,” wrote Bago in 2016.<sup>28</sup> While these environments may have allowed players to concentrate purely on the game and their quest to go pro, they also heavily resemble mill towns and other industrial complexes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where the factory owners set up housing, intense work schedules, and controlled most aspects of their workers’ lives. The gaming house is not as extreme an example as this, they are not, for example, paid in vouchers only redeemable at company-sponsored stores, but the model does represent something of an internet-age equivalent.

Despite obvious Industrial Revolution undertones, the gaming houses were held up as one of the keys to Korean success in games like *StarCraft* and *League of Legends*, and were subsequently imported to the West and other parts of the world. Bago, for example, wrote that the West had “romanticized” the idea of the gaming house, and that the model did not lead

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<sup>27</sup> Krishnan 91.

<sup>28</sup> John Paolo “Sandata” Bago, “Dispelling the Myth of the Korean Gaming House: What Lessons the Philippine eSports Industry Can Learn From Our Korean Overlords,” *Inquirer.net*, February 24, 2016, <http://esports.inquirer.net/13920/dispelling-the-myth-of-the-korean-gaming-house-what-lessons-the-philippine-esports-industry-can-learn-from-our-korean-overlords>

directly to success, but still maintained that the gaming house was a trial to be endured on the path to pro play. Other writers' descriptions of gaming houses, however, call the gaming house's reputation into question, such as one by veteran esports journalist Duncan "Thorin" Shields:

"These teams, sometimes run by reputable figures and sometimes by shady 'used car salesmen' types...would feature basic PC equipment, typically all stacked together in one room of cheap accommodation, and simply mattresses on the floor, again all in one room...Players would play night and day... In latter years, some teams did get better apartments and provide proper beds for their star players, but even great players had to work their way up through the team, sleeping in bunk beds, often 4 bunk beds to a room, with their team-mates."<sup>29</sup>

These conditions have gotten considerably better over time, particularly as more money has poured into professional gaming, but that basic model has remained. To this day, the vast majority of teams and players still use the gaming house model in *League of Legends*, and Shields pointed to that as one of the main reasons for the extremely short careers of *League* players. He wrote in 2016 that the gaming house system did not work particularly well because rather than working together for eight hours and parting ways to decompress, professional *League* players were stuck living together, unable to get the necessary separation from arguments and differences in opinion that could cripple team chemistry and detract from healthy professional lives.<sup>30</sup>

The result of this particular Korean innovation is that players have been historically vulnerable to the teams that own their rights. The teams own not only the rights to the players' professional play and salaries them accordingly, but also houses them, equips them, and often feeds them. Yet there was no players union in *League of Legends* until 2017, and even then, the

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<sup>29</sup> Duncan "Thorin" Shields, "Western Pro-Gamers Shouldn't Want to be Like Koreans," *Dot Esports*, October 18, 2014, <https://dotesports.com/league-of-legends/news/western-progamers-shouldnt-want-to-be-like-koreans-5759#list-1>

Bago, "Dispelling the Myth..."

<sup>30</sup> Duncan "Thorin" Shields, "The Thorin Treatment – Team Houses and Burn Out," *Dot Esports*, June 15, 2016, <https://dotesports.com/league-of-legends/news/the-thorin-treatment-team-houses-and-burn-out-5837#list-1>

only known organization exists in North America, where its creation was officially mandated by Riot Games, *League*'s developer and most powerful entity in the esports space. This means that for the first eight years of *League of Legends*' existence, its professional players were at the mercy of organizations that may or may not have been entirely stable or trustworthy. Even Korea, whose larger corporations stepped in to sponsor a variety of teams, there were still Shields' "used-car salesman" types, making the legacy of Korea's economy on professional gaming sometimes appear more gilded than polished.

Ultimately, there can be no argument that professional esports, and therefore professional *League of Legends*, have been shaped by Korean economic influences. This manifests in the form of Korea's own esports development and status in the professional scene as esports Mecca, where the games' finest players make their names, but it also appears in the character of esports' darker labor history. In both ways, the esports we know today owe much to South Korea's total economic mobilization for esports.

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## **Esports as Korean Culture**

Beyond deep economic roots, esports also took hold in Korea because of particular cultural currents, and Korean success in *League* reflects these. In Korea, there are two cultural currents intertwined with esports and *League*: a cultural affinity for rapid changes that reflects the economic shifts after the Korean War and the rise of gamers as distinct celebrities in Korean culture, which helped push geek culture in a new, more mainstream direction. This, in turn, helped create the foundations of a new kind of masculinity that placed value on technical skill and knowledge in gaming, rather than traditional athleticism.

By the start of the Third Wave (2010-Present), gaming had become entrenched in Korean culture, and, according to Jin, “Unlike almost anywhere else in the world, Koreans who are good at playing digital games are highly regarded...”<sup>31</sup> Over the course of the Second Wave (1998-2012), when Korea first showed dominance at the professional level in Blizzard Entertainment’s *StarCraft: Brood War* (1998) and *StarCraft II* (2010). More Korean players earned prize money at tournaments than any other country. Korea’s dominance rested on a unique culture that embraced competitive online gaming more enthusiastically than much of the rest of the world. A key aspect of that cocktail, according to Jin, was Korea’s post-war fascination with rapid change and adaptation.<sup>32</sup>

The post-Korean War era on the southern half of the peninsula was colored by a wave of reform and Westernization. Korea’s post-1960 republic sought to emulate the West by industrializing and embracing technological innovation. Yang Woo-jin, in an article entitled, “Two Key Historical Moments of the Early 1960s: A Preliminary Reconsideration of 4/19 and 5/16,” argued that the Korean intelligentsia’s push for modernization combined with a pro-American inclination to cause the country to imitate the United States. Further, land reform and the end of old social norms set the stage for the rapid capitalist development in the 1960s and beyond.<sup>33</sup> Korea set a precedent for rapid industrialization, adaptation, and change in its economy and infrastructure. It is this demand for rapid adaptation that trained Korea for the adoption of other new technologies such as broadband internet, smart phones, and esports.

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<sup>31</sup> Jin 59-60

<sup>32</sup> Total winnings by Korean *StarCraft: Brood War* players comprised 92.8% of all prize money ever awarded in that esports, according to E-Sports Earnings, outstripping the rest of the world by over six million dollars.

“Top Countries for StarCraft: Brood War.”

“Top Countries for StarCraft II.”

Jin 27

<sup>33</sup> Woo Jin Yang “Two key Historical Moments of the Early 1960s: A Preliminary Reconsideration of 4/19 and 5/16,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall, 2005): 124.

One of the main factors behind this rapid assimilation, noted Jin, was Korea's emphasis on dynamism. "Most Koreans want quick communication, quick games, and quick contact. Everything needs to *balli balli* [hurry, hurry!], and this mentality has expedited the rapid deployment of broadband services." The demand for rapid results created a demand for faster information diffusion, manifested in high degrees of broadband integration and the rapid adoption of new media.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Korea became a nation of early adopters, constantly working for their own betterment by finding the next big thing. As a mentality, this made the nation extremely well-situated to keep pace with the internet – the world's most quickly evolving piece of technology.



Figure 2.2: Air Force ACE, the Korean Air Force's StarCraft team

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid 17, 27, 28

This adoption addiction created more than an affinity for change; it fundamentally normative social pressures in Korea to favor change and the adoption of the next big thing, also known as *me-too culture*. Me-too culture is, broadly, the pressure to stay apace of changes in society, and it has made Koreans, according to Jin, extremely conscious of the status indicators of their neighbors, coworkers, and peers so as not to be left behind. He went on to elaborate that this was not simply an individual phenomenon, but rather a deeply rooted cultural attitude that affected entire companies and their affinity for certain systems of operation. Whatever the next big thing was, me-too culture made sure it was something Koreans wanted – a key factor in the speed at which Korean corporations got involved in esports. Once big companies started investing in professional teams, the trend exploded across Korea, until even the Korean Air Force had a professional *StarCraft* team.<sup>35</sup>

While corporate sponsors provided the funding and exposure necessary for esports due to a combination of me-too culture and market competition, the actual workers – pro players –were mobilized through a social pressure called *mass play culture*. Mass play culture is an aversion to being left out of the group during recreational activity. For example, when a group of friends want to head out to play basketball, peer pressure from mass play culture ensures that some of them will go because they do not want to be left out. In Korea, if a group of friends are headed to the *pc bang* to play *League of Legends*, some who may or may not actually be interested in *League* initially would go along to participate in the group activity.

As Jin noted, Koreans are much more conscious of the pressures of potentially being left behind in their consumer culture. This is particularly apparent in examining mass play culture, as Korea's youth generally prefer multiplayer, team-based games like *League of Legends* to

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<sup>35</sup> Jin 29-31

“Air Force ACE,” *Liquidpedia*, last edited November 9, 2017, [http://liquidpedia.net/starcraft/Air\\_Force\\_ACE](http://liquidpedia.net/starcraft/Air_Force_ACE)

games with a heavy emphasis on single player modes. In Korea, the pressure of me-too culture enhances that of mass play culture, making the rise of gaming as youth leisure a powerful social force. The team elements of *League* played a clear role in that game's rise to prominence as a social experience. The popularity of *StarCraft* built a space for mass play culture. Friends pursue similar gaming trends as both recreation and friendly competition, but the creation of spaces expressly for that type of recreation – the *pc bangs* – helped activate the effects of mass play culture in Korea. Rather than bidding each other goodbye and going to their separate computers, Korean youths could instead just head over to the *pc bang* without having to go separate ways. This group gaming mentality is key for the creation of esports scenes, because esports demand the best possible players, and mobilizing more of a region's populace gives the esports access to more players.<sup>36</sup>

The rapid adoption of broadband and the subsequent spread of *pc bangs* as neighborhood hubs helped make online gaming a more accepted part of Korean society. *The New York Times* described *pc bang* as, "...a sort of neighborhood basketball court where gamers could test their skills."<sup>37</sup> In the same way that American youths can head to the local courts and play pickup basketball games, Korean youths are able to head down to the *pc bang* and play a few matches in their favorite online game. It remains a model that remains largely limited to Asian markets, and, combined with a virulent mass play culture, it ensured that Korea mobilized many more of its gamers than other regions.

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<sup>36</sup> Jin 29-31

It should be noted that while mass play culture would certainly explain the rapid rise in *League*'s popularity in Korea, it does not provide the fullest explanation for Korean esports mobilization on its own. The Korean esports scene was built on *StarCraft: Brood War*, a game that was largely played in a one-on-one duel, during the Second Wave. In *Brood War*'s case, it is more likely that simple peer pressure to participate and compete against friends played a role than the team-based elements that made *League* popular.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Mozur, "For South Korea, E-Sports Is National Pastime," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/20/technology/league-of-legends-south-korea-epicenter-esport.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/20/technology/league-of-legends-south-korea-epicenter-esport.html?_r=0)



With mobilization came visibility, and with visibility came a change in the way that gamers were perceived. In Korea, geek cultural values, as defined by T.L. Taylor, surged into the highly visible spectrum, not as stereotypical, anti-social shut-ins, but as celebrities that people looked up to, turning the height of geek culture into a goal. In her book, *Raising the Stakes* (2012), Taylor noted that geek culture places a high social value on refined skill, mastery, deep knowledge, and intense commitment to certain, specialized subject matter, typically in the realm of science, technology, or gaming.<sup>38</sup> Placing displays of such skill and knowledge in a more openly social space with like-minded individuals enhanced the mass play culture incentives to keep pace with fellow gamers in that setting.

This public social environment and the gamer as a type of celebrity or hero created a new standard of masculinity derived from those geek cultural values. Dubbed “geek masculinity” by Taylor, the new type of “manliness” represents an ironic turn for a social group – gamers – that has been typified by the effeminate, bespectacled nerd, but now began to coalesce into a much more widespread social group. While these geeks have traditionally been drenched in otherness by typical forms of hegemonic masculinity that prized the athletic above all else, the new form of masculinity that began to take shape on a more visible level in Korea placed the esports competitor at the intersection of technological masculinity, which prizes technological prowess and knowledge above all else, and traditional athletic masculinity, which emphasizes athleticism and competitive drive. This particular form of masculinity, which formed in a “sub-masculine” group, comes with its own set of problems regarding geek identity and sexism, which will be fully addressed in Chapter 4, but was essential to the formation of a more widely popular and visible geek culture because it normalized a different type of valorization that favored gamers.

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<sup>38</sup> T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 111

This, in turn, created some of the earliest esports celebrities – lauded gamers that were often measured against a Korean standard. In advertisements, announcements, and team photo shoots, these esports players were striking poses that oozed masculine competitiveness and pride, rather than the sort of traditional geek imagery.



Figure 2.3: Images of Lim "BoxeR" Yo-hwan (top) and Song "Smeb" Kyeong-ho (bottom) are two esports celebrities in Korea. Their skills made them geek masculine, rather than geek effeminate.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Seeker, "The BoxeR Fan Club," *TeamLiquid.net*, June 8, 2012, <http://www.teamliquid.net/forum/fan-clubs/343353-the-boxer-fan-club>

The cultural significance of public celebrity for pro gamers, particularly in Korea, manifests in the ways that Korea's esports foundation during the Second Wave (1998-2012) carried over into the Third (2012-Present). Several celebrities from that first generation of Korean esports celebrities continued to be involved in esports after they retired from pro play. Some of them, like Park "Reach" Jung-suk, Kim "HooN" Nam-hoon, and Kim "Rookie" Dong-jun, became coaches and broadcaster personalities within the *League of Legends* community – visible icons of a past age. Yu "Grape" Byeong-jin, one former professional player from *StarCraft: Brood War*, switched to *League* (under the new moniker, "Ggoong") and was, at one point, one of Korea's most feared players.<sup>40</sup> Each of these *StarCraft*-turned-*League* personalities expressed not only Korean adaptability, taking on a new game, and the general cultural value that Koreans place on gaming and esports. The decline of *Brood War* did not force all of Korean esports to wake from their fever dream and return to more conventional pursuits. Rather, competitive gaming had cemented itself firmly enough in Korean culture that many of the old guard stayed in the industry and turned esports into a long-term career, taking some of the earliest necessary steps toward making the esports industry a true career industry that could support former players as well as current ones.

A nation and its most famous spectator sports reflect one another. As baseball and the Tour de France reflect their respective nations, so too do esports reflect Korea. The nation's culture and economy changed in tandem, and, through those changes, created the optimal germination site for professional gaming. Korea's dominance in esports like *League of Legends*

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Timothy Kimbirk, "Smeb: 'It's a job that comes with a lot of sacrifice,'" *12UP*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.12up.com/posts/3776456-smeb-it-s-a-job-that-comes-with-a-lot-of-sacrifice>

<sup>40</sup> "Reach," *Leaguepedia*, edited October 28, 2016, <http://lol.gamepedia.com/Reach>.

"HooN (Korean)," *Leaguepedia*, edited February 16, 2017, [http://lol.gamepedia.com/HooN\\_\(Korean\)](http://lol.gamepedia.com/HooN_(Korean))

"Ggoong," *Leaguepedia*, edited January 25, 2017, <http://lol.gamepedia.com/Ggoong>

MachinimaVS, "Kim Dong Jun: Champions of Korea," *YouTube*, September 3, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svphtdDHV6w>

is a reflection of the country's cultural values as pioneers and blisteringly fast adopters. The result of the early adoption of esports is not only one of the world's most normalized gaming cultures, but also earliest concerted steps toward a more firmly cemented gamer identity. The rest of the world has followed suit, and many of the conventions of modern esports – gaming houses, arenas, formalized leagues, and corporate sponsorships – are products of Korean innovation. But effect what does a nation that is so tightly bound to esports have on the game internationally? Just how large are the ripples of the world's first esports nation? In the Web 2.0 world, esports are no longer local. Thanks in large part to Korea, they have become distinctly global, and Korea's relationship with esports has affected the way that *League* has developed as a global spectator sport.

## Chapter 2

### Chasing Korea: Korean Dominance and Global *League* Culture

*Korea has been perfecting esports for so long that other regions may NEVER catch up. It could be like other countries trying to beat the USA at basketball. It's close sometimes...There are some pretty great players from outside the USA. That's about as far as it goes.*

*-Joshua "Jatt" Leesman, League of Legends commentator*

In Ruck's examination of baseball, the United States is the center of that sport's world. That centrality gives the U.S. control over baseball's international industry it hosts the biggest contracts, most visibility, and the World Series. In *League*, Korea is the cutting edge. However, while the United States imports the world's baseball, Korea exports strategies, players, and philosophies to the rest of the world. The peninsula had also done this during the *StarCraft* era, and it had robbed local industries of homegrown heroes, disrupted the international competitive balance. The rest of the world tried to catch up by importing Korean players, infrastructure, and coaches, while Riot Games curbed Korea's footprint with structural changes to the regional leagues.

Koreans dominated whatever game became most popular. This created a sense of pride among pro gamers that elevated that career from dream to dream job. Esports players won endorsement deals with companies like Doritos and Intel, and made appearances next to other celebrities, like K-Pop group, Girls Generation. As the path to pro gaming became more acceptable, the dream of becoming a professional gamer drew more and more people, mostly young men, who hoped to turn their pastimes into careers.



Figure 3.4: Lim "BoxeR" Yo-hwan in an Intel processor commercial with Girls Generation, a Korean pop group.<sup>1</sup>

When the dream traveled internationally, the allure of international competition – a chance to test oneself against the best in the world – came with it. The Koreans, due to their early adoption and top-down integration with esports, dominated. Koreans won 93% of all prize money awarded for *StarCraft: Brood War* tournaments. This dominance solidified Korea's cultural legacy in esports through the expressions of its environment. Korea and her esports reflected one another, and *League of Legends* also expressed that connection. As of April, 2018, Koreans had won almost \$20 million in *League* winnings, more than the next eight highest earning countries combined. As a result, *League* struggled mightily with the effect of Korean teams on international competition. Korea, esports greatest innovator and supporter, was also the greatest threat to the professional game's narrative variety, regional heterogeneity, and watchability.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> xHydrax, "SlayerSBoxeR & Girls Generation –SNSD- on Intel Korean Ad [Starcraft 2]," *YouTube*, April 1, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq0vLeL0RNs>

<sup>2</sup> "Top Countries for StarCraft: Brood War," *E-Sports Earnings*, October 23, 2016, <http://www.esportsearnings.com/games/152-starcraft-brood-war/countries>.  
 "Top Countries for League of Legends," *E-Sports Earnings*, April 14, 2018, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/164-league-of-legends/countries>.

The esports machine that Korea built for itself was the product of rapid technological and economic adaptation from the Korean people, mass media, economy, and government. The result was a nation that dominated on the international stage across multiple games and decades. However, *League of Legends* and other esports are global spectator sports. South Korean dominance profoundly affected the rest of the world. The effect was so pronounced that the West had problems supporting games in the long term. Journalist Roland Li argued that:

The dominance of South Korean players became a large problem in *StarCraft*, creating a repetitive narrative where, with a few rare exceptions, Western players didn't have a chance of winning. The WCS [*StarCraft II*'s professional league started by Blizzard in 2012]<sup>3</sup> also wasn't initially "region locked," meaning that Korean players could qualify for the main championship by playing in the Americas and Europe, where they were superior to local players.<sup>4</sup>

This overwhelming Korean power suppressed other esports scenes, playing into stereotypes about Asian gamers and creating several esports-specific stereotypes about Koreans. The increasing disparity between Western and Korean players in *StarCraft: Brood War* hurt the game's appeal in the West. In *StarCraft II*'s heyday, even after Blizzard Entertainment, the game's developer, region locked the World Championship Series – the game's regional tournament circuit – Korean players still took home more tournament winnings than the next five top earning countries combined.<sup>5</sup> Korea's five world championships in *League of Legends* seem like a different verse in the same song. Western analysts despaired that the rest of the world would ever catch up to Korea, which led to the growing perception of a "Gap" between Korea and the rest of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> "World Championship Series," *Liquidpedia*, edited February 22, 2016, [http://wiki.teamliquid.net/starcraft2/World\\_Championship\\_Series](http://wiki.teamliquid.net/starcraft2/World_Championship_Series)

<sup>4</sup> Roland Li, *Good Luck, Have Fun: The Rise of esports* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 126.

<sup>5</sup> "Top Countries for StarCraft II," *E-Sports Earnings*, October 23, 2016, <http://www.esportearnings.com/games/151-starcraft-ii/countries>

The Gap is common vernacular. It appears in YouTube video titles, *ESPN* articles, and discussion forums.<sup>6</sup> A simple Google search for “League of Legends the gap is closing” or its opposite yields hundreds of thousands of search results. One particularly memorable example written by *League of Legends* forum user, Stillname, read:

[The gap is closing]...amongst Korean teams.  
In season 3 worlds there was one Korean team that stood above the rest (SKT)  
In season 4 worlds there were two Korean teams that stood above the rest (SSW SSB)  
In season 5 worlds all three Korean teams sent to worlds stood above the rest (SKT KOO KT)  
In season 6 worlds all three Korean teams sent to worlds plus one that wasn't sent (4 total) stood above the rest (SKT ROX KT SSG)  
Every year Korea has one more strong Korean team so the gap must be closing over there.<sup>7</sup>

Stillname's post expresses the feelings of futility that plagued North American fans after five years of failing to match Korea's level of play. It also reflects the growing prevalence of the Gap in discussions about the esports.

The Gap is the most visible product of Korea's powerhouse status in consumer technology and video gaming. It is also one of the greatest threats to esports because it threatens the popularity of large, international tournaments. Therefore, Korea's footprint on *League of Legends* can be seen in two ways. First, culturally, in the way the rest of the world reacted to sustained Korean dominance. Second, structurally, in the ways Riot Games, *League's* developer, attempted to make international play more balanced and less predictable. As the most powerful

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<sup>6</sup> Tyler Erzberger, “Erzberger: The gap is not closing in League of Legends,” *ESPN*, October 14, 2016,

[http://www.espn.com/esport/story/\\_/id/17794800/gap-not-closing-league-legends](http://www.espn.com/esport/story/_/id/17794800/gap-not-closing-league-legends)

Thoorin, “Thorin vs. Loco Episode 1: Is the Gap Closing?” *YouTube*, October 28, 2016,

<https://youtu.be/2ExyAiwd6M>

MrFlemz, “The gap is closing – Jatt,” *League of Legends Subreddit*, September 29, 2016,

[https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/5516oy/the\\_gap\\_is\\_closing\\_jatt/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/5516oy/the_gap_is_closing_jatt/)

<sup>7</sup> Each of the seasons refers to a year after League's launch in 2010. Season 3 was 2013, Season 4 was 2014, and so on.

Stillname, “The gap is closing...” *League of Legends*, October 30, 2016,

<http://boards.na.leagueoflegends.com/en/c/esport/Vr6dH05n-the-gap-is-closing>



piece of cultural iconography that Korea's dominance created internationally, the Gap expresses effects of Korea's rapid esport adoption that ranges beyond wins, losses, and prize money.

There are two sides to the Gap debate, one that believes that the Gap is closing between the West and Korea, and another that does not. The two sides justify their reasoning differently, but there are thematic currents in each discussion. The Gap's debate involves analysts, commentators, pundits, journalists, players, coaches, general managers, and team owners, as well as average community members like Stillname. Plenty of them argue that the rest of the world continues to improve their coaching staffs, organizational structures, players, and practice habits compared to their Korean counterparts. Their opposite numbers claim, equally vehemently, that the Gap is not closing and that the continued failures of Western teams on the World Championship stage are indicative of a Sisyphean crisis. This debate reflects the world's struggle legitimize professional *League*, given increasingly dominant Korean teams.

Several notables who have weighed in on the Gap discussion are commentator Joshua "Jatt" Leesman, former coach Choi "Locodoco" Yoon-sub, and journalist Tyler "Fionn" Erzberger. In 2016, Leesman, argued that the gap between Western teams and Korean teams was closing. He cited mass infrastructural changes in the North American scene. Western teams imported Korean players and coaches and expanded their staffs with sports psychologists, lifestyle coaches, and strategic analysts. These investments, argued Leesman, had improved the quality of play from North American teams.<sup>8</sup>

Choi, who coached four North American teams, including the region's most popular and storied organization, echoed this sentiment. "Koreans don't even have analysts," he said in a debate. "Koreans don't have sports [psychologists]. The West...invests way more in terms of

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua "Jatt" Leesman, "The gap is closing." *TwitLonger*, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, [http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n\\_1sp5c6e](http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1sp5c6e)

coaching staff." He also stated that because Western teams had begun importing Korean players, those players had elevated the game of the North American and European regions. Further, Choi argued that Korea was actually helping to elevate Western *League* because Western teams that bootcamped in Korea learned key concepts that they could perfect on their own time and use to dominate their own regions.<sup>9</sup>

Both Choi and Leesman argued that Western esports were evolving. Western teams have improved over the course of *League of Legends* history. However, even Leesman wrote in that same post that the rest of the world may never catch Korea in *League*:

These guys have been doing it for over a decade. The infrastructure, the coaching, the hierarchy of respect amongst teams, the esports culture, the pool of soloQ talent, the effort.

YOU KNOW HOW BIG THAT GAP IS??

It's massive.

Korea has been perfecting esports for so long that other regions may NEVER catch up. It could be like other countries trying to beat the USA at basketball. It's close sometimes, there was that one Olympics where the USA didn't win Gold. There are some pretty great players from outside the USA. That's about as far as it goes.<sup>10</sup>

Choi was more optimistic. In fact, he placed the lion's share of the blame for the Gap on Western players. Leesman cited differences in hierarchies of respect in teams, and Choi stated that this was the largest problem that Western teams and coaches faced. The players have always been the centerpieces of Western esports consciousness, so coaches have a difficult time controlling them. In fact, one of the largest factors keeping the Gap from closing, according to Choi, is the Korean hierarchical framework that punishes younger people who talk back to their elders. While he acknowledged that Korean coaches are not infallible, Choi also stated that the

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<sup>9</sup> Thoorin, "Thorin vs. Loco Episode 1: Is the Gap Closing?"

<sup>10</sup> Leesman

good Korean coaches have an easier job than Western coaches because the players are not as stubborn or openly rebellious.<sup>11</sup>

This hierarchy stereotype has been echoed by other Western coaches, such as Charlie Lipsie. “I feel the Western players are not as...mature as some of the players in Korea, because in Korean society, they respect their elders a lot more, so [there are those] levels of authority...” said Lipsie in an interview with *OnGamers*’s Travis Gafford. “In the Western scene, it’s a bit different, because there’s not that infrastructure that’s been built up for like, years, so people tend to be more friendly instead of just an authority figure.” Gafford echoed those sentiments.<sup>12</sup>

Despite misgivings about players’ respect for authority outside of Korea and the lack of international results for Western regions, Choi, Leesman, and others, like *12UP*’s Mauricio Muniz, argued that a bright future non-Korean teams in international competition because, objectively speaking, the quality of play and infrastructure throughout the world is rising, particularly in North America. For them, Korea is the perfect rival; it pushes other regions to improve and chase. When the other regions do legitimately compete with Korean teams evenly, *League* will be one of the world’s most viewable and unpredictable esports.

There is also a pessimist camp surrounding the Gap, however. Erzberger, a writer for *ESPN*’s esports department, argued against the likes of Leesman and Choi. He cited Western teams’ continued failure to beat Koreans at the World Championships. In an op-ed in 2016, Erzberger expressed Western frustration after once again watching as the Korean machine chewed up the rest of the world’s hopes again:

Every year we talk about the gap getting smaller between South Korean teams and the rest of the world, and sure, we have some upsets in the best-of-one group stages, but that’s it...But largely, South Korea has owned the professional scene since the Taipei

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<sup>11</sup> Thoorin, “Thorin vs. Loco Episode 1: Is the Gap Closing?”

<sup>12</sup> G|League, “C9’s Charlie breaks down a coach’s role in LoL Esport,” *YouTube*, October 16, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdoUwta9fGU>

Assassins defeated Azubu Frost in the 2012 Summoner's Cup final...Maybe in the realm of single games the gap is shrinking...One game, sure, I'll give you it. But to reach the throne, to actually touch and raise the cup, you need three wins in a best-of-five setting where one game of genius will only get you so far.<sup>13</sup>

The frustration that is evident in his words has deep roots that extend beyond his own experiences. The West's often futile struggles against Korea in esports are nearly two decades old. As Li wrote, Korea's dominance in *StarCraft: Brood War* and *StarCraft II* pushed those esports to more obscure status.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the heart of this debate is the instability of esports and worries that Korea's involvement in an esports is a kiss of death. Disparity and unchanging narratives are destructive to spectator sport longevity. *League* expresses Korea's total mobilization for esports through existential dread.

Korea's international influence was not restricted to existential crises, however. Because of the peninsula's success in *StarCraft* and in *League*, Korean teams, players, and coaches have become a fascination, especially in the West. As Choi mentioned, Western teams strove to build infrastructures similar to those in Korea and imported Korean players to bolster their squads. When Korean players transfer to Western teams, an enormous hype train follows them and expectations skyrocket.

The most poignant example is the story of Shin "Seraph" Woo-yeong, one of the first Korean *League of Legends* players to transfer to an international team. Rumors that North America's Counter Logic Gaming (CLG) had acquired a mysterious Korean player brought all sorts of speculation and hype. When the team officially introduced Shin as a member of the team, the *League* community went wild. *Slingshot* writer Connor Smith wrote in 2016, "The move captivated an entire region, as fans clamored for information about the mysterious

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<sup>13</sup> Erzberger

<sup>14</sup> Li 126

Korean.”<sup>15</sup> Shin became the Other, but in a messianic way. He was a savior purely because he was Korean. There was very little consideration of how things might go wrong.

The only other Korean player to play for a North American organization was Choi “Locodoco” Yoon-sub, the outspoken proponent of a closing Gap between Korean and Western teams. Choi was an established veteran when he transferred. He had played with Korean powerhouse MiG Frost and was fluent in English thanks to his time attending school in Texas. Shin was Choi’s opposite. He spoke very little English and had played in only one game in Korea’s prestigious OGN Champions league, where he had been a substitute for an average team. Due to Korea’s reputation in *League*, however, Shin became the center of a storm of hype. CLG fans found his account names, people streamed his games on Twitch.tv. When he began streaming himself, he drew audiences in the tens of thousands. Unfortunately, Shin was not the star for which the *League* community had hoped, and his lack of English fluency severely hampered the team’s chemistry.<sup>16</sup> However, Shin and other Korean players remained the objects of a particular, gaming brand of exoticization, and continued to draw huge interest abroad.

Shin’s story was the first in a bombardment of international transfer stories coming from Korea. Despite the disastrous results for Counter Logic Gaming, 2014 was a watershed year for Korean imports in the West, China, and Southeast Asia. In stark contrast to international

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<sup>15</sup> Connor Smith, “Career perspective: Seraph, the self-proclaimed grandfather of Korean imports,” *Slingshot*, July 25, 2016, <https://slingshotesport.com/2016/07/25/shin-seraph-wu-yeong-counter-logic-gaming-korean-import-envyus-league-of-legends-championship-series/>  
Jax 90, “Seraph officially joins Counter Logic Gaming,” *in2LoL*, May 20, 2014, <https://www.in2lol.com/en/news/18255-seraph-officially-joins-counter-logic-gaming>

<sup>16</sup> Smith

“Locodoco,” *Leaguepedia*.

Wilhelm Lichnock, “There and Back Again: A Look at Seraph’s Time with CLG,” *GameCrate*, November 24, 2014, <https://www.gamecrate.com/there-and-back-again-look-seraphs-time-clg/9440>

Elo Maniac, “CLG Seraph’s Solo Q games Currently being streamed,” *League of Legends*, May 9, 2014, <http://forums.euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/showthread.php?t=1716930>

Lichnock

transfers in baseball, which Rob Ruck so condemned, Korean players became the country's primary esports export, as teams outside of Korea sought to give themselves a shot of star power and publicity.<sup>17</sup> Rather than continuing to chase Korea, teams from other regions brought Korea to them. This logic exploded after the 2014 World Championship, in what is now referred to as "The Korean Exodus." The Exodus threatened to crush local pro gaming scenes by robbing regions of local heroes and regional-cultural connections essential to spectator sport popularity and perpetuation.

After the 2014 World Championship, the entire rosters of world champions Samsung White and their sister team Samsung Blue left Korea for more lucrative contracts in China and other regions. They were not alone. All told, thirty-one players – a full third of Korean pros – left Korean teams looking for brighter financial prospects elsewhere. The Exodus stripped *League*'s most powerful region of its best players, and Western fans were optimistic about their chances after an international tournament victory for North America's Team SoloMid. Speculation rampaged through the *League* subreddit as to whether or not Korea had weakened enough to be beatable come Worlds. JuanBARco wondered, "Korea isn't as strong as everyone thought, but was it just [GE Tigers choking] and tilting after a bad game, or has Korea fallen that far?"<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, however, Korea was far too culturally mobilized in esports for the Exodus to noticeably affect the country's *League* industry. All three Korean teams made it out of the World Championship group stage that year. For the first time in *League* history, the finals were between two Korean teams. The Exodus had meant nothing to Esport Mecca. If nothing else,

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<sup>17</sup> Ruck viii

<sup>18</sup> TDaotje, "[Spoiler] Grand Final / IEM Katowice 2015 Day 3 / Post-Match Discussion," *League of Legends Subreddit*, March 15, 2016, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/2z5we5/spoiler\\_grand\\_final\\_iem\\_katowice\\_2015\\_day\\_3/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/2z5we5/spoiler_grand_final_iem_katowice_2015_day_3/) Colin "CD Mangaka" Nimer, "Europe's False Exodus," *Medium*, January 12, 2016, <https://medium.com/slingshot-esport/europe-s-false-exodus-a3ffae63e72c#.ugop4vlbs>

the Korean Exodus remains one of the most powerful examples of the close relationship between Korea and professional esports. Who else could have possibly recovered from losing so many pros?

The uptick in international transfers did, however, have a profound effect on the demographic of pro players in regions outside of Korea. Duncan “Thorin” Shields, an esports commentator and host, noted that the number of Korean players on teams in the semifinals at the World Championship was steadily increasing. This was due not just to increasing Korean prowess, but to international transfers to foreign teams (Figure 2).

Another post, this time by Reddit user, “MelGibsonDerp,” noted that as of July 31, 2016, that the North American *League of Legends* Championship Series had only one North American starter at the mid lane position. Out of ten players, there were six Koreans, three Danes, and American Eugene “Pobelter” Park.<sup>19</sup> The post attracted numerous jokes about Park that reflected North America’s tendency to import players. For example, “flydigh” wrote that, “NA [North America] is the only region where Pobelters [do] not take up an import slot, It is insane [to] me that only one team in NA has one on their team.” Another user, “SonoTabiNi” asked, “Where is the nation of pobelt located?”<sup>20</sup> It is now fully within reason to expect several international transfers involving Korean players per offseason.

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<sup>19</sup> Park is, ironically, a Korean-American.

<sup>20</sup> MelGibsonDerp, “Every single starting Mid laner in NA is Korean, Danish, or Pobelter,” *League of Legends Subreddit*, July 31, 2016, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/4vfbkt/every\\_single\\_starting\\_mid\\_laner\\_in\\_na\\_is\\_korean/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/4vfbkt/every_single_starting_mid_laner_in_na_is_korean/)

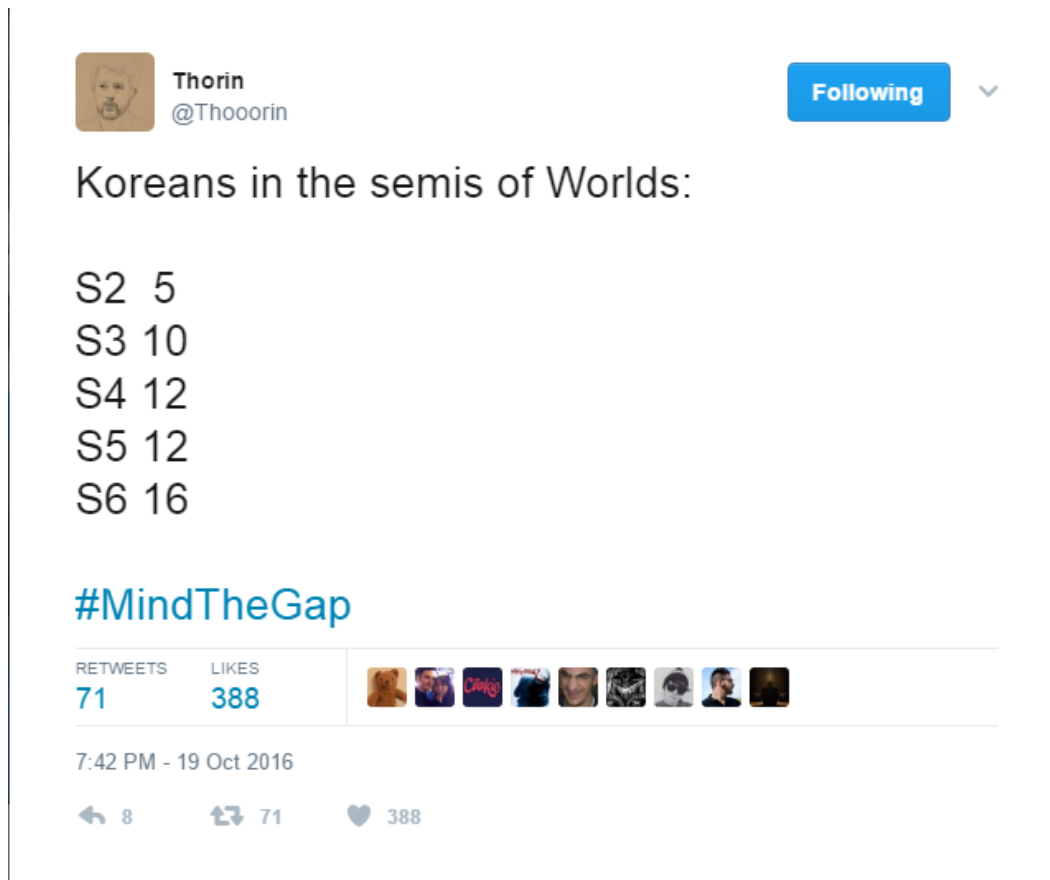


Figure 3.5: Tweet by Duncan "Thorin" Shields on Korean Players in the World Championship Semifinals in 2016

International transfers on this scale dredged memories of the problems that they had caused during the Second Wave, when *StarCraft: Brood War* (1998) and *StarCraft II* (2010) had been the iconic esports. As Li mentioned, neither of those games were initially region locked, allowing Korean players to leave Korea and play in whatever region they chose. As a result, regions outside Korea struggled to compete and the spectator sport began to follow a tired narrative of Korean dominance.<sup>21</sup> However, after Shin's transfer to North America in 2014 and, more importantly, the transfer of LMQ, a fully Chinese team that immediately dominated North America that same year, Riot Games instituted official region locking procedures. These new

<sup>21</sup> Region Locking refers to the barring of international transfer players from playing in-game in favor of players endemic to the region in which the team plays.



rules stipulated that no team in any region could field more than two players with citizenship in another region. Thus, only two Korean players could play on any North American or European squad at any one time.<sup>22</sup> The region lock was just one of the expressions of Korea's close ties to esports, and it was a necessary step for the maintenance of *League*'s place as the world's most popular one. If Korea could not only export players to other regions, but also readily replace the ones that leave, Korean players could severely damage the viewership appeal of *League* by crushing local scenes through their presence and market appeal.

Riot's attempts to reinforce regional particularism and force teams to develop home-grown talent were indicative of concerns related to *StarCraft: Brood War*'s international balance of power. Because professional *League of Legends* is played at single locations in each region to normalize playing conditions, geographic connections to teams are already tenuous. The watchability of the esport requires some regional heroes to make up for the lack of directly local ones. Region-locking eases this problem, but heroic reputations are difficult to build without championships, and ultimately there was not much change in the results of World Championship play. What region locking changes did show, however, was that Riot was willing to go out of its way to try and curb Korean influence in each of the other regions. In 2016, the developer moved on another expression of Korea's esports influence.

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<sup>22</sup> Riot did offer a naturalization option of sorts, however, that allowed players who had remained in the same region for two years to become treated as a "local" player. That residency requirement has since been extended to four years.

Rhea "Ashelia" Monique, "Riot Announces New Rules About Regional Movement," *Redbull esport*, September 6, 2014, <http://www.redbull.com/us/en/esport/stories/1331676933955/riot-announces-new-rules-about-regional-movement>

Callum Leslie, "Riot tighten interregional movement policy for LCS players," *Daily Dot*, August 2, 2016, <http://www.dailydot.com/esport/riot-regional-residency-changes-lcs/>

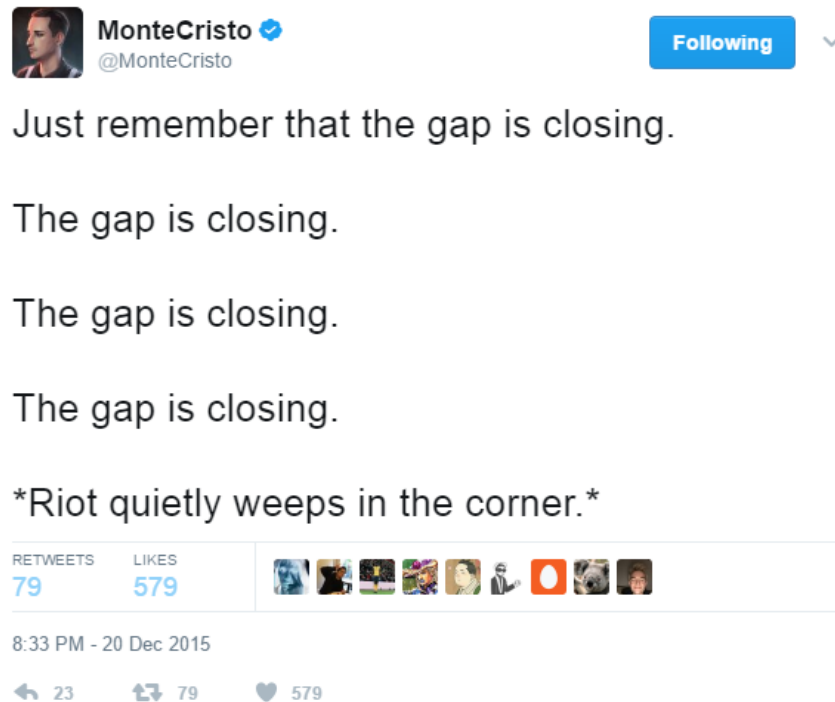


Figure 3.6: Tweet by Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles on Attempts by Riot Games to Promote International Parity

The other concern for *League*'s watchability was the actual game itself. Pro *League* was suffering from a particular Korean strategy that had made the first fifteen or so minutes of the game less exciting. In *League of Legends*, Riot patched the game to fix elements that the developer found to be unfairly powerful, exploitable, or otherwise difficult for most players.<sup>23</sup> However, *League*'s esports explosion forced Riot to ensure that its changes to the game kept the professional scene fresh and entertaining to watch as well. Typically, when the developer made changes aimed at the professional level of play, those changes would also address problems at the casual level because many members of the larger player base followed a "Meta," or

<sup>23</sup> Patches are regular updates to the game's code that are aimed at tweaking *League*'s balance, so that certain characters and strategies do not become too dominant. This is not only a useful mechanism for making sure the game still feels fair, but also a powerful tool for keeping the game from becoming stale and losing its player base. Patches come out for *League* every couple of weeks or so.

metagame – a style of play largely governed by professional preferences in things like champion choices. However, the Korean strategy that had made the game less exciting had not made headway on the casual level, and the fix Riot implemented was the first and only time that the company had patched the game specifically to make an aspect of the pro game less viable.

Because computer games are coded, and therefore governed by a mathematical logic, situational outcomes are perfectly replicable. Therefore, there is a consensus most efficient way to play the game. The Korean Lane Swap was just that. A piece of strategic genius developed by Korean teams that completely changed the professional game in 2012, the lane swap redefined *League*'s professional landscape. Most teams played the game conventionally. The players would each go to their assigned positions and play out the game by dueling with their opposite numbers and join their team to finish the game later. However, the Koreans would swap two of their lanes. One lane, which typically had two people in it, would instead go to the other side of the map, forcing an opposing player to play 1v2. Initially, this was a crushing strategy, and as time passed, the other regions copied it. The Koreans continued to refine the lane swap and remained largely superior to their opponents. Riot Games had a problem with the lane swap, however, because it was not very fun to watch; typically the early parts of the professional game featured very few kills, if any, and a lot of two-on-one bullying. For a very long time, the developer tolerated lane swapping's presence. However, just before the 2016 World Championship, Riot released Patch 6.15, which featured particular in-game changes that were clearly aimed specifically at curbing the lane swap's efficiency.<sup>24</sup> It marked a point at which Riot, in the name of making their spectator sport more appealing, fundamentally changed

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<sup>24</sup> Richard "Scarizard" Scarborough, Paul "Aether" Perscheid, Mattias "Gentleman Gustav" Lehman, Boka "LaBoka" Agboje, "Patch 6.15 notes," *League of Legends*, July 25, 2016, <http://na.leagueoflegends.com/en/news/game-updates/patch/patch-615-notes>

both the casual and professional game. The changes, in effect, changed the very symmetry of the map, and thus the very nature of the game itself. This change remains one of Korea's most tangible expressions of esports dominance – a structural change to the code of the game itself.

Ultimately, Korea's esports footprint in *League of Legends* manifested not just in international tournaments, but on discussion boards, in regional league structures, and in-game changes. The tiny peninsular nation's rapid adoption of changing technologies in the internet world made it a powerful contender in the tech field, but also in esports, where the Korean dominance remains one of the most difficult challenges facing the *League of Legends* spectator sport.

Despite all of the changes in esports, Korea maintained its dominance by displaying the iconic dynamism that Jin mentioned in *Korea's Online Gaming Empire*. The *balli balli* (hurry, hurry!) mentality not only made Korea extremely quick to adapt to new technologies in the world at work, but also in the world at play. They have maintained and, at times, increased their level of dominance despite vast changes at home and abroad in the *League* esports.<sup>25</sup> Whether it was mass exoduses of players or patches singling out their favored strategy, South Koreans have always adapted to changes in *League* with relative ease. That dynamism has, in turn, forced the rest of the world to constantly adapt to new Korean innovations in the game, creating a new identity for Korea within this particular subculture as an offshoot of the nation's rising power in the technology market. In this endless, cyclical chase after Korea, it seems the only thing that has not changed is the presence of The Gap – that yawning crevasse that separates international tournament success from frustration and disillusionment – the creation of a tiny Asian nation hopelessly addicted to change.

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<sup>25</sup> Jin 28

## **Part II: *League of Legends* as Global Cultural History**

## Chapter 3

### Guess Who: Usernames and Cultural Systems in Web 2.0

*“Of course. Everyone knows him. Faker is God.”*

*-Korean League of Legends Fan*

As esports professionalized within and beyond Korean borders, the first esports celebrities emerged: professional players, coaches, writers, and analysts acquired followings in the Web 2.0 world through their expertise in various esports. However, few fans would recognize them by their birth names. Instead, these celebrities went by their usernames, such as American pros, “Reginald,” “Dyrus,” and “HotshotGG,” who are better known by those names than Andy Dinh, Marcus Hill, and George Georgallidis, respectively.

On esports broadcasts the commentators shout usernames, not birth names, at the games’ climaxes. Usernames are on the backs of player jerseys. Usernames are on the introductory visuals. In the esports space, the birth name is just a relic of a bygone age – an identity that most players have let slip into the shadows of their newfound fame. In some players’ cases, those two identities do not even remain separate. When one of Darshan “Zionspartan” Upadhyaya’s high school teachers discovered that he was a celebrity, she changed his name on her seating chart to his *League of Legends* username.<sup>1</sup> Because these names are directly associated with in-game accounts, fans are able to have “close encounters” with recognizable celebrities while playing. Therefore, in the case of *League* and other esports, the username is the point of contact between the celebrity and his or her fans. Usernames are the carriers of celebrity within these subcultures.

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<sup>1</sup> Upadhyaya has since changed his professional username to “Darshan,” his first name, but the example still stands. LoL Esports, “Even his teacher calls him ZionSpartan,” *YouTube*, June 13, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb0iA4DM9Hk>.

Username are a staple of the online gaming world. In order to maintain distinguishable identities between individual players, online games allow their players to choose a unique identifier attached to their online account. This allows the players to identify friends, rivals, or unknowns in the game world, while also creating a naming process that reveals a great deal about the Web 2.0 world. The explosive rise of broadband internet, social media, and user-generated content like videos and blogs has made the Web 2.0 world a much smaller place. The username – both as private identity and public persona – and the traditions that shape usernaming choices expose the threads that bind globalized online communities to each other to form larger subcultures and cultures. *League of Legends* provides an exceptional example of this because its place as the world’s most visible esport makes the cultural impact of its usernames larger, and therefore easier to identify and dissect.

Username reveals two particular aspects of online gaming subcultures. The first is the cultural system within which username-based celebrity operates, which provides a model for how culture functions and propagates in a Web 2.0 subculture. The second is the regional usernaming trends – traditions that reflect deeper regional linguistic relationships. Username are chosen, not given, so these trends also illustrate a key aspect of the coalescence of celebrity identities in esports subcultures. Only the broadcast usernames of professional players qualified for this examination. Since Riot Games claims *League of Legends* supports 100 million monthly players, this kept the sample size manageable and publicly accessible.<sup>2</sup> The names of

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<sup>2</sup> Phil Kollar, “The Past, Present and Future of League of Legends Studio Riot Games,” *Polygon*, September 14, 2016, <https://www.polygon.com/2016/9/13/12891656/the-past-present-and-future-of-league-of-legends-studio-riot-games>  
“2017 World Championship/Seeding,” *League of Legends on EsportsWikis*, accessed September 1, 2017, [http://lol.esportswikis.com/wiki/2017\\_Season\\_World\\_Championship/Seeding#Play-In](http://lol.esportswikis.com/wiki/2017_Season_World_Championship/Seeding#Play-In)

professional players are especially significant because the visibility of their usernames influences the usernaming choices of both *League*'s and other esports' player bases.

I have also narrowed my study to pro players from the five major regions, as designated in the seeding of the 2017 *League of Legends* World Championship tournament: Korea, China, North America, Europe, and Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau.<sup>3</sup> This sample includes 957 individual players. However, because players sometimes (or often, in some cases) change their usernames over the course of their careers, the actual sample size of usernames was 1104.<sup>4</sup>

Usernames in professional *League of Legends* provide insight into how they function as cultural carriers for celebrity in Web 2.0 subcultures. Usernames reflect the players that chose them, and therefore illustrate the deeper ties between the self-made identities of the players and their ties to the culture of their home regions.

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the leagues in each of these regions are as follows: Korea (*League of Legends* Champions Korea, or LCK), China (LoL Pro League, or LPL), North America (North American *League of Legends* Championship Series, or NA LCS), Europe (European *League of Legends* Championship Series, or EU LCS), and Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau (*League of Legends* Master Series, or LMS).

<sup>4</sup> The full data set can be found in Appendices A through E.





Figure 4.7: (Above) The members of Unicorns of Love make their way toward the stage during Intel Extreme Masters, Oakland, 2016. (Below) Jin Air Greenwings (top) squared off against SK Telecom T1 (bottom) in Spring, 2016. Notice that the names are all usernames.<sup>5</sup>

## Anything but Commonplace

Username are the points of reference keep the *League* community of discourse moving. They act as conversational shortcuts, providing an internal vernacular in the *League* esports community that carries elaborated non-verbal context. *League*'s usernames function similarly to references to celebrities in other professions or spectator sports, like Tom Brady, whose name, for many Americans, immediately evokes visions of the dominant NFL quarterback. Just as traditional sports stars' names convey meanings that extend far beyond their literal alphabetical composition, Faker, Doublelift, and xPeke carry cultural weight with *League of Legends* players and fans. Where did this significance come from, and how does it change over time? How do these names interact with each other in the *League* community?

First, usernames are part of a cultural system. The system illustrates the way that culture spreads and changes over time. Within that system, usernames serve as cultural carriers – the honey bees of *League* subculture that carry cultural information between people. These short, often innocuous or silly, names carry the weight of recalled moments and impressions that shape the community's perception of them. As such they exert cultural influence throughout the *League* community. A helpful way of understanding culture as a system and the role usernames play within it comes from the work of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. His 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, proposed the existence of just such a carrier of cultural information: the “meme.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Best, “Unicorns of Love Send Team SoloMid Home at IEM Oakland, Advance to Finals,” *WWG*, November 20, 2016, <http://wwg.com/esports/2016/11/20/unicorns-of-love-send-team-solomid-home-at-iem-oakland-advance-t/>.

LCSHighlights, “SKT vs JAG Game 2 Highlights – SK TELECOM T1 vs JIN AIR GREENWINGS – LCK 2016 LOL Champions KR,” *YouTube*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzlktrDELcg>.

<sup>6</sup> It is ironic, now, that Dawkins' term is now more popularly known for its context in internet humor.

Dawkins' thoughtfully developed the concept, deriving it from the Greek word, "mimeme," or "imitation." He chose a monosyllabic term similar to "gene" because he conceptualized of them as rough parallels. With this in mind, he shortened his term to "meme," which closely shadowed the French word for "same," *même*.<sup>7</sup>

The meme was one aspect of Dawkins' larger study on the selfish behavior of genes. He proposed that genes do not propagate on a group or species basis, but purely as the product of individual successes and failures – in other words, "selfishly." The good of the species plays no part in the determination of a gene's fitness. Instead, it is only by grace of the individual's survival and passing on of a gene that that gene survives. Therefore, genes carry qualities that affect the survival chances of the individual, and those that propagate do so only because of their own selfishness aligning with the context of their environment.<sup>8</sup>

Memes, argued Dawkins, reinforce this framework because their value and propagation is based on individual decisions to give them cultural weight and share them. While a meme could be a tune, an idea, a catchphrase, a technique, or almost anything else that people might imbue with cultural significance, it performs the same function in culture as genes in biology, passing on small bits of information from person to person. To put it in Dawkins' words: "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which...can be called imitation." To survive, however, memes must also "survive." In this case, that means that they must meet a certain threshold of cultural value in order to be passed along –

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<sup>7</sup> Dawkins even saw to it that the pronunciation of his word would follow strict guidelines by writing that the sound, and I quote, "...should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream.'" Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 2006), 192.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 2-10

in other words, a meme has to be an idea that its recipient deems appealing enough to share. This follows Dawkins' stress on the individual as the fundamental unit of study in the propagation of biology, and now, culture, for each individual judges the worth of the memes rattling around inside their head. This concept is clearly demonstrated with the culture of sharing that now exists in social media. Users judge various posts as share-worthy or not based on their own cultural values.<sup>9</sup>

Assuming this framework, memes in *League* only propagate because of their significance to the subculture's context. A meme's propagation within the *League* community depends on the geek cultural values defined by T.L. Taylor in *Raising the Stakes*. Geek culture prizes "...highly refined skill and mastery [that] operates through technology, science, and gaming."<sup>10</sup> Thus, memetic propagation in *League* depends on a system of values related to displays of skill or deep knowledge. Other factors, such as humorousness, also play a part, but even examples like humor are dependent on the perception of a player's skill. One such example is Brandon "Saintvicious" DiMarco, who gained a reputation for failing to properly execute plays in the clutch. That idea became a running joke, or meme, within the community that led to YouTube montages and a now defunct website that documented his most recent blunders in both casual and professional settings. Similar examples abound in other spectator sports of players, or even teams, known as chokers in big games. American football player Donovan McNabb, for example, led the Philadelphia Eagles to four straight conference championship games but only won one of them, which left his name associated with choking under pressure.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 192-193

<sup>10</sup> T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 111.

<sup>11</sup> "Saintvicious," *Leaguepedia*, edited 7 June, 2017, <https://lol.gamepedia.com/Saintvicious>  
Coiley Mid, "Saintvicious Fail Smite Montage," *YouTube*, 24 August, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlGPM1AjGLw>

Because Dawkinsian memes can be any number of different things, they need to be categorized for a memetic cultural system model. For *League* celebrity, basic memes consist of words, plays made, actions taken by a player on camera, and anecdotes of actions taken by a player while off camera. Web 2.0 social media and user-generated content created these memes. Audiences usually witness these small snippets, often no more than a few seconds long, on streaming websites like Twitch.tv, where top *League* personalities command huge followings. Dedicated fans upload the most resonant moments on YouTube channels for posterity, creating a memetic archive.

Live streams, one of many new media in the Web 2.0 world, are one of the most important innovations in gaming history. A live stream is a video feed that runs directly to a streamer's computer screen, capturing everything that happens on camera. Thus, people can go to a live stream to watch people playing video games, often with the streamer using a webcam that allows the audience to see their reactions while playing. Further, a live chat sidebar allows viewers to interact with each other and the streamer as well. This takes the asynchronous experience of watching gameplay on YouTube and makes it a more visceral, synchronous experience.

Popular live streaming is defined by good players and very entertaining on-screen personalities. *League*'s competitive nature and difficulty provides powerful incentives for continual learning outside the game. Therefore, top level players, especially pros, are very popular among *League*'s player base. Streams for the top *League* pros can rack up massive numbers of views. While famous, players are almost never known by their birth names, like Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok, considered the best *League* player ever. His inaugural Twitch stream

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nickchan85, "When did saint last miss smite? Updated," *League of Legends Community*, 18 July, 2013, <http://forums.na.leagueoflegends.com/board/showthread.php?t=3677730>

session – under the name, “Faker,” – peaked at 245,000 concurrent viewers in February, 2017.<sup>12</sup>

Lee, a three time World Champion before he began streaming, demonstrated the power that usernames hold in the *League* community and the potential size of the audiences for Twitch streaming.

Live streams make up a huge part of a gaming community’s memetic cultural system because it produces memes. But how do memes actually work? Dawkins outlined the rough parameters of meme propagation in *The Selfish Gene*. He proposed that memetic propagation proceeds systematically through individual judgments of individual memes based on the meme’s longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity, as well as by the cultural context of the brain which carries it.<sup>13</sup>

Just before the turn of the millennium, Susan Blackmore, another memetic scholar, elaborated on Dawkins’ work. In *The Meme Machine* (1999), she also used genetics as a parallel for culture, and laid out how the process of imitation – culture’s propagation system – worked. However, Blackmore concluded that the system for memetic propagation had not yet solidified, largely because culture did not yet have its perfect, high-fidelity data carrier like DNA. She pointed to the internet as the best candidate, though. Even in the late 1990s, the internet had so shrunk the world and sped up the memetic process that it represented a real possibility for a truly polished imitation system.<sup>14</sup> By Web 2.0, the roadmap of such a system was in place. In *League of Legends* subculture, livestreams on Twitch.tv produce memes. In concert, sites like YouTube

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<sup>12</sup> Nathan Grayson, “*League of Legends* Pro Faker Signs Up For Twitch, Immediately Breaks Streaming Record,” *Kotaku*, February 6, 2017, <http://kotaku.com/league-of-legends-pro-faker-signs-up-for-twitch-immedi-1792058749>

<sup>13</sup> Dawkins 192-195

<sup>14</sup> Susan Blackmore is a freelance writer and Visiting Professor at the University of Plymouth. Susan Blackmore, “Full Biography – Dr Susan Blackmore,” *Dr Susan Blackmore*, accessed 17 August, 2017, <https://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/biography/>  
Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 208-209.

provide a high copying-fidelity storage medium for those individual cultural units, preserving them so they can be passed on as accurately as possible.

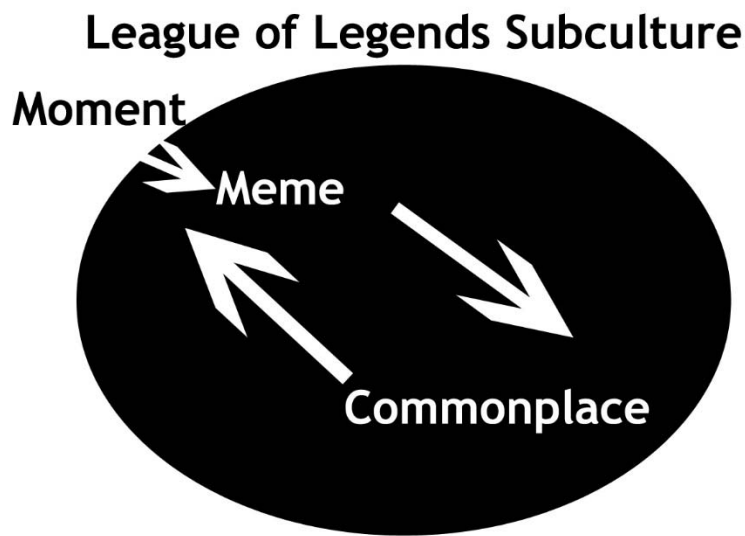
If memes propagate through imitation using Web 2.0 media, what does *League*'s subcultural system look like? The individual memes, little clips of play or dialogue almost universally witnessed on live streams and preserved on YouTube, represent a sort of "proto-meme" stage when they first occur. Because of their brevity and their part as fractions of larger broadcasts, I refer to these individual units as Moments. To put it simply, a Moment is just something that happens. Moments are the sick outplays, the mind games, the trash talk, or the spilt soup on stream. To continue using the example of Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok, one such Moment occurred during his professional debut. Matched up against Kang "Ambition" Chan-yong, a veteran and the best player at Lee's position at the time, the rookie destroyed him in a duel early in the game. "The audience members stared blankly at the screen," wrote Mina Kimes, a senior writer for ESPN, in a 2015 profile of Lee. "They looked as if they had just witnessed a crime."<sup>15</sup> This "crime" was Lee's first professional Moment, and it immediately entered the subculture via its witnesses, where it was judged against the cultural values of the community members.

If a Moment like Lee's duel with Kang has memetic significance with some of its witnesses, they will pass it along, officially making the Moment a Meme, as seen in Figure 2. While its reception may vary from person to person, the Moment carries cultural information now, attributed to it by each witness, and will continue to propagate as long as fresh witnesses continue to judge it worthy of passing along further. In the case of Lee, his debut moment was weighty enough to leave his audience in shock. It became a Meme and made the rounds of the

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<sup>15</sup> Mina Kimes, "The Unkillable Demon King," *ESPN*, June 10, 2015, [http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/\\_/id/13035450/league-legends-prodigy-faker-carries-country-shoulders](http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/13035450/league-legends-prodigy-faker-carries-country-shoulders)

*League* community, putting his username officially on the subculture’s map as well. His username now also carries cultural information – his duel against Kang – so “Faker” is also judged by community members. Since Lee’s username is associated with a good Meme, it likely gets passed around and also becomes a Meme. This is the all-important first step on a username’s journey as a cultural carrier. However, Lee did not retire after one match, so when he created new Moments, another change happened.



*Figure 4.8: The League of Legends Memetic System*

In theory, usernames could be designated as Memes. After making his big first play, for example, “Faker” was also judged by *League* community members. Ultimately, however, usernames are complicated Memes. A username carries a player’s reputation, but reputations themselves are constructed with Memes – players like Lee have many significant Moments over the course of their careers. Therefore, usernames are Memes that also carry other Memes.

Dawkins struggled to distinguish individual memes and composite entities. “So far I have talked of memes as though it was obvious what a single unit-meme consisted of. But of



course it is far from obvious. I have said that a tune is one meme, but what about a symphony: how many memes is that?" The symphony is an excellent example. Many symphonies have famous measures within their larger body, such as the opening to four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Such measures are Memes. However, during a performance, a soloist may have a Moment of brilliance that creates another Meme. Therefore, symphonies are more than Memes. Dawkins explained that ultimately culture is built from units of varying sizes, which are, themselves, often composite entities that are difficult to distinguish or categorize.<sup>16</sup>

Creating a category for usernames is possible due to the work of University of Pittsburgh English composition professor David Bartholomae, who coined the term, "commonplace," meaning, "...a culturally or institutionally authorized concept or statement that carries with it its own necessary elaboration." Bartholomae's term is in reference to his writing classes, and refers specifically to terms and concepts that appear in language. A phrase like, "original sin," for example, is understood to be a theological concept and part of a Biblical passage, onto which people have placed layers of social and cultural meanings.<sup>17</sup>

One easy connection between usernames and commonplaces is that usernames are also language, like "Ambition." More importantly, however, commonplaces gain reputations in *League* subculture, which is a distinct community of people who understand the multiple meanings without needing explanation. Therefore, usernames are Commonplaces that attract new Memes (Figure 3). "Faker," is the nucleus at the center of many Lee Sang-hyeok Memes.

Commonplaces illustrate that Memes do not exist in vacuums. They stick to each other around Commonplaces, where they link with one another and interact. For example, if Lee made an uncharacteristically poor play, that play is only uncharacteristically poor because the other

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<sup>16</sup> Dawkins 195.

<sup>17</sup> David Bartholomae, "Inventing the University," *Journal of Basic Writing* 5, no. 1 (1986), 137-138.

Mememes attached to Faker make it so. Commonplaces are the same. They interact with the other Mememes and Commonplaces in the subculture. So how do these larger entities interact with each other? How do “Faker” (Lee) and “Ambition” (Kang) interact with one another memetically?

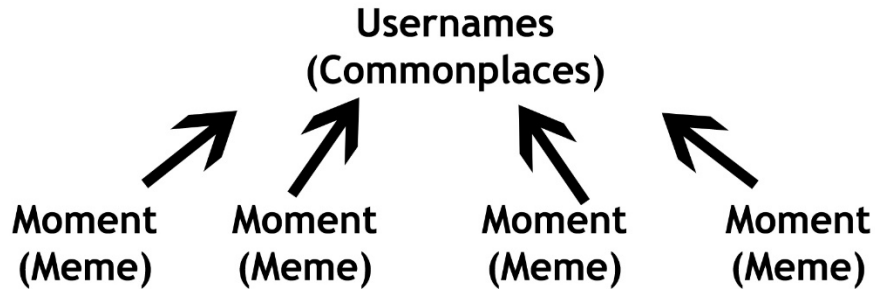


Figure 4.9: Usernames (Commonplaces) as composite memetic entities.

Limor Shifman, in *Memes in Digital Culture* (2014), undertook an exhaustive examination of popular internet memes, like Gangnam Style and “Charlie bit my finger.” Shifman applied elements of the Dawkinsian model to discuss the Meme’s humorous cousins. She concluded that, “...memes may best be understood as pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon. Although they spread on a micro basis, their impact is on the macro level: memes shape the mindsets, forms of behavior, and actions of social groups.”<sup>18</sup> Shifman claimed that memes constantly spread from person to person in forms of mimicry and remixing. She asserted that

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<sup>18</sup> Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 18.

memes, unlike their biological counterparts, often change when “inherited” by someone new. People often use an existing meme, such as the flamboyance of a music video’s main subject or the horror of a child having his finger bitten by a younger sibling, and use it to produce content of their own. For example, a user could mimic the original content in different media – such as reenacting “Charlie bit my finger” with Legos – or remix it by changing the original image or soundtrack. Each time a user remixes or mimics a meme, it becomes more likely to be passed on because their version of the meme will be more palatable to people with similar cultural values.<sup>19</sup>

In *League*, a computer game that is governed by mathematical logic, many in-game Memes are entirely replicable. That allows community members to constantly remix and mimic Memes as they propagate, all of which attach to a Commonplace. One good example of this case is Choi “InSec” In-seok, who invented a move in *League* that bears his name to this day, regardless of who is using it. However, not all Memes are created equal because they propagate differently according to the cultural values of their judges. Choi’s original move still resonates with *League* subculture, whereas none of his imitators have replaced him as the move’s namesake. This macro impact, measured by way of mentions in subreddit comments and other means of *League* discourse, provides an approximation of a Meme or Commonplace’s *memetic mass*, or overall significance to that subculture.<sup>20</sup>

Shifman’s model means that individual users apply memes they already have to memes they inherit. Thus, the memetic process operates on a macro scale through Memes influencing their subcultural counterparts. Because Commonplaces draw Memes to themselves, they also affect the subculture around them. As with Memes, they too are unequal because the cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 20-22

<sup>20</sup> There are, of course, many exceptions to such an assertion. There is no single video of most Moments, but one could certainly interpret the proliferation of videos depicting the same Moment as another measure of memetic mass.

significance – or memetically massive – of the Memes attached to the Commonplace are unequal. Therefore, username commonplaces with more memetically massive Memes will reach a greater number of people. This memetic mass directly affects the influence that the Commonplace exerts on the subculture: a *memetic gravity*.<sup>21</sup>

Lee remains one of the best examples of a username commonplace's memetic gravity. His changed the narratives of emergent rookies, like Gwak "Bdd" Bo-seong, who has spent his whole career being compared to "Faker," and Rasmus "Caps" Winther, who was hyped up before his 2017 season debut as "Baby Faker."<sup>22</sup> It has also warped the careers of veteran players like Yoo "Ryu" Sang-ook, who was famously outplayed by Lee in 2013. According to player-turned-coach Choi "Locodoco" Yoon-sub, a running joke in Korea goes, "Ryu dies every five seconds," because it is assumed that someone, somewhere, is watching a YouTube clip of Lee outplaying Yoo at any given point in time. Yoo's face on camera after being outplayed also became a common emote on *League* streams.<sup>23</sup> When Mina Kimes, an ESPN staff writer, wrote a profile of Lee in 2015, she witnessed his memetic gravity firsthand. "When I asked [a PC café patron] whether he's heard of Faker, he looks at me as if I've sprouted a third eye. 'Of course,' he replies, while his friends snicker. 'Everyone knows him. Faker is God.'"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to be confused with "mimetic gravity" in astrophysics, a field of study as foreign to me as Sanskrit.

<sup>22</sup> Julian Alexander Cantwell, "VIDEO: Caps Showing Why He's Called Baby Faker," *12up*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.12up.com/posts/4563300-video-caps-showing-why-he-s-called-baby-faker>  
JohnnyBrawoo, "Baby Faker crushing asses," *Fnatic Subreddit*, December 3, 2016, [https://www.reddit.com/r/fnatic/comments/5g8v01/baby\\_faker\\_crushing asses/](https://www.reddit.com/r/fnatic/comments/5g8v01/baby_faker_crushing asses/)

Colin "CD-Mangaka" Nimer, "Bdd as the next Faker? Not so fast," *Slingshot Esports*, March 22, 2016, <http://slingshotesports.com/2016/03/22/league-of-legends-bdd-faker-comparisons-premature/>

Tyler Erzberger, "The moment of truth for Gwak 'Bdd' Bo-seong is upon us," *ESPN*, August 25, 2017, [http://www.espn.com/esports/story/\\_/id/20448794/league-champions-korea-moment-truth-gwak-bdd-bo-seong-us](http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/20448794/league-champions-korea-moment-truth-gwak-bdd-bo-seong-us)

<sup>23</sup> LoL Esports, "Worlds Feature: Faker vs. Ryu," *YouTube*, October 1, 2015, <https://youtu.be/YFCpCajop9k>  
"Ryu," *EsportsWikis*, Edited June 24, 2017, <http://lol.esportswikis.com/wiki/Ryu>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

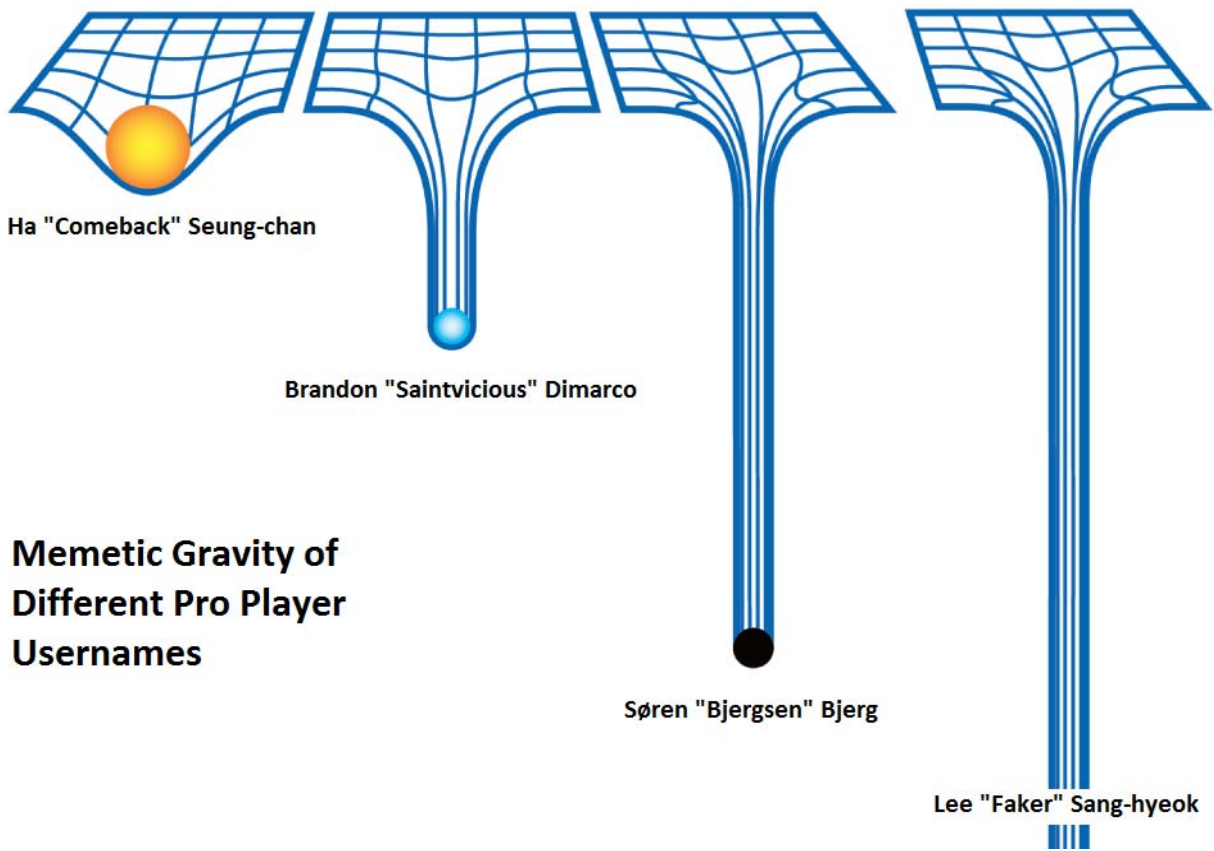


Figure 4.10: Memetic Gravity of different professional League of Legends player usernames, as shown using a spacetime model.<sup>25</sup>

“Faker”’s memetic gravity warps the fabric of *League* subculture, similarly to the way a bowling ball might warp a cloth. If we conceive of all of culture as a single plane of interconnected subcultures, a Meme or Commonplace’s memetic gravity warps that plane based on its memetic mass (Figure 4). Ultimately, if the its memetic mass is great enough, this memetic gravity can warp a given subculture, like *League*’s, so much that it also warps adjacent,

<sup>25</sup> The meme-literate reader will not that this image is taken, appropriately, from an Internet Meme called “Heaviest Objects in the Universe.”

connected subcultures, or even larger cultures, transcending many cultural divisions and even national borders in influence – i.e. Lee appearing in a Chinese Doritos commercial in 2017.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 4.11: Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok in a Chinese Doritos commercial.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 4.12: Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok.

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<sup>26</sup> BlackBadger, "SKT Faker Doritos Commercial," *YouTube*, August 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSYDEQntjls>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*



Figure 4.13: Religious images of Lee "Faker" Sang Hyeok.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 4.14: Yoo "Ryu" Sang-ook after being outplayed by Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok in the Korean Summer 2013 regional finals.<sup>29</sup>

Memetic gravity also explains the actual content of the usernames commonplaces in *League* subculture. All memetic objects in culture exert memetic gravity on one another. *League*'s usernames are similarly shaped by particular cultural influences from other memes in

<sup>28</sup> Haryuu, "David Contre Goliath," *OGaming.tv*, October 25, 2015, <http://www.ogaming.tv/news/david-contre-goliath/10072>

김리븐, "This is why Faker is God," *YouTube*, November 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GgUQsfIJj0>

<sup>29</sup> "Ryu Faker GIF by LoL Esports," *Giphy*, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://giphy.com/gifs/ryu-faker-tilted-3o7WTrvzwOW02kc0Xm>

larger or connected subcultures. These influences on *League*'s usernaming culture and traditions lay bare several cultural-historical currents in world history.

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## A Splendid, Coded Mural

Memetic gravity causes the emergence of usernaming traditions. Professional players choosing a username choose one that is culturally resonant for them. In many cases, that means pop culture references, but it also means format or style references to other usernames. These usernaming traditions illustrate the practical side of memetic gravity: how the gravity of certain cultural events and trends affects usernaming choices.

Pro player usernames in *League of Legends* yield two distinct threads. First, usernames reflect the global nature of Web 2.0 and esports. Some 56% of all pro usernames across the five major regions of North America, Europe, Taiwan/Macau/Hong Kong, Korea, and China are English (Table 1).<sup>30</sup> The rest include a multitude of other non-endemic languages – Japanese, French, Spanish, and Italian. Clearly, even outside North America, English usernames are a tradition, and the linguistic variety illustrates the globalized nature of *League*.

Secondly, since 2012, pro usernames have shown increased awareness of their as celebrity status in esports subculture. There are several influences on this. Players select usernames that project aspects of themselves, their ambitions, or other cultural influences. Korean players led the way in establishing this usernaming trend because of a reigning tradition of successful esports celebrities during the Second Wave (1998-2012).

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that I refer to the five major regions based on seeding for the 2017 *League of Legends* World Championship. These regions all had teams that automatically qualified for Group Stage play at Worlds 2017, while other regions, such as Brazil, Latin America, Japan, Turkey, and the C.I.S., participated in a preliminary play-in to qualify for groups.

“2017 World Championship,” *EsportsWikis*, Visited October 20, 2017, [http://lol.esportswikis.com/wiki/2017\\_Season\\_World\\_Championship](http://lol.esportswikis.com/wiki/2017_Season_World_Championship)



Another example of this increased awareness is consciousness of the esports broadcast, which brings together the anonymous world of the game and the public one of the stream. Awareness of this influences players to select names that sound better on stream and eliminates some names that were more appropriate when players remained anonymous. This trend manifests in the general shortening of usernames and the prevalence of name changes among pro players across the five major regions.

*Table 4.1: A survey of professional League of Legends player usernames across the five major regions as of 10/2017*

Region	Total Names (including changes)	Number of Unique Name Changes	Number of Foreign Language Names	% Foreign Language Names	Number of English Names	% English Names
North America (NA LCS)	164	19	21	12.9%	142	87.1%
Europe (EU LCS)	193	12	- <sup>31</sup>	-	66	34.2%
Korea (LCK)	380	62	323	85%	234	61.6%
China (LPL)	241	46	148	61.4%	107	44.4%
Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau (LMS)	128	7	80	62.5%	68	53.1%

Table 1 reflects the increasingly global nature of Web 2.0, gaming, and esports.<sup>32</sup> In the three Asian regions, non-endemic language usernames own a huge share of the name complex. Further, the majority of those names are in English. Even Korea, the world’s leader in esports,

<sup>31</sup> The European region has players from 24 different countries, so the idea of “foreign” usernames is less practical to distinguish.

<sup>32</sup> This data was collected using EsportsWikis. I found that EsportsWikis had the most recent, comprehensive, and accountable list of players in each region as of the writing of this study. The list of names (see Appendices A-E) accounted only for players endemic to that region according to residency designations for the sake of teasing out regional trends. This means that while some players, such as Vincent “Biofrost” Wang of North America, may be marked with an extra-regional country of origin in the wiki, their North American residency determined their place on that list.

boasts 62% English usernames despite its pro players sharing one language. Europe has the smallest English name composition, 34%, but represents twenty-four countries.<sup>33</sup>

Of the five regions, the China, Korea, and Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau illustrate the memetic gravity of non-endemic language exoticism most prominently. In Korea (Appendix A), names like “Ambition,” “Impact,” “Shy,” and “Deft” are more common than “SuNo,” “Eryuk,” or “SoHwan.” China’s (Appendix B) foreign usernames include “illusion,” “Gogoin,” and “Uzi.” Among Taiwan’s, (Appendix C) “Wish,” “Westdoor,” and “Steak.”

The presence and prevalence of the English usernames Meme likely reflects the importance of English in these societies. English, one of the main languages of imperialism, has been the most recent lingua franca of the West. Because of this, English has a heavy presence in all three of the Asian regions. Yang Woo-jin argued that South Korea’s pro-American tendencies spurred the country’s push to catch up to the technological and economic levels of the rest of the world.<sup>34</sup> The importance of English shaped the Korean education system, which still features English in its required curriculum. According to *Asia Society*’s Center for Global Education, Korean students begin English-language instruction in third grade. Not every Korean pro gamer is bilingual, but an education based largely on rote memorization provides players with a working vocabulary that informs naming traditions. Combined with the non-endemic language exoticism, this makes English usernames the most common choice for players to project their personalities.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The countries represented are: Great Britain, France, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Finland, Spain, Russia, Estonia, Norway, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Israel, Romania, Hungary, Croatia, Afghanistan, Slovenia, and the UAE. As shown on the table, this linguistic diversity made “Foreign Language” name designations nearly impossible.

<sup>34</sup> Woo Jin Yang “Two key Historical Moments of the Early 1960s: A Preliminary Reconsideration of 4/19 and 5/16,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall, 2005): 124.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Diem, Tedd Levy, and Ronald VanSickle, “South Korean Education,” *Asia Society*, Visited October 21, 2017, <http://asiasociety.org/global-cities-education-network/south-korean-education>

Education systems in the other major Asian *League of Legends* regions also stress the importance of English. Hong Kong remained a British colony until 1997. Even after independence, English language education continued in the Hong Kong education system. The public schools teach in both Cantonese and English, leaving the primary language to the school's discretion. English education also has a strong presence in Taiwan where, according to *World Education News & Reviews*, Taiwanese children have access to English immersion programs in pre-school and begin compulsory English education in primary schools at the fifth grade level.<sup>36</sup>

Although China shares a history of European imperialism with Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau, its relationship with the West broke off following the Maoist revolution (1945-1950). According to Fu Shiyi of Xiamen University, China attempted to rid its education system of English during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-72. However, U.S. President Richard Nixon's visit in 1971 helped bring English slowly back into the Chinese curriculum.<sup>37</sup>

English language instruction is one source of the prevalence of English usernames. English education provided the vocabulary necessary for English username proliferation. However, a more powerful influence came from the first global esports celebrities: *StarCraft*: *Brood War* and *StarCraft II* players, who heavily favored English usernames.

The professionalization of esports created usernaming trends during the Second Wave (1998-2012). Usernames anchored this emergent professionalism. As of 2017, six of the top ten

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<sup>36</sup> The Taiwanese *League of Legends* league, or LMS, is actually comprised of Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese, and Macau Chinese player bases. However, because there is only one registered starting player from Macau, Lam "KuKu" Ka Fu, this study restricted its investigation to the cases of Taiwan and Hong Kong. "Guide to Hong Kong Schools and Education," *The Wall Street Journal*, Visited October 21, 2017, <http://guides.wsj.com/hong-kong/guide-to-hong-kong/education/> Jessica Magaziner, "Education in Taiwan," *World Education News + Reviews*, June 7, 2016, <https://wenr.wes.org/2016/06/education-in-taiwan>

<sup>37</sup> Shiyi Fu, "Teaching Writing to English Majors at the Tertiary Level in China – Reflections on Material Development and Teaching Methodology," *English Discourse and Intercultural Communication* 1 (2007), 26-38, [http://comm.louisville.edu/iic/books/mx1/MX\\_Volume%20I\\_26-38\\_FU.pdf](http://comm.louisville.edu/iic/books/mx1/MX_Volume%20I_26-38_FU.pdf)

highest grossing *StarCraft: Brood War* players used English usernames – Flash, sAviOr, Stork, July, iloveoov, and BoxeR. Thus English language usernames became associated with success, professionalism, and pride. This association influenced naming trends in *Brood War*’s sequel, *StarCraft II*, seven of whose top ten players had English usernames.<sup>38</sup>

Early professional gamers’ pioneer status amplified their usernames’ memetic gravity. For the first time, talented gamers became celebrities, creating ripples that warped much of esports subculture and established the first usernaming traditions. Because the most successful early pros were Korean, the peninsula became the epicenter of this gravity, pulling in other regional gaming subcultures, and resulting in a huge percentage of English usernames in pro play.<sup>39</sup>

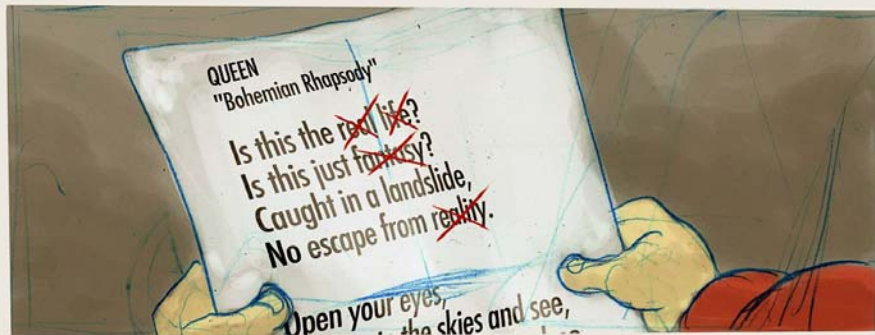
The large number of English usernames emerged with the burgeoning professionalization of esports players during the Second Wave. During the Third Wave, players became increasingly aware of the integration between their anonymous identity in the game and their celebrity status in the esports. As a result, username selection became a more formalized process worldwide. Players began to select shorter usernames that conveyed specific intentions on the part of the namer.

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<sup>38</sup> “Top Player Rankings for StarCraft: Brood War – eSports Player Rankings,” *E-Sports Earnings*, Edited September 23, 2017, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/152-starcraft-brood-war/top-players>  
“Top Player Rankings for StarCraft II – eSports Player Rankings,” *E-Sports Earnings*, Edited October 17, 2017, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/151-starcraft-ii/top-players>

<sup>39</sup> Dal Yong Jin, *Korea’s Online Gaming Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 60.  
Ibid 87-88

## How Koreans pick their starcraft names



Art by Nicolas Chaussois

every Monday  
The Weekly  
Ain't  
최고의주간

Figure 4.15: Fan-made comic depicting Korean StarCraft player selecting his username using words from the end of lyrics in Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody."

Broadcasters universally referred to players by their usernames rather than their birth names, so many players changed usernames with an eye toward how their names sounded on stream. The content of usernames varied widely, but players did generally adopt shorter and shorter ones, as illustrated by a general decrease in the average syllables in player names over the course of professional play from Spring 2013 to Summer 2017, especially in the West, where esports professionalism was just emerging (Figure 10).<sup>40</sup>

The change in average syllables in professional player usernames reflects the varying levels of regional professionalization vis-à-vis their levels of achievement in Second Wave esports. Korea, the most successful and professional of the five regions, started with the lowest initial syllable count and showed little volatility over time. China, the second highest earning country in both flagship esports of the Second Wave, *StarCraft: Brood War* and *StarCraft II*, also showed relatively little volatility in the number of syllables in each pro player's name. North America and Europe, however, show relatively high volatility from split to split and a large reduction in username syllables between their inaugural and most recent seasons.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Notably, Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau's league started later, in Spring 2015, when the trio of countries split from the old Southeast Asian league to form their own, while Korea's Champions League started in early 2012 and included a third season per year until 2014. However, I took the liberty of standardizing the data sets for the figure as the Spring and Summer regular seasons for each year to make for easier comparative study.

<sup>41</sup> "Top Countries for StarCraft: Brood War," *E-Sports Earnings*, Edited September 23, 2017, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/152-starcraft-brood-war/countries>  
"Top Countries for StarCraft II," *E-Sports Earnings*, Edited October 17, 2017, <https://www.esportsearnings.com/games/151-starcraft-ii/countries>

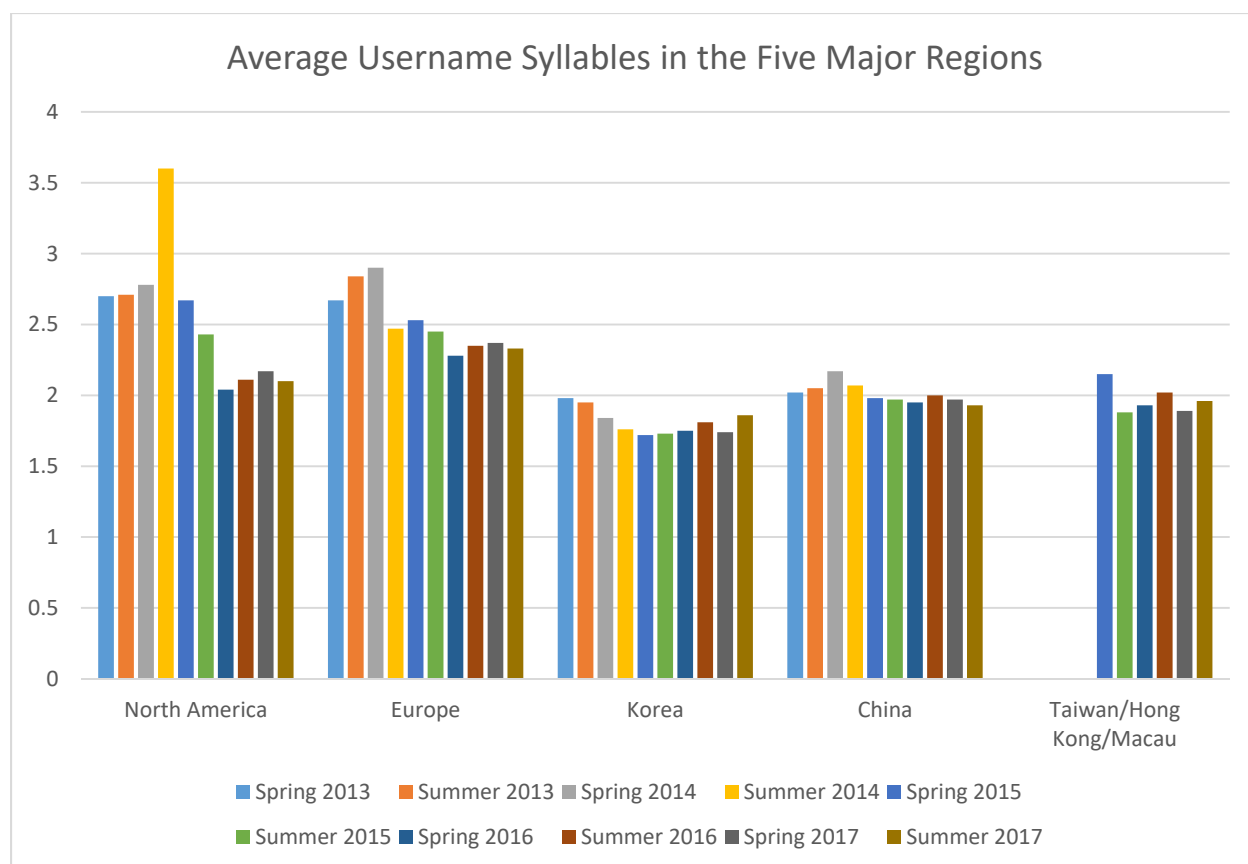


Figure 4.16: Changes in Average Number of Syllables in Professional League of Legends Player Usernames across the Five Major Regions

This change over time in the North American and European regions reflects a rising number of pro gamers who felt the need to shorten their usernames. Players were increasingly aware of personal branding. They cared about name recognition and the broadcast quality of their usernames – how their names sound when used on broadcasts. Shorter names simply made more sense for the broadcast or brand conscious player because they were easier for commentators to say on broadcasts during the more frenetic moments of a game. The sound of a player's name on stream, therefore, becomes one of many Memes attached to a username. Commonplace, and the sounds of short usernames are more culturally resonant because they are smoother and better sounding on a broadcast. Notable examples of this trend in North America

and Europe include Zach Malhas, who shortened his name from Nientonsoh to Nien or Apollo Price's shift from WizFujiin (pronounced Wiz Fusion) to simply Apollo.<sup>42</sup>

Username also functioned as canvases onto which pros and aspiring pros project a curated part of themselves. At the earliest stages of username selection, even in the anonymous context of the game, the username served as a projection of self. A player's username conveyed something about the player, even if the reader did not know the person behind it.

However, in esports, players are celebrities, so the username becomes the point of contact between the player and their audience. The username's objective is to provide something for fans to engage with, based what the player chooses to project. Other sports have also developed similar naming practices. As Michael Gennaro explored in his study of boxing in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria, Nigerian boxers often took nicknames during this era. They were also keenly aware of their nickname's place as a bridge between them and their audience:

The importance of these names was twofold; it was a way of celebrating one's talent, skill, strength, and courage, while also eliciting excitement in fans to see them fight. Linking their ring personae to famous boxers or cowboys who they had seen in movies...was part of claiming and displaying their toughness, ruggedness, and manliness in public.<sup>43</sup>

These boxers took names like, "Speedy Eric," "Money Hard," and "Strong Man of the Pen," that celebrated their ambitions, personalities, and fighting styles in the ring. In *League of Legends*, pros' usernames also project their uniqueness, personality, or playing style. Players adopt usernames that express their personal traits, reference other geek subcultures, or, ironically, play off of their birth names.

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendices D and E

<sup>43</sup> Michael Gennaro, "Nigeria in the Ring: Boxing, Masculinity, and Empire in Nigeria, 1930-1957" (PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2016), 158-159.



The memetic gravity of Korean Second Wave professional players' usernames is the strongest. Korean English names, typically very short nouns and adjectives, describe traits in players. Kang "Ambition" Chan-yong's name spoke to a deep, burning desire to become a household name. Kang has not only played *League* professionally since 2012, but also endured bouts of mediocrity, a position change, and a team change before winning a World Championship in 2017. Sometimes, however, a player feels that his username does not reflect his career.

Ha "Comeback" Seung-chan is an example of a pro engaging with his audience by changing his name. Originally known as "Hachani," Ha had a reputation for mental lapses and was an average player on one of Korea's better teams. After a particularly lackluster season, he left the Korean team, signed a contract with Europe's Team Vitality, and changed his name to "Comeback." Ha remained an average pro player, but did make a comeback of sorts when he returned to Korea in Summer 2017. Just as "Ambition" showed Kang's burning desire for victory and success, Ha's change from "Hachani" to "Comeback" clearly illustrated his desire for redemption and escape from his previous reputation.

Players' usernames thus project not only who they are, but who they aspire to be. Pro player usernames take on the significance of being a Commonplace for *League* esports audiences. They also create something for players to live up to over the course of their careers.

Outside of esports Mecca, however, naming traditions differed. A greater number of usernames reference other subcultures. Brandon "saintvicious" DiMarco's name is a reference to Vicious, the villain of the anime *Cowboy Bebop* (1998). Usernames engage their audience by appealing to such cross-subcultural Commonplaces. They illustrate the player's interests and

hope to draw fans with similar ones.<sup>44</sup> This method reveals a player's interests rather than traits. Therefore, such usernames are capable of illustrating both the individual player and the larger subculture's wider interests. They act as markers for memetic gravity across subcultures.

In a third naming trend, North American players select usernames that make allusions to their birth names more often than other regions. Players like Hai "Hai" du Lam, or Michael "MikeYeung" Yeung assert agency over their birth names through their usernames by claiming them. At the intersection of the anonymous and the public identity, professional players reclaim agency over their identity. These usernames are uniquely linked to the player, circumventing the process of boiling oneself down to an attribute. The birth name, in this case, plays the role of projecting the entire experience of that player through their name immediately, rather than focusing the lens on one trait. Abandoning the premise of anonymity that of a selected username in the game-space projects a transparent personality, free of smoke and mirrors, rather than a constructed identity.

In conclusion, all three methods of projecting self through usernames show not only the agency of pro players in their username's creation, but their increased awareness of their place as public figures with personal brands. Thus professional players' usernames offer a variety of insights into the historical context of professional *League*. Given their memetic-gravity, it is clear that usernames play an essential role in *League* subculture as Commonplaces by warping not only discussions within the subculture, but also other Memes and Commonplaces in connected subcultures and cultures. Analysis of the usernames themselves demonstrates how heavily their content is influenced by the memetic gravity of both short term esports history and long term regional histories. Increasing levels of professionalization in this case went beyond

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<sup>44</sup> LoL Esports, "How a pro player gets his name," *YouTube*, July 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNpK76KUZkM>

player jerseys and commentators wearing suits and ties; players' usernames also reflect pro players' awareness of their new audiences as they achieved celebrity status.

Individual usernames, silly or simple, illustrate important aspects of *League* subculture within the larger world of Web 2.0. The entire memetic system rests on social media and user-generated content. Understanding how these Memes become Commonplaces and influence subsequent Memes is key to understanding the roots of celebrity and its propagation in the *League of Legends* world.

## Chapter 4

### *League, Gender, and the Geek Identity Crisis*

*“When an actual female gets into the LCS let me know I’ll be sure to extend my congratulations.”*

*-League of Legends Community Member  
on transgender player, Maria Creveling*

*League of Legends* may be the most played computer game in the world, and it may be the face of contemporary esports, but that does not mean that all things remain equal within the professional game, itself. Most glaringly, there is a dearth of visible women in and around the professional level of *League*. As of December, 2017, there was not a single woman starting for a professional team in any of the five major regions. There are also only a few visible female public figures, such as Eefje “Sjokz” Depoortere, the host of the European *League of Legends* Championship Series, and Indiana “Froskurinn” Black, an English language commentator for China’s LoL Pro League.

This lack of women in professional *League* reflects a deeper problem with gender in gaming as a whole. Despite its place as an effeminized culture relative to hegemonic, athletic masculinity, geek culture continues to punch down instead of up. Traditional masculinity’s effeminization of male geeks has led the subculture to seek new ways of differentiating its members from women, especially in predominantly male hardcore gaming communities like *League*’s, resulting in a sexism in geek culture that reflects geek masculinity. If a truly masculine geek is a highly specialized, knowledgeable gamer who puts tremendous focus into the game, then a woman, who is othered to preserve geek masculinity’s protest of its effeminization, must be casual about the game.<sup>1</sup> She does not put as much time in, and she does

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor 116-117

not give her all for the win; she embodies an effeminate casualness. That false equivalence between casualness and femininity shifts the focus from women's skills and qualifications within geek culture to their bodies. As a result, other forms of bias, such as verbal abuse, oversexualized female character designs, and a resurgence of gender roles based on an outdated cult of female sensitivity have proliferated in geek society. In issues of gender, as in issues of labor, esports subculture resembles an early twentieth century European society rather than a more socially conscious twenty-first century one – a realm that any woman would be hesitant to enter.

The marginalization of women in spectator sports is not new; many traditional sports, such as the Tour de France, exclude women. Christopher S. Thompson argued that the Tour became a means of manufacturing heroes for a French public that was feeling insecure about the virility of its men and the power of its nation. This not only meant elevating the male athlete as a powerful, virile, and desirable figure, but also delegating women to traditional gender roles supporting these male heroes. The French cyclist hero, then, was not only an assertion of masculinity, but a separation from women who were many fin de siècle contemporaries feared were blurring the lines between the sexes.<sup>2</sup> Esports subculture mirrors the Tour. It claims masculinity derived from its technical knowledge, prowess, as well as its competitive drive, but also by separating itself from women.

The absence of women from an esports as popular as *League of Legends* defies the logic of simple volume for a game that claims 100 million monthly players. A demographic examination of *League's* players confirms there are very few female gamers in the *League* community. In 2012 Riot Games released an infographic that claimed that 90% of the game's 32

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher S. Thompson, *The Tour de France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 97.

million players at the time were men. In 2015, an informal poll of 22,975 participants on the *League* subreddit found only 11% of participants were female. Such a slow rate of growth among female gamers over three years illustrates the community's unwelcoming nature for women. The lack of women at the professional level of the game reflects this low representation in *League*'s demography and according barriers to entry set up by a primarily male player base, who are easily able to project casualness onto a less commonly represented group within the subculture.<sup>3</sup>

*League*'s overwhelming male majority means most *League* content is aimed at a male audience. It also means that most voices belong to men and express male viewpoints. That creates a less welcoming atmosphere for women. These mainly male viewpoints exacerbate the unwelcoming atmosphere, and even when issues of welcoming and breaking conventions vis-à-vis women come up, they are mainly discussed from a male perspective – insider to insider or majority to majority, rather than outsider to insider or minority to majority. Therefore, even when the gender imbalance in *League* comes up, the discussions are between community members who are all likely to subscribe to an idea of effeminate casualness. The memetic gravity of that idea is extremely strong in *League*'s subculture.

The interconnectedness of the Web 2.0 world multiplies memetic gravity's effects. In this case, that means that ideas like the cult of sensitivity and the objectification of women adapt to new subcultures more rapidly. It also means that geek culture-specific ideas like the

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<sup>3</sup> "League of Legends' Growth Spells Bad News For Teemo," *Riot Games*, October 15, 2012, <http://www.riotgames.com/articles/20121015/138/league-legends-growth-spells-bad-news-teemo>  
"Are you are male or female League of Legends player?" *Strawpoll*, March 18, 2015, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/2zgvy6/are\\_you\\_a\\_male\\_or\\_female\\_league\\_of\\_legends\\_playe](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/2zgvy6/are_you_a_male_or_female_league_of_legends_playe)  
r/

femininity of casualness also exerts a wider and stronger influence that alters the character of these other gender-related themes.

*League*'s misogyny and hypermasculinity exist in a larger cultural matrix of geek sexism. The broader culture both passively and actively objectifies and stereotypes women, resulting in the *League* community's negative views of women as less skilled or serious about the game as their male counterparts. Overlooking the exclusion, *League* subculture then justifies its own position by framing itself as a meritocracy and attributing the absence of female professional players to this truth. Further, Riot Games, despite their heavy handed approach to running their esports, has failed to intervene, allowing the effeminate casualness stereotype to propagate unhindered.

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### **Geek Masculinity Writ Large**

Before examining *League*'s misogynist particularities, it is important to establish the broader concepts whose memetic gravity affects *League* subculture. Masculinity and femininity in geek culture are the broadest starting points for this. T.L. Taylor examined a number of converging theories on gender, geekdom, and technology in *Raising the Stakes* (2012), concluding that esports sit at an awkward intersection point between technological masculinity, which marks technological expertise as a form of masculinity, and athletic masculinity, which prizes athleticism and competitive drive, as well as stoicism. As a result, the competitive gamer, typically represented in broader culture as effeminate, lays claim to both types of masculinity in some capacity, while remaining outside hegemonic masculinity, which has traditionally looked down on them because of their attachment to technology's link to lacking athleticism and

confidence. Taylor thus described geek masculinity as a rather confused morass with a few central pillars.<sup>4</sup>

Alternate geek masculinity in hardcore strategy games like *StarCraft* or *League*, places great value not only on intense levels of specialization in gaming and technology, but in the types of games in which players specialize. These factors govern their vision of masculinity. In examining particular gaming stereotypes about women – most notably that women play games differently than men, a pervasive idea in the *League* community – Taylor concluded that male gamers tend to assume that female players are less competitive and play games more casually. Because getting good at games like *League* and *StarCraft* requires a process that is close to rote memorization, these players assume that less skilled players simply spend less time on the game or play other games with lower skill floors. Ultimately, because the players of hardcore games perceive a hierarchy of games, people who play less technically and intellectually intensive games on Facebook or their phones are less masculine within the geek masculine framework. The perception that fewer women are in the highest tier of players in these hardcore games, then, leads to an assumption that there is something inherent to womanhood that makes this so, hence the idea of effeminate casualness. This idea shifts the focus of male players from a woman's play or specialization to her womanhood and the stereotypes that accompany it. Taylor asserts that the ties between masculinity and intense dedication make women who show such traits clash with stereotypes of what that woman should mean within the community. These clashes are disruptive to the hardcore gamer's identity because of his assumptions about where women belong in his gaming ecosystem. The intense focus that esports geek culture prizes is intimately linked to eventual returns in the form of recognition and social capital, and the idea of a

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor 112-117



widening pool of competitors threatens the male esports gamer's ability to distinguish himself within that framework.<sup>5</sup>

Clashes between visions of effeminate casualness and actual competence lead directly to verbal abuse. In one connected esports community – that of *Smite*, a game very similar to *League* – Lydia Picknell, one of the game's better coaches and businesspeople, dealt with regularly being called 'puta' when the Latin American team she coached appeared on broadcasts. Her experience was summed up by *Polygon* writer Colin Campbell:

Every coaching position she's held has come with abuse. There's the European rival who thinks it's funny to goad her with extravagant compliments about her appearance. There's the South American player who promises to kiss her when they meet at a live event. There's the Israeli player who said he didn't want her advice because she's a woman. And there's the countless spectators who spew insults at her through social media and streaming feeds.<sup>6</sup>

Picknell challenged the masculine gamer conceptions of what she was supposed be in esports and hardcore gaming subculture. Never mind that Picknell had developed her own particular coaching style, or that every team she worked with, according to Campbell, showed marked improvement. The community instead focused largely on her sex; she was a woman, a casual, and therefore unworthy of more respect for her accomplishments. The contrast between her talent and success at her job and what members of the *Smite* community thought she *could* or *should* be able to do made her a target.

Another notorious example came from South Korea. A 17 year-old *Overwatch* (2016) player, Kim "Geguri" Se-yeon, caused a stir with her extremely skilled play. Her favored character in that game required very precise mouse movements to track opponents across her screen. Her extremely high level of skill actually led someone to broach the idea that Kim had to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 118-120

<sup>6</sup> Colin Campbell, "Smite, Sexism, and the Soul of Esports," *Polygon*, November 3, 2015, <https://www.polygon.com/features/2015/11/3/9660094/smite-sexism-and-the-soul-of-esports>

be cheating to be as accurate as she was. In the uproar that followed, two male Korean pros *Overwatch* players literally bet their careers against her, promising to retire if she turned out to be legit. Blizzard Entertainment examined Kim's play and who found no evidence of cheating. However, to further prove her innocence, Kim also played a series of live streamed games to prove that she was, in fact, as good as she appeared to be, eliciting apologies from the two male pros, both of whom followed through on promises to retire.<sup>7</sup> Not only did this incident once again reveal prejudiced assumptions of geek masculinity, the difference between the perception of women gamers and the reality of Kim's skill disrupted the idea of effeminate casualness enough for two male players to bet their careers against her. As with Picknell, Kim's case clarified the twin cultural currents of masculinity resting on insecure male technological specialization that created distinct, but "natural" barriers to entry against women. The male esports community was obsessed with a player's sex shaping their capabilities in the game and the community – women were evaluated based on their womanhood rather than their achievements within the framework of geek culture.

In the larger cultural ecosystem of Web 2.0, these gendered perceptions and the issues they cause persist across several larger subcultures that intersect with the *League* community. However, it is not only womanhood that has disrupted the male vision of esports masculinity. The memetic gravity of traditional masculinity othering the LGBTQ community has warped geek masculinity as well. Transgender and homosexual gamers are disruptive to the idea of effeminate casualness because LGBTQ individuals blur the lines between traditional masculinity and femininity, and do the same to effeminate casualness, which has resulted in an equal "othering" to competent women, along with its requisite abuse.

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Ashcraft, "Korean Woman Kicks Ass at *Overwatch*, Gets Accused of Cheating [Update]," *Kotaku*, Updated June 22, 2016, <https://kotaku.com/korean-woman-kicks-ass-at-overwatch-gets-accused-of-ch-1782343447>

Accomplished fighting game professional, Ricki Ortiz, a transgender woman, faced regular insults regarding her identity. Ortiz first faced discrimination as an openly gay man before deciding to follow through on a sex change that made her much happier overall, but did bring its unfair share of criticism and insults from the community with it. The early focus was on Ortiz's sexuality. Because, as Taylor noted, homosexuality was typically used as an insult among young men because of the assumed femininity of gay men. The geek masculine complex therefore conceptualized of gay men as less masculine, more casual, and less deserving of respect. After Ortiz's decision to begin the sex change process, the focus shifted to whether or not she qualified as a woman. The community never focused on her abilities in the game. Instead, harassment centered on her gender and its place in geek masculine rhetoric, which rested on sexist assumptions of effeminate casualness and clashing conceptualizations of the female image.<sup>8</sup>

Othering women and LGBTQ community members was not the only manifestation of female casualness, though. One very clear manifestation of it can be seen in the very media around which gaming communities are centered. Mainstream video game character design has long catered to a primarily male audience. The pervasive idea that a female character needs to be explicitly, indisputably, physically female manifests in a variety of character design decisions in all of the games above *and* in running tropes that exist in the larger gaming community. The most well-known offence is the MMO Armor Principle.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Martin, "The Struggles and Victories of the First Transgender Fighting Game Champion," *Playboy*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.playboy.com/articles/transgender-street-fighter-fighting-game-pro-ricki-ortiz>



Figure 5.1: Examples of Female (Top) and Male armor in the MMO, Tera (2012)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> SocietyX, "New Armor Renders (All Races)," *Official En Masse Entertainment Forums*, March 27, 2012, <https://tera-forums.enmasse.com/forums/art-media/topics/New-Armor-Renders-All-Races>  
Altira, "Show Off Your Character!" *Official En Masse Entertainment Forums*, June 25, 2012, <https://tera-forums.enmasse.com/profiles/Altira?page=9>

Female armor in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games like *World of Warcraft* (2004) is much more sexually provocative than practical compared to similar armor for male counterparts. As Justin Olivetti commented in *EnGadget*, “Man, we’ve beaten this dead horse for years now, haven’t we? And yet it keeps getting more ridiculous, from *TERA*’s spiderweb lingerie to *Guild Wars 2*’s devs attempting to justify why some of their female characters are geared more for harlotry and less for front-line combat.”<sup>10</sup> The fundamental problem is a result of the assumption that the games’ demographic is largely male. Female characters are therefore designed to look sexy for the player base, rather than any diegetic reason.

The ripple effect of gendered character design trends is seen in various manifestations of vitriol directed toward women in gaming and esports. The continuous emphasis on the objectification of female characters and the sexualization of their accoutrements amplifies the notions of effeminate casualness in gaming as a whole and shifts the immediate focus to her sex rather than her skills. The MMO Armor Principle, along with other character design problems explain the shift in focus from female specialization to female femininity. Many of the gender bias issues exploded during a recent social media event known simply as Gamergate.

In August, 2014, Eron Gjoni, the ex-boyfriend of female game developer Zoey Quinn published a series of blog posts charging her, in great detail, with infidelity during their relationship. He claimed that Quinn’s infidelity was derived from her desire to get ahead in her career and garner favorable reviews for a game that she had launched in 2013 called *Depression Quest*, whose linear narrative style had proven somewhat divisive among players. The key was that this was not, according to Gjoni, a case of exploitation by the people she was sleeping with,

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<sup>10</sup> Justin Olivetti, “The Perfect Ten: Why MMO armor is completely ridiculous,” *EnGadget*, January 17, 2013, <https://www.engadget.com/2013/01/17/the-perfect-ten-why-mmo-armor-is-completely-ridiculous/>

but an action in which she had full agency. Gjoni's decision to denigrate his former lover in the public forum sparked a very loud, vitriolic discussion within the video gaming community. Gamers lambasted the moral bankruptcy of the interaction between game developers and game journalists, but more importantly, the community aimed their harassment at the sexuality of female developers instead of their body of work, tagging their harassment of Quinn and other women developers with #Gamergate. Clearly, a highly vocal group of gamers found the idea of a more inclusive gaming culture offensive, and Quinn's alleged sexual infidelity represented another version of effeminate casualness. For a geek community, nothing proved casualness more than shortcuts to success, and the idea that women might be succeeding through such "underhanded" means made them livid. That group began to viciously harass several women in the gaming world with hacks, releases of personal information, death threats, and rape threats that forced Quinn and several other women to flee their homes in fear. This was the worst geek culture had to offer: a militant geek masculine response to perceived effeminate casualness taken to the extreme in a highly visible public forum. It was the culture war between Web 2.0's inclusive and exclusive gaming communities.<sup>11</sup>

The culture war exploded between gamers in favor of a more inclusive gaming community and gamers intent on ensuring an exclusive, masculine cultural space. Gamergate was the result of a community resisting the change that grew so rapidly in the age of social

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<sup>11</sup> Eron Gjoni, "TheZoePost," *WordPress*, visited October 23, 2017, <https://thezoepost.wordpress.com/>  
Caitlin Dewey, "The only guide to Gamergate you will ever need to read," *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/?utm\\_term=.b6dd5c67b3e2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/?utm_term=.b6dd5c67b3e2)

Kyle Wagner, "The Future Of The Culture Wars Is Here, And It's Gamergate," *Deadspin*, October 14, 2014, <https://deadspin.com/the-future-of-the-culture-wars-is-here-and-its-gamerga-1646145844>

Zachary Jason, "Game of Fear," *Boston Magazine*, May 2015, <http://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/article/2015/04/28/gamergate/>

media.<sup>12</sup> In her layman's guide to the Gamergate phenomenon, Caitlin Dewey of the *Washington Post* explained what Gamergate reflected:

At its heart, remember, the so-called “movement” (if an ambiguous hashtag with no leaders and no articulated goals can be called a movement), was always about how we define our shared cultural spaces, how we delineate identity, who is and is not allowed to have a voice in mainstream culture. It's about that tension between tradition and inclusion — and in that regard, Gamergate may be the perfect representation of our times.<sup>13</sup>

The tension between inclusion and exclusion to which Dewey alluded was hardly limited to Gamergate. The same exclusionary culture of geek masculinity and the otherness of effeminate casualness that operate in various esport subcultures, including *League*, were at work. Game development is not easy requires a degree of technical skills and knowledge, alongside personnel management, narrative, and finance. However, the idea that a woman might use her sex in order to circumvent any of her weaknesses reinforced the idea of women less skilled, dedicated, and qualified when it comes to games, expanding it from simple game playing to game building. The attacks on Quinn and others like her are the product of a particular vision of womanhood as less focused and dedicated to the gaming realm, and therefore less deserving of its benefits. This exclusionary rhetoric is utterly lacking in self-awareness for a culture that is, ultimately, excluded and othered from the traditional forms of masculinity. The geeks, in effect, simply became a different form of stereotypical American high school jocks.

Gamergate started when a developer's ex revealed a woman's sexual behavior to the internet. Further, he explicitly tied her expertise to her use of sex, bringing in preconceived notions of effeminate casualness in a destructive light. A woman sleeping with a journalist to get favorable reviews for the game she developed implied first that she was not skilled enough to earn those reviews with her level of specialized knowledge, and secondly that women were using

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<sup>12</sup> Wagner

<sup>13</sup> Dewey

sex to corrupt game development and games journalism. Gamergate clarified the intensity of the struggle over definitions of masculinity for men. As Taylor explained, geek culture was ironically exclusionary considering gamers' typical positions as outsiders vis-à-vis more general masculinity.<sup>14</sup>

These larger currents of masculinity, stereotyping, and exclusion in larger Web 2.0 communities help put the gender issues in *League* into perspective. Objectification through misrepresentation, an overrepresentation of portrayals of women as supportive, passive agents in geek culture, and perceptions, which often feed off of the other two currents, that women are less serious or skilled in their gaming pursuits created an environment that remains hostile to the female sex.

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### **Objectification and Gender Stereotyping in the *League* Community**

As a hardcore, esports subculture, *League of Legends* subculture is affected by the memetic gravity of themes like geek masculinity and effeminate casualness as well. This memetic gravity is illustrated by the frequency of examples in *League* that reinforce geek cultural misogyny, such as design principles that cater to a mostly male audience, the emergence of a cult of sensitivity derived from perceived effeminate casualness, and a backlash against the efforts of women to enter the professional scene. The scarcity of female on-screen personalities and players in *League*'s professional scene reflects these cultural currents.

As illustrated by the MMO Armor Principle, character design trends cater to their intended audience. In *League*'s case, the game is roughly 90% male, and has historically been designed for that market. Character designs play an integral role in a game's welcoming

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor 117



atmosphere, as a player's first interactions with *League of Legends* come through the characters presented to them. When female characters are designed to appeal to players rather than the character's diegetic environment, it detracts from that atmosphere for female players.

Female representation in *League of Legends* heavily favors the image of the slender, attractive Caucasian woman, despite generally varied male character designs in the game. As of August 23, 2017,<sup>15</sup> *League* offered 138 playable characters, male and female, among whom are cowboys, pirates, sorcerers, knights, and bizarre monsters from another dimension. However, female characters are disproportionately represented in hyper-feminized ways. Out of the 46 female champions in *League*, 31 of them are young women with slender, and often exaggerated, bodies. The remainder include a monster from another dimension, a small, gnomelike creature, a phoenix made of ice, a child, and a clockwork robot. However, even Riot's monstrous female champions are sexualized, often without diegetic purpose. For example, Cassiopeia,<sup>16</sup> a very human looking Medusa-like character, slithers around the map in a bikini top and says things like, "I do love getting up close and personal," and "You won't forget my embrace." As community member Mattias Lehman put it in a March, 2014 article breaking down the representation of female characters in *League*, "When it comes to male champions, Riot has put out some *seriously* monstrous (and I mean that in a complimentary way) champions, like Urgot or Trundle. But when it comes to female champions, the 'monstrous' champions more resemble 'sexy' Halloween costumes than monsters."<sup>17</sup>

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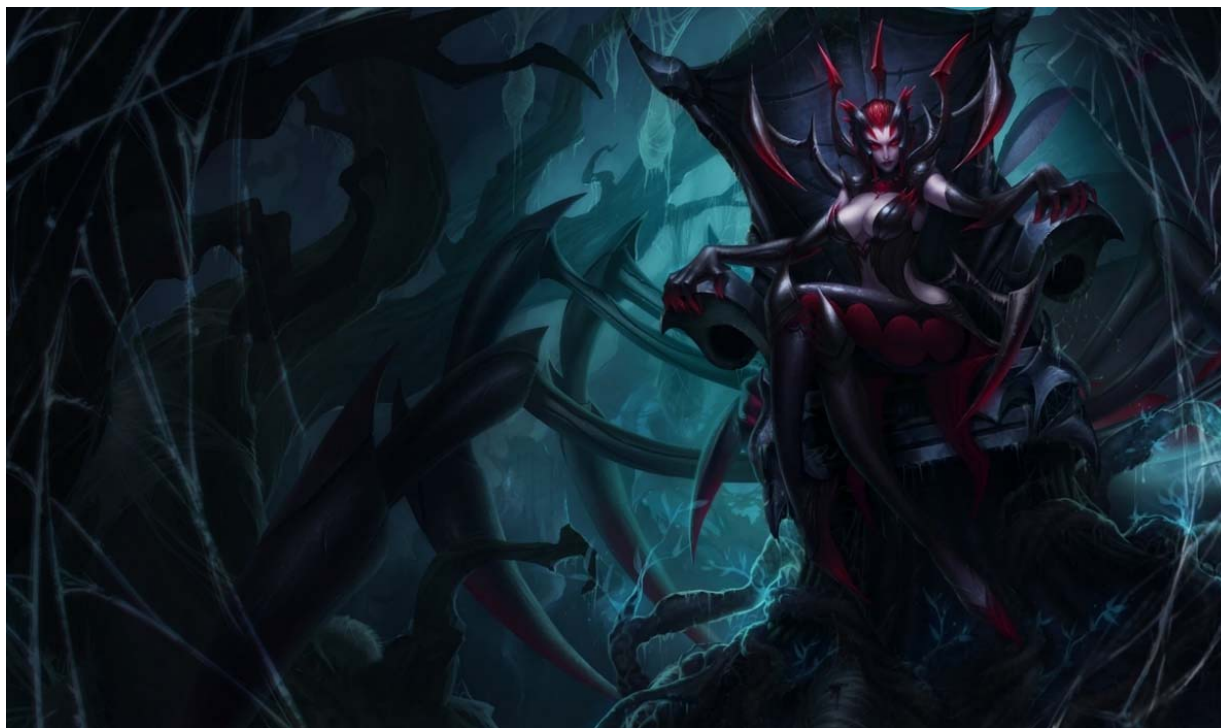
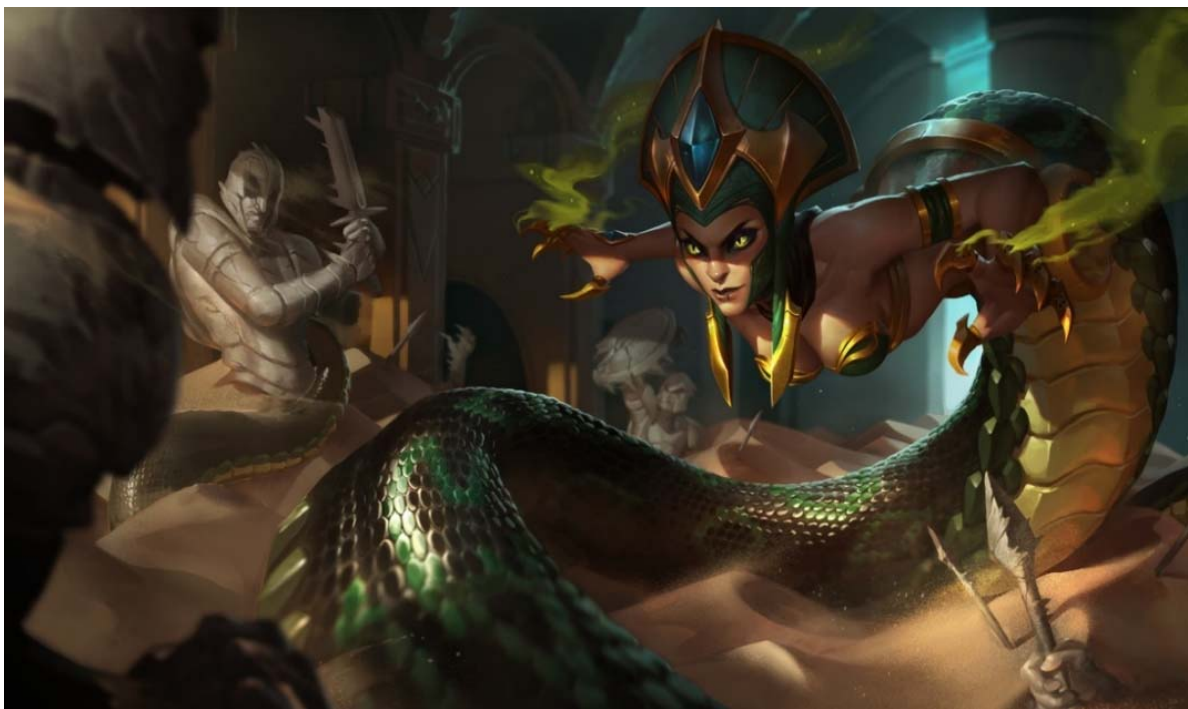
<sup>15</sup> I use a precise timestamp because Riot Games will release champions on monthly, or sometimes bi-weekly intervals, depending on their production schedule. A more general timestamp would add unneeded ambiguity.

<sup>16</sup> Several *League* characters are based on mythology from around the world. Sun Wukong, the Chinese Monkey King, is another such example.

<sup>17</sup> "Champion," *League of Legends Wiki*, Edited October 18, 2017, <http://leagueoflegends.wikia.com/wiki/Champion>  
"Cassiopeia/Quotes," *League of Legends Wiki*, edited April 1, 2018, <http://leagueoflegends.wikia.com/wiki/Cassiopeia/Quotes>  
Mattias Lehman, "Gender Representation in League of Legends," *Wordpress*, March 15, 2014, <https://gentlemangustaf.com/2014/03/15/gender-representation-in-league-of-legends/>

Ultimately, such a tilted set of characters is problematic because the champion is the link between the diegetic world of the game and the non-diegetic world of the player outside of the game. Players will choose characters based on a number of taste factors that may vary from relatability to aesthetics, so the high percentage of female champions that follow a similar design limits the ways that female characters might align with female players' tastes. While plenty of men might pick Cassiopeia or the comically well-endowed Miss Fortune for their looks, what about these characters would be particularly appealing to women on an aesthetic level?

For the record, Riot Games has done a much better job of exploring different visions of women in *League*'s boundless fantasy world recently. Two good examples are Illaoi, a stocky, muscular woman whose appearance illustrates her strength and self-sufficiency, and Rek'Sai, who is a monstrous sand-tunneling shark, whose appearance is truly monstrous, rather than Halloween costume-esque, but these sorts of entries only began to appear in 2014, five years after the game's initial launch. However, even the changes in character design philosophy illustrate Riot's female form's centrality to their characters. The difference was that Riot was attempting to undo some of the damage that most of the early character designs had already done. The majority of *League*'s female characters were still more distinctly female than distinctly competent.



*Figure 5.2: Two of League's monstrous female champions, Cassiopeia (Top) and Elise (Bottom). Both are really overemphasized female humanoids with monstrous characteristics than outright monsters.*

This overemphasis on the female body over the champion's competency manifests in the *League* community's content and discussions. This leads to extreme levels of objectification and oversexualization. In 2014, for example, someone posted a ranking of the breast-sizes of the 39 (at the time) female champions in the game on Chinese forum, Duowan. In the West, *League* subreddit user, ChristianTerrorist, posted a much deeper exploration that compared various sexual aspects of the female *League* roster. ChristianTerrorist's chart was entitled, "League of Legends Waifu Chart Version 2.0," using "waifu," a Japanese term for a character in a game or anime that an individual would claim as their wife. These two examples illustrate the objectification of women in the *League* community. However, both posts also involved a great deal of time building "data sets." The community, particularly in the case of ChristianTerrorist's "Waifu Chart," made very little protest against them – likely because these sexualized rankings catered to a largely male audience.<sup>18</sup>

These sexist trends in geek culture manifest in ways beyond the oversexualization of the female body, however. The *League* community's focus on femininity over ability and the perception of effeminate casualness are also clearly illustrated in the discourse surrounding female participation in *League* play, which oscillates between vague social justifications to an open cult of sensitivity in its efforts to explain why "girls are bad at *League*." YouTuber Dong Huap was one of many male *League* community members to try and explain the realities behind this perception. In a video aimed specifically at explaining to a male audience, Huap, whose YouTube channel is almost entirely comedic in nature, concluded that, "It's because girls don't

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<sup>18</sup> Jing Zhang, "China creates a breast-size ranking for all 39 female League of Legends champions," *Tech In Asia*, July 9, 2014, <https://www.techinasia.com/china-creates-a-breast-size-ranking-for-all-39-female-league-of-legends-champions>

ChristianTerrorist, "League of Legends Waifu Chart Updated (Version 2.0)," *League of Legends Subreddit*, February 26, 2017, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/5wby00/league\\_of\\_legends\\_waifu\\_chart\\_updated\\_version\\_20/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/5wby00/league_of_legends_waifu_chart_updated_version_20/)

play as much League as guys,” – basically a version of the same answer he gave to explain the community perception that Asians are better at *League* than non-Asians. However, this vlog really cast a symptom as a cause. The reality, as is clearly demonstrated by the various manifestations of exclusive geek masculinity, is that the *League* community is not a female-friendly environment, which discourages a larger time commitment because, frankly, feeling unwelcome is not fun. Despite attempting to play the mediator, Huap actually presents an apologist argument that detracts from the importance of larger community agency in the inclusion/exclusion process.<sup>19</sup>

A video detailing the reasons that women are worse than men at *League of Legends* reveals gendered assumptions of the *League* community that women *are*, in fact, generally worse at the game. Huap’s video again illustrates two key stereotypes. The first is that women are perceived as worse at the game and the second is that they are less invested in the game, both manifestations of effeminate casualness. Huap’s video illustrates the roots of *League*’s cult of sensitivity, which paints women as gentle, nurturing, but ultimately uncommitted players who join in to support their male counterparts. The result is that *League*’s positions themselves have become gendered based on these retrograde stereotypes.

One generally accepted stereotype is that women generally play the “Support” role, which hinges largely on aiding a weaker teammate until they become stronger in the later portions of the game. Despite Support’s greater emphasis on controlling various elements of big picture strategy, the community generally perceives it as a role that demands less technical skill from its players that depend on reflexes and aiming. As a result, the position is viewed as more casual, and therefore more effeminate. *League* subreddit user, DuhParafex, called support the

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<sup>19</sup> Dong Huap, “Why girls are bad at League,” *YouTube*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj4xEepRTM>

least stressful role in the game and noted that it allows one to rely on one's teammates more than other roles would, as if these were positive qualities that women sought in their position selection. Meanwhile, in an article for *EsportsEdition*, Jungroan Lin wrote that, "No one needs additional pressure, never mind someone who already needs to conquer the difficulty of liquid eyeliner every single morning," and patronizingly refers to the role as a reprieve from the stress of everyday life for women.<sup>20</sup>

All of these assertions not only attribute perceived female preference for the role to a lack of skill and investment in the game – and stressful makeup experiences – detract from the masculinity of the role itself, and ultimately assure male players that female gamers are playing support because they want to, not because they are pigeon-holed into it. Because of the support role's job helping another player in a lane, as opposed to being a lone wolf, there is also a tendency to conceive of a culture of sensitivity centered on that role. DuhParafex dutifully noted that, "Support feels A LOT like baby sitting and what gender tends to baby sit more? EXACTLY! That definitely has to be related psychologically!"<sup>21</sup> He – incredibly – attributed a perceived increase in female support players to a type of part-time job that happens to deal with children, which only justifies impressions of esports as a temporally displaced culture that belongs in a masculinity-obsessed France of the 1890s instead of the modern day.

Lin voices the cult of sensitivity more explicitly by crediting the women he played with as being more sensitive to the feelings of others. "Ultimately, my girlfriends are much kinder as

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<sup>20</sup> Malzberry, "Girls play support," *League of Legends Community*, January 30, 2014, <http://forums.na.leagueoflegends.com/board/showthread.php?t=4238712>  
DuhParafex, "Whats the Psychological reason why girls main support?" *League of Legends Subreddit*, July 30, 2015, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/3f5zzw/whats\\_the\\_psychological\\_reason\\_why\\_girls\\_main/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/3f5zzw/whats_the_psychological_reason_why_girls_main/)  
Jungroan Lin, "Female Support Players, What's the Deal?" *EsportsEdition*, July 6, 2016, <https://esportsedition.com/league-of-legends/female-support-players/>

<sup>21</sup> DuhParafex

a whole than the bros. When I'm down, it's okay to cry on their shoulders. They are compassionate to my feelings as a whole. They know what I want; more importantly, they know what I don't want."<sup>22</sup> However, Lin has simply stated traits of decent human beings, rather than women specifically, and his assertions, like those of DuhParafex, are restrictive generalizations that box women in in the *League* community, and do not in any way reflect their commitment or skill, once again illustrating the community's obsession with womanhood over actual merit within a geek cultural framework.

The cult of sensitivity is not a new issue in gender relations, and its memetic gravity is massive. Its impact on geek culture is visible in the gaming, esports, and *League* communities, but is also reinforced by other adjacent subcultures, like the Japanese media subcultures. Tropes about women in anime and manga reinforce retrograde gender stereotypes whose memetic gravity warps all of these subcultures.

The anime and gaming communities are closely tied to one another. Anime and manga, Japanese comics and animated shows, also have fans who do not fit the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the two communities are not only linked by interests, but by social degradation. A simple Google search for "Anime and Gaming," reveals pages and pages of anime and gaming focused conventions, where fans of both media meet, intermingle, and celebrate their passions.

However, anime culture comes with its own drawbacks when it comes to gender. By and large, the most popular anime perpetuate stereotypes about women as more sensitive, motherly, and less dynamic characters. Alvina Lai noted in an op-ed for *The Mary Sue* in 2015 that anime

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<sup>22</sup> Lin

often portrayed female characters in different ways depending on the intended audience, much like games:

...the protagonists of josei and shoujo, or any genre in general, have relatable but sometimes simple personalities: innocent characters...the kind and helpful characters, the cute and oblivious characters, and so on. Sometimes, this can lead to a development of strong, admirable female characters with interesting development, but it can also lead to oversimplification, sexualization, and objectification as well.<sup>23</sup>

Lai's conclusions apply to many of the mainstream productions. Two of the most popular anime, *Naruto* (2002-2017) and *Bleach* (2004-2012), have many female characters. However, despite being initially very powerful, these women struggle to keep up with their male comrades. For example, female leads Haruno Sakura and Inoue Orihime struggle to be useful during climactic scenarios and end up making many of their contributions from the sidelines in the form of support and encouragement. Anime tropes like these reflect similar gendered stereotypes about women playing *League*.

The simplification of female personalities in anime roughly mirrors the simplification of female body diversity in character design for games like *League*. Such simplified elements can function as a strong foundation for a truly memorable character. However, most often, game developers and directors alike end up creating female characters that follow familiar sexist tropes.<sup>24</sup> Strong and diverse female characters do exist in gaming or anime, but in general, both genres leave a specific and gendered impression of women. Most of these characters are presented as objects rather than agents, more meant to engage with the player in the real world than function in the diegetic one. The professional *League* scene illustrates these roots as well

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<sup>23</sup> Alvina Lai, "Looking at Female Characters in Anime and Manga Through a Western Feminist Lens," *The Mary Sue*, April 30, 2015, <https://www.themarysue.com/female-characters-anime/>

<sup>24</sup> Eri Izawa, "Gender and Gender Relations in Manga and Anime," *Rei's Anime and Manga Page*, visited October 28, 2017, <http://www.mit.edu/~rei/manga-gender.html>



through its treatment of female teams and players, whose identity is determined by their sex rather than their skill.

The professional game also plays into this emphasis on the female aesthetic over the female person. The overwhelmingly dominant male presence in *League*'s player base made them the primary target of all advertisers, which has contributed to an unwelcoming environment for women engaging with the esports by barely acknowledging their existence as community members. According to *Polygon*, a gaming news website, a company representative for marketing agency, Trifecta Media, stated that, "In terms of gaining female gamers as readers, I think any benefit would be quite limited."<sup>25</sup> He added that content aimed at female gamers could be worth pursuing because it created debate, but otherwise seemed unwilling to commit to it as more than a novelty.<sup>25</sup> *League* has also followed this model. In spite of a large number of female streamers, there is very little content directly aimed at female players – an awkward afterthought for advertisers who see them as an underrepresented demographic instead of a contributing part of the esports community.

Professional *League of Legends* has also failed to provide a space for women to fight against their stereotypes. *League* presents itself as a nominal meritocracy, where the best players will play, regardless of gender or orientation, but Riot has made very little effort to create opportunities for women to overcome the prejudice of effeminate casualness. There is no official professional level of the game for women, and the lack of official leagues means that female players and teams face a much more ambiguous revenue model than their male

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<sup>25</sup> Emily Gera, "Where are the women in eSports?" *Polygon*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.polygon.com/2014/5/27/5723446/women-in-esports-professional-gaming-riot-games-blizzard-starcraft-lol>

counterparts, who receive regular salaries and tournament winnings. Women, when they do get the chance to compete, are often at the mercy of sponsorship deals.<sup>26</sup>

Because sponsorship deals are about visibility, many sponsors in esports cater to a largely male audience. Aspiring female professionals, particularly those on all-female teams, faced very different expectations from their male counterparts. The result is that, once again thanks to the idea of effeminate casualness, the focus of these sponsors shifts from female pros' skills to their bodies. Smaller prize pools for women's pro teams put the players at the mercy of these prejudices just to earn a living, as explained by Jamie Fullerton in an article for *Motherboard*. Fullerton attested to this fact through conversations with a Chinese women's pro team:

The priority for most managers of female teams, then, is making money through sponsorships, promotion deals, and self-broadcast websites rather than tournaments. The Twin Flower Girls explain that their most common clients are computer equipment manufacturers that hire them for demonstration matches to show off their products. The result is that being considered conventionally attractive is often more important for team members than being able to plough through a load of digital minions. Some teams go as far as to simply recruit models then train them up as gamers.<sup>27</sup>

One member of that female team, Li Min, added, "Professional female players should be good-looking...otherwise you won't receive attention, however well you play."<sup>28</sup> These assertions speak to an unpleasant truth: the *League* community focuses on a female gamer's womanhood over her skill, particularly at the professional level. That level of objectification filters into how the *League* esports is run, leaving serious female gamers with few good choices.

When an aspiring female player overcame all of these sexist biases and made it to the highest level of professional play, she challenged all of these notions. Maria "Remilia"

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<sup>26</sup> Jamie Fullerton, "For China's All-Female Professional Gaming Teams, Looks Count," *Motherboard*, April 16, 2016, [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/yp3wbw/for-chinas-all-female-professional-gaming-teams-looks-count](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/yp3wbw/for-chinas-all-female-professional-gaming-teams-looks-count)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

Creveling became the first female player to win a starting spot in the North American *League of Legends* Championship Series when she helped lead Team Renegades through the North American Promotion Tournament. It was the highest level of play that any woman had reached in North America, Europe, Korea, China, or Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau. Initially, Creveling actually had intended to step down after helping the team reach the LCS, but she was convinced to stay by teammates and management. However, after a bumpy start and increasing anxiety about being on stage, Creveling announced again that she would be stepping down. This time, she left the team permanently.<sup>29</sup>

The *League* community took issue with Creveling's status as the first woman in LCS, not because she was uncomfortable on stage and not because of her skill level, but because she was transgender. Similarly to Ricki Ortiz – the transgender female fighting game professional – Creveling faced a huge community backlash over her sex. Clinging to ideas of effeminate casualness, some community members devalued her achievement because she was not, in their estimation, a woman – no “real” woman would have been competent or serious enough to make it to the big leagues.

Comments on highlight montages of Creveling's play and on articles about her featured numerous declarations that she was not, in fact, the first woman to make it into the LCS because she was not, in fact, a woman. “feminist (sic) how does it feel that the best female lcs player is a man? Lmao” wrote one commenter. “When an actual female gets into the LCS let me know I'll be sure to extend my congratulations. Till then I'll just hope this generation one day stops

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<sup>29</sup> “2016 NA LCS Spring Split,” *Leaguepedia*, October 9, 2016, [http://lol.gamepedia.com/2016\\_NA\\_LCS/Spring\\_Split](http://lol.gamepedia.com/2016_NA_LCS/Spring_Split)  
Brandon Boatman, “Remilia has left Renegades,” *Hardcore Gamer*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.hardcoregamer.com/2016/02/02/remiliahasleftrenegades/190696/>

glorifying a mental illness,” said another. The level of anger toward what some vocal parties saw as a misrepresentation of Creveling’s sex was so bad that the subreddit moderators began to remove any comments or posts that had to do with Creveling’s being transgender.<sup>30</sup> Again, as with Ortiz, because of the ideas of geek masculinity and effeminate casualness, these male geeks were unable to reconcile a transgender woman’s skill with her identity and the way it disrupted their cultural worldview. To make their world “right” again, and assert their masculinity over *somebody*, they focused on Creveling’s sex as their standard of geek masculinity, rather than her skill.

The interaction between effeminate casualness and the objectification of the female gamer was clearly present around all-female *League* teams on multiple occasions. The *League* community’s treatment of famous all-female teams illustrates its perpetuation of sexist ideologies.

One of the most important aspects of what T.L. Taylor terms, geek masculinity is, “...the valorization of highly refined skill and mastery [that] operates through technology, science, and gaming. Intensive commitment and passion for a domain is a consistent feature of geekdom, where extensive knowledge of specialized areas is not only a source of personal pride and enjoyment, but operates socially.”<sup>31</sup> Skill serves as the basis for evaluating a player’s legitimacy and respect within the *League* community. However, because geek masculinity is built on this principle and applied to a group that is typically effeminized, male *League* players are easily angered by perceived threats to their fragile masculinity. This sensitivity emerged when an all-female team, Team Siren, posted a promotional video for their team on YouTube on May 30,

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<sup>30</sup> Verticalex, “Remilia the LCS girl,” *YouTube*, August 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdeXFdcCgbI>

<sup>31</sup> Taylor 111

2013.<sup>32</sup> The video introduced them as, “The First All-Female *League of Legends* Team,” and interspersed shots of the team practicing with short interview sound bites and footage from the highest levels of Riot’s competition. The community assumed that the team meant to go pro and make it to the LCS. However, numerous problems with Siren’s representation in the video, beyond its presentation, brought it to the top of the “Cringe” subreddit.

The team was not the first all-female *League of Legends* team, and many picked up on the headline’s inaccuracy as if it were of critical significance. Prior all-female teams included the Kitchen Bandits, a group of female players who played ranked matches together on Twitch.tv. They only had a small following, and were not a powerful force in the *League* community. The Kitchen Bandits had faced their fair share of jokes regarding their lack of revealing clothing, stereotypes about passive aggressive behavior, and their perceived lack of seriousness about the game. Despite being one of North America’s better received all-female teams, they still faced critiques based on sexist stereotypes instead of their skill.<sup>33</sup>

Many community members insisted that Kitchen Bandits were the real first all-female *League* team. Others pointed to Mystical Angels, an all-female team from Malaysia that, like the Twin Flower Girls case, emphasized their appearances and femininity over skill. Their presentation was clearly aimed at fulfilling several gender stereotypes and male ideals about female professional gamers, including a more casual approach to the game, itself. The team discussed the need for more women to get involved in *League of Legends* in their promotional video, but supplemented with clips of other players playing, rather than those on the team,

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<sup>32</sup> Team Siren, “Introducing Team Siren,” *YouTube*, May 30, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Gz9um3wV1o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Gz9um3wV1o)

<sup>33</sup> The-World-Seven, “Kitchen Bandits Ranked 5s all grrl team streaming,” *GameFAQs*, March 28, 2013, <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/954437-league-of-legends/65817885>

furthering the notion that they were not only casual, but not very good either, which fit a comfortable geek masculine narrative of effeminate casualness.<sup>34</sup>

Siren's transgression had been the daring to present themselves as serious, which elicited a more vicious response. The team was immediately placed under the microscope. It was hardly a major point that Siren was not the first all-female *League* team, but this was one of many attempts to undermine the serious tone of their promotional video. Several commenters also felt that a mixed gender team would have sent a stronger message than an all-female one, which again betrayed an association between skill and male-ness and implied that women would not be capable of proving their worth on their own. Others reinforced this attitude. Unless Siren achieved quantifiable results to prove their skill, they did not exist.<sup>35</sup>

The nitpickers in the *League* community soon found that Siren actually reinforced their views of effeminate casualness. Siren had no professional level players, and only two of the players were anywhere near the highest possible rank in *League*, Challenger. This discovery made the team a laughingstock, despite all of the players being well above average at the game. The problem was that they were nowhere near professional grade the video had implied. Siren ultimately failed to perform at a pro level for a team looking to make a professional run. As a result, the *League* community humiliated them by way of a show match against a group of male *League* pros who, all playing out of position, decimated Siren. The team disbanded in June, approximately one month after its announcement, its team name surviving as an internet meme associated with unskilled play.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> GLiveProduction, "Introducing The Mystical Angels," *YouTube*, December 14, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXryZnC55U0>

<sup>35</sup> Lyncholas, "Introducing Team Siren – The First All-Female LoL Team," *League of Legends Subreddit*, May 31, 2013, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/1fdjlc/introducing\\_team\\_siren\\_the\\_first\\_all\\_female\\_lol/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/1fdjlc/introducing_team_siren_the_first_all_female_lol/)

<sup>36</sup> OfficialLeagueVideos, "All Girl Team Siren vs HotShotGG and Friends – League of Legends Season 3 (Spectated by TheOddOne)," *YouTube*, June 5, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnoLMiAUC\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnoLMiAUC_I)

These examples show the pervasiveness of sexism in the *League* subculture. Its roots lie in geek masculinity's emphasis on skill, which leads to the idea of effeminate casualness. This concept lead to the objectification of women and the perpetuation of unfair, retrograde stereotypes by focusing on women's gender instead of their skill in-game. While gendered competency is not a unique concept to *League*, the esport expresses it through various design elements, stereotypes, and assumptions that are present not only in wider gaming culture, but geek culture as a whole. The end result is a community that lacks female pros because it does not welcome them, and hides behind the pretense of a pure meritocracy when criticized. Esports subculture's attempt to distinguish itself from the hegemonic masculinity that excludes ironically resulted in a subculture that stressed exclusion as much as inclusion. A community that could have been highly inclusive was instead warped by the memetic gravity of the very hegemony that effeminized it.

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Kaitlin Silver, "League of Legends Team Siren Disbands: Valuable Lessons Learned," *Game Skinny*, June 28, 2013, <http://www.gameskinny.com/hzi5j/league-of-legends-team-siren-disbands-valuable-lessons-learned>

## Chapter 5

### Hushed: Web 2.0, Corporate Interest, and Censorship in the *League* Community

*“And I was already pretty, like, done with League. I didn’t want to deal with it anymore. I was sick of Riot trying to undercut me and fucking with me and my team and everything like that.”*

*-Christopher “MonteCristo” Mykles<sup>1</sup>*

Media and spectator sports have enjoyed a long collaborative relationship. Historically, innovators like baseball’s Larry MacPhail have capitalized on new media like radio and television to boost their profit margins. However, there are also cases in which the reverse is true, and private interests in media have used latent spectator sport potential to increase their own revenue. *League of Legends* falls into this latter category, and as the highest authority in its spectator sport, Riot’s passively and actively censors news coverage, content creation, and investigative journalism to align with its aims using Web 2.0 information bottlenecks like the *League* subreddit.

The Tour de France is an interesting parallel from the traditional sports world. Like *League* and other esports, the Tour was born of private interest. Henri Desgranges and Géo Lefèvre, editor-in-chief and editor’s assistant of the cycling magazine, *L’Auto-Vélo*, conceived the idea of a cycling race that spanned all of France as a means of keeping the magazine afloat. As the race’s highest authority, *L’Auto-Vélo* would have insider access to many of the breaking stories related to it, and could control media coverage rights for the race as they saw fit. Ultimately, the concept evolved into a symbiotic relationship that allowed both the race and the magazine to advertise for one another and express each other’s values and motifs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blitz Esports LoL, “MonteCristo on his ‘caster crucifixion’ and what he admires about Riot,” *YouTube*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bukAHrTLGLk>.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher S. Thompson, *The Tour de France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 17-18.



The result of this initiative was a spectator sport ecosystem that was beholden to private interest, and the themes and motifs that surrounded the spectator sport were heavily curated through not only media coverage, but also the way the spectator sport was built – i.e. the actual course of the race, which changed annually, or the frequent shifts from national, unsponsored teams back to private, sponsored ones. The Tour’s central goal was to promote an idealized and unified French identity and modernize the country by using racers from all corners of France to bring the gift of cycling, a modern sport, to all corners of the nation.<sup>3</sup> *League*’s inception as a spectator sport followed a similar path insofar as it is a game – and therefore an intellectual property that is owned by Riot Games – that was elevated to spectator sport status by the studio’s willingness to use the spectacle to advertise for the game and vice versa.

Riot Games’ central position in its esports ecosystem provided necessary support as the spectator sport grew. However, as the regional leagues became more structured and a truly international esports emerged, Riot’s power has become problematic, in particular as it relates to free expression. Esports journalism and analysis are subject to passive and active corporate censorship limiting blog, vlog (video blog), and traditional written sports journalism in the *League* world. The centralization that stabilized professional *League* also made this type of censorship possible.

Censorship occurs in the *League of Legends* community on three levels. First, Riot Games, whose power over the community shapes coverage, particularly criticism leveled at the company. Second, the moderators of the *League of Legends* subreddit are the community’s gatekeepers, and they directly control content circulation and what users are allowed to post on the *League* community’s central information hub, limiting the amount and diversity of content

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid 59-63

that reaches the larger community. Third, members of the community itself, teams, players, and fans, have repeatedly displayed very hostile views of journalists and journalism coverage of *League*. The way *League* esports coverage converges on the *League* subreddit enables these types of censorship because subreddits collect content in one place where it can be easily found, but also easily bottlenecked, sorted, and censored.

Web 2.0 has fundamentally changed journalism and content creation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by accelerating the process. The Internet's revolution enabled a surge of grassroots content creation through social media. The emergence of the blogger, YouTuber, live streamer as entrepreneurs fed off of a culture of sharing, imitation, and remixing to create a cultural ecosystem that allows content to proliferate and propagate faster than ever before. It represents a deviation from the older models of journalism and of newspapers, television, and magazines toward the amateur and entrepreneurial content creators,<sup>4</sup> many of whom have little to no formal training in journalistic practices. The *League of Legends* community is no different, but all media focus on one online video game, so readership is more limited than in traditional coverage and the competition for visibility is fierce. Many of *League*'s media, however, are new media less common in traditional sports. Professional and casual *League* players alike use YouTube to make concept guides for certain champions and teach the game to new players, while commentators make vlogs discussing league structure, monetization, and other topics.

Of equal importance, Twitch.tv, the live streaming website, is where most video game fans began to consume live video gaming content. Viewers can watch professional matches across the globe in different esports or tune in to watch their favorite entertainers and

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<sup>4</sup> The term "Content Creator" refers to anyone who makes content in a Web 2.0 context. Because coverage of *League* is highly transmedia-focused, journalists make YouTube videos, commentators write articles, and everyone ends up on talk shows. "Content creator" simply does a better job of describing someone covering the game than any one of these other terms.

professional players either playing or practicing. Twitch offers fans a chance to catch the pros on the figurative practice court and ask questions in real time about techniques and strategies that the player uses in-game. Fans and professionals alike also write for online publications and blog sites like Medium or Goldper10.

However, the vast majority of the *League* community consumes content through Reddit.com – one of the most intriguing products of the Web 2.0 era. The meritocracy-based content aggregation site is home not only to the general Reddit domain, but also smaller, topically specialized subreddits. Subreddits are as varied as human beings and address topics that range from simply, Funny, Gaming, or Movies, to more specific topics like, “Explain Like I’m Five,” “Shower Thoughts,” “Writing Prompts,” or “Male Fashion Advice.” There is even a one called “Ask Historians.”

The wide appeal of subreddits has helped make Reddit the fifth most visited website in the United States and the 17<sup>th</sup> most visited website in the world. Reddit is able to cater to a limitless number of human interests and was designed to be user-driven. Reddit users post discussion topics and links to articles, videos, and blogs posts on the website or its many subreddits, and Reddit users comment and vote on whether or not those posts should rise to the website or subreddit’s front page. Subreddits manifest users’ desire to share content with others who would understand its memetic gravity and help it propagate. In this way, each subreddit creates its own distinct community anchored by commonplaces, which act as points of reference for those who understand them. In other words, the subreddits act as established spaces in which community members share the same commonplaces, therefore streamlining discussions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Reddit.com Traffic, Demographics, and Competitors,” *Alexa*, last updated March 24, 2017, <http://www.alexametrics.com/siteinfo/reddit.com>.  
David Bartholomae, “Inventing the University,” *Journal of Basic Writing* 5, no. 1 (1986): 137-138.

While no one in particular controls a subreddit, they do have moderators, or mods. Mods are volunteers, typically selected by a subreddit's creators or preexisting mod team, who enforce the rules of the subreddit. These rules are made by either the subreddit's creators or its moderation team and posted on the subreddit. The posting interface of these subreddits typically has a hyperlink to the subreddit's specific rules. These typically relate to behavior and self-promotion on the subreddit. In fact, all subreddits operate under a shared framework of etiquette. The rules of the *League* subreddit – curated by its mod team – condemn personal attacks, calls to action, and Not Safe for Work content – usually anything with nudity, “smut fiction,” or excessively gory content.<sup>6</sup> To enforce these rules, moderators have the power to delete posts and ban user accounts, either for a period of time or permanently. These powers allow mods to enforce the subreddit rules and protect users from abusive behavior, but also give mods the power to act as gatekeepers because, ultimately, anything that a mod interprets as breaking subreddit rules can be deleted. This power has led to conflicts between mods and content creators and journalists at odds with moderators on many occasions.

Many video games, not just *League of Legends*, have subreddits, but *League* is the most popular game-specific subreddit in the world. According to *Top 100 Social*, a social media ranking website, the *League of Legends* subreddit is the world's 60<sup>th</sup> largest subreddit, reflecting the game's massive popularity and the *League* community's process of subredditization, by which its discussions and commentary from other forums moved to one, centralized subreddit.<sup>7</sup> For example, there are a variety of online publications focused on esports, but they typically post links to their content on the subreddit to make sure it reaches its readership. Subredditization,

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<sup>6</sup> HarleyWorking, “subredditrules – leagueoflegends,” *League of Legends Subreddit*, last revised March 5, 2017, <https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/wiki/subredditrules#rules>

<sup>7</sup> “Top 100 Subreddits by Subscribers,” *Top 100 Social*, visited March 26, 2017, <http://top100social.com/top-subreddits-by-subscribers>

therefore, creates a convenient environment for media consumption, but a very competitive one for media circulation. When a subculture undergoes subredditization, its members are less likely to seek content beyond the subreddit, downgrading the websites of online publications to secondary or tertiary points of distribution.

This places the subreddit in a position of paramount importance as a media bottleneck. While it is relatively easy to make a play at getting exposure for one's writing or videos because a content creator can reach their entire prospective audience at once, *League's* subredditization makes articles, videos, and streams easy to censor. A ban from the subreddit could easily mean the death of a content creator's following – and, therefore, career – in that subculture.

Three levels of censorship occur in the *League of Legends* subculture: the ownership level – which operates through Riot's power in the community – the subreddit moderators' level – which operates through their direct censorship powers – and the community level – which expresses *League* subculture's distrust and poor understanding of the journalistic profession. The censorship problem in the *League of Legends'* community is indicative of larger issues stemming from the imbalance of power between journalists and their subjects in the Web 2.0 world. Sports journalists in traditional sports are beholden to the owners, teams, and players that they cover, esports journalists must also contend with the enormous power of their sport's developer and the subredditization that puts them at the mercy of censors. The equivalent would be if all sports coverage of American football was vetted by the NFL, and the league had the power to remove articles from circulation and blacklist journalists from continued publishing.

As esports become more mainstream, the issue of fair coverage will continue to grow as not only the teams, but the developers, the moderators, and even the fans continue to restrict what journalists can and cannot do without risking their reputations or careers. In a world with

decreasing news literacy and increased emphasis on speed over accuracy in journalism, one important and neglected aspect of the journalistic environment in public discourse is the levels of censorship faced by those reporting on the happenings of the Web 2.0 world.

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## **Riot Police**

In *League of Legends*, and esports in general, one central tension separates them from their traditional counterparts, the duality of the video game existing as both a spectator sport and as one company's intellectual property. Riot Games, *League of Legends*' developer, controls everything that happens to the game, but the aims of a spectator sport and a video game are different. Both seek to entertain, but their audiences are different. Spectators demand dynamism, flashy plays, and superstars, while players demand competitive balance, stability, and equal agency among game participants. These two audiences are extremely difficult to reconcile, and some of the changes that Riot has made to the game over the years have balanced one form of *League*'s entertainment, while hurting the other.

This central tension is important because of the historically symbiotic relationship between the spectator sport and the media, such as in the case of *L'Auto-Vélo* and the Tour de France. The *League* esports, at its most basic level, is Riot's most effective advertising mechanism for *League*, and *League* is also the most effective advertising mechanism for the esports. *League* players follow geek conventions and value displays of superior technical and skill, which makes the professional level and alluring form of entertainment, while the spectator sport helps drive Riot's business model. *League* is a free to play game, so all of Riot's revenue comes microtransactions – small purchases that give players access to purely cosmetic items, called “skins,” that alter champions' in-game appearance. When a pro player makes a big play

while wearing a \$10 skin, that skin acquires increased memetic gravity through nostalgia, and its sales increase.

As the developer of *League*, Riot can shape the professional game for its own purposes because, unlike the NFL or other traditional sport leagues, it owns the actual game, not just the product of the league. Having centralized professional play under its wing, Riot wields greater power over its spectator sport than any traditional sport league. Thus, the company wields massive influence not just on the *League* subreddit, where Riot employees often participate in the discussions, but also in the *League* community as a whole.

Writing about his study of the place of sports journalists as gatekeepers and agenda setters, Cyrus Saatsaz explained how sports journalists are often heavily influenced by the teams that they cover:

The sports journalists, and especially those who are assigned to a specific team and region, frame the message to appease both the team and the fan base, some of which have a preference for receiving news that may have a bias for the sake of appeasing their personal beliefs about the team they root for. Framing, in relationship to the study of news, can be understood as the “point-of-view” on a given issue or event—magnifying or shrinking aspects of that issue or event to make them more or less salient.<sup>8</sup>

In the *League of Legends* community, framing also occurs, but beyond fans and teams. In this spectator sport, esports framing also appeases the developer, Riot Games. Riot has undue commercial influence over the journalistic objectivity of *League*’s esports coverage. Writing about *League* has an impact on Riot’s league and Riot’s intellectual property. To use the case of NFL football for contrast, the NFL does hold great power over its league, but the game is not owned by anyone and the league is owned by the team owners. A brave individual could

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<sup>8</sup> Cyrus Saatsaz, “Sports Journalists as the Gatekeepers of Cultural and Social Movements: A Comparative Analysis of the Media’s Coverage of Jackie Robinson, Jason Collins, and Michael Sam,” (master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 2015), 15

theoretically start up their own football league, like the XFL (1999-2001) or UFL (2009-2012), to compete with the NFL. Unlike traditional sports like football, however, professional *League of Legends* is not a conglomerate. The teams all answer to Riot's rules and decisions. The studio owns the leagues, the game, and the broadcasts. It employs the commentators, the referees, and everyone else that helps the league run smoothly. Riot occupies such a central place within *League of Legends* that its shadow looms over all coverage of the professional game. Riot's control over *League* journalism has distorted, and in some cases silenced, coverage and criticism surrounding the spectator sport. Journalists who criticize Riot Games typically fear for their careers. Often in esports, journalists specialize in one or maybe two games, so being blacklisted or banned from events or from meeting with sources is fatal to their careers. That fear plays clearly and decisively on journalists.

One example of this illustrates the interaction between Riot Games and the media. In August, 2016, Riot's President and CMO, Marc Merrill, made inflammatory comments on the *League* subreddit, personally attacking Andy "Reginald" Dinh, the owner of one of North America's most famous teams. Dinh had complained about the North American LCS's narrow revenue stream for teams and the stress of pro play for players, and Merrill responded by claiming that the owners were at fault for not paying their players enough and investing millions of dollars in *League* revenue in teams for other games. However, at that time, teams had no share in broadcast or ticket revenues from LCS play, and were at the mercy of sponsorships endemic to the computer and gaming industries. Merrill's attack launched a firestorm of criticisms against Riot and himself on the subreddit because the community believed that Merrill



was either entirely uninformed about or flat out ignoring his own professional league's revenue structure.<sup>9</sup>

James "Obscurica" Chen, hoping to address a newsworthy topic by examining how Merrill might have become so disconnected, wrote an article detailing the inner workings of Riot's esports division and unpacking how Riot's leadership's could be so uninformed of the way its leagues worked. Despite taking successful measures to help players earn a decent living, the company's esports division ultimately failed to make the league more financially viable for teams. Chen's article explored Riot's failure to effectively monetize the League Championship Series. He also examined the process behind the developer's decision to force Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles and Chris Badawi to sell their team in just ten days. Riot accused Mykles and Badawi of breaching league rules regarding collusion, failing to pay players, instigating confrontations between team management and players, and failing to provide a safe environment for all players on the team. However, the developer did not produce any evidence to back up its claim or justify Mykles' and Badawi's punishment. Riot's power of its intellectual property made this possible, but the system had been cloaked in secrecy.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Chen's article painted a picture of corruption, politicking, and incompetence that justified the community's inflamed anti-Riot sentiment after Merrill's comments. The article detailed Riot's esports division's internal politicking and favoritism, and accused it of attempting

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<sup>9</sup> Travis Gafford, "@MarcMerrill responded to @TSMReginald's remarks about patch timing. That opening line..." *Twitter*, Accessed October 4, 2016, <https://twitter.com/TravisGafford/status/767819530978471936>.<sup>9</sup>

ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Relegations..."

ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Tryndamere Posts on Reddit," *YouTube*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjFCS0WxJO4>

Thoorin, "Thorin's Thoughts – Tryndamere Tastes His Shoe Again (LoL)," *YouTube*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oILTlJLDaZI>

<sup>10</sup> James "Obscurica" Chen, "Riot Esports Director and Boss Implicated in Recent Esports Conflicts," *PVPLive*, September 1, 2016, <https://pvplive.net/c/whalen-rozelle-and-dustin-beck-implicated-in-riot>  
Whalen "Magus" Rozelle, "Competitive Ruling: Renegades and TDK," *LoLEsports*, May 8, 2016, [http://www.lolesports.com/en\\_US/articles/competitive-ruling-renegades-and-tdk](http://www.lolesports.com/en_US/articles/competitive-ruling-renegades-and-tdk)

to sell Mykles and Badawi's team to business associates of its director, Whalen "Magus" Rozelle. Chen also claimed that Riot selected its corporate leadership, like Rozelle, who had no sports league management experience, through political connections over business acumen and experience.<sup>11</sup> Chen's sources included several Riot employees and LCS team owners, but all anonymously. Clearly, having their names associated with attacking Riot was dangerous for both Chen and his sources. Riot could easily fire employees, or bar any source from owning a team or attending an event. In fact, Chen confessed in the article that he feared it could mean the end of his own career:

It's necessary to note that [I have] worked extensively for Riot before in a freelance capacity as contributor to LoLesports. I've many close friends within its ranks, my writing career thus far has relied extensively upon the scene...I am very nervous to have written this, as I know many bridges will be burned in the process.<sup>12</sup>

The anonymity of his sources and Chen's trepidation spoke clearly to the possible ramifications of the piece. Chen wanted desperately to inform the *League* community about the corruption, but feared the repercussions of his actions on himself and on the spectator sport as a whole, which might not have survived upheaval like a walk-out by popular team owners or players. In criticizing Riot, Chen took on a large company with complete control over the *League* community. He was also taking on the spectator sport itself. Chen's fears were justified initially, but Riot did not censor him. However, his reliance on anonymous sources left his work vulnerable to challenge. Further, no other exposés followed Chen's piece. Were there other journalists with similar information who remained silent due to the same fears Chen outlined in his piece? Were Chen's claims really were baseless? Chen's credibility was damaged in the end. Without corroborating reports, named witnesses, or reproducible evidence, Chen had no

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<sup>11</sup> Chen

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

ground to stand on. Yet, Chen's fate reveals a great deal about the weak investigative journalism in *League of Legends*.

Later, other journalists echoed Chen's fears. Duncan "Thorin" Shields, an esports journalist, commentator, and outspoken critic, argued, on a talk show, that journalism in esports like *League of Legends* forces its writers and reporters to make very difficult decisions about what they write or record.

On this topic here, on like criticizing people, I can't really ever give people advice on this topic. I'll give you an example. I had a journalist who contacted me recently and he said, 'In this game, I have similar thoughts to you on things...and I have criticisms that I want to make about the company and about the game and the teams, but I'm scared to do it because I want to one day, hopefully, to maybe be on broadcast desks, or I want to be at a higher position, you know.' ...A lot of bad things happened to me that if I wasn't a very stubborn person, maybe I would've just given up...<sup>13</sup>

These fears belie the image of esports as video games simply converting to professional sports. The conversion places the game's developer in a position of absolute corporate power, which creates an ecosystem that necessarily caters to that power. On the surface, the players, coaches, and enthusiasts of esports communities like *League*'s finally get to live out their dreams of having their own spectator sport. However, those who covered esports were often forced to choose between their careers and open, honest coverage. Chen has, thus far, been lucky. No legal action was taken against him and he still writes regularly.<sup>14</sup> However, Mykles, the team owner forced to sell in ten days, confirmed Chen's and other journalists' fears through the ramifications of his own outspoken opinions later that year.

Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles, an English-language commentator for Korea's Ongamenet with meticulous research habits and strong opinions that he expressed bluntly, had

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<sup>13</sup> Thoorin, "Esports Salon Ep 4: Journalism (feat. Richard Lewis, Drexsin and Skim)," *YouTube*, November 11, 2016, <https://youtu.be/YREOLY5I95U>

<sup>14</sup> As of March, 2017.

become one of the most celebrated minds in *League of Legends*. His sharp analysis of *League*'s most complex concepts made him a central figure in the Western esports scene as well, where he had coached Counter Logic Gaming in 2014 and bought a joint ownership stake in Team Renegades in 2015. However, he ran afoul of Riot Games' ruling that Mykles had breached league rules team ownership in late 2016.

Mykles was outraged by the lack of transparency from Riot regarding the ruling and the short, ten-day window that he was afforded to sell his team. In a series of YouTube videos, he credited Riot for their initiatives early in *League of Legends*' life as a spectator sport, but he also issued harsh criticism of their shortcomings in adapting to the game's global growth as a form of spectator leisure. Mykles' videos were viewed over 700,000 times. Having been a victim of it himself, Mykles also expressed concerns with the judicial process by which Riot made disciplinary rulings on players, owners, and teams participating in the LCS. He was particularly angry about his own seemingly arbitrary ruling and Riot's decision not to release proof to himself or the community. Further, Mykles complained about various rules and procedures in the LCS that he believed were inefficient or ineffective and the way Riot Games treated its full-time commentators.<sup>15</sup> These commentators, Mykles explained, were underpaid, restricted to specializing in only *League of Legends* – which would leave them less mobile – and given no options build their own brands or make extra money through Twitch or YouTube while employed by the company. Frank Fields, a former Riot employee, posted a blog discussing the fallout from the sale of Mykles' team. Fields explained that, despite Riot's lack of transparency during its investigation of Mykles' team, "...it's not hard to see that Monte's open criticism

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<sup>15</sup> Mykles' own commentator work with OnGameNet is as a freelancer. As such, he has no direct business relationship with Riot.

towards Riot and sometimes dismissive attitude towards the Western LoL scene hasn't endeared him to Riot Esports."<sup>16</sup>

Mykles' content, because it was both very popular and very critical of Riot's league management, drew the developer's ire. Despite being the foremost expert on Korean professional *League of Legends* and a commentator at the World Championship from 2013-2015, Mykles was not invited to work at the Season 6 World Championship. Two of his OnGameNet colleagues were. In effect, he had been blacklisted.

Riot Games' decision not to invite Mykles was viewed as momentous snub. One of Mykles' friends and colleagues, Duncan "Thorin" Shields, explained in a pseudo obituary that, "As an analyst, [Mykles] brought not only his deep knowledge of the Korean scene and the fruits of his personal labour in following the Western regions, but also added elements of punditry and showmanship with his flair for antics and humour." The same day that Mykles' non-invitation was announced, *ESPN*'s Jacob Wolf reported that Mykles would be working with Ongamenet as a commentator for a different game: Blizzard Entertainment's *Overwatch* (2016). His career as a *League of Legends* broadcast personality was over.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Tie-Breakers in the NA LCS," *YouTube*, June 20, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzJD8N3lTIk>

ggMonteCristo, "MonteCristo Discusses LoL Sandbox Mode," *YouTube*, August 6, 2015,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_tdrx3Fohmc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tdrx3Fohmc)

ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Relegations, Franchising..."

Rozelle, "Competitive Ruling: Renegades and TDK."

ggMonteCristo, "Riot's Renegades Investigation," *YouTube*, July 28, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXIcwyTutno>

Frank Fields, "Transparency Where—How Montecristo became collateral damage in the prosecution of Chris Badawi," *The Nexus*, August 2, 2016, <https://nexus.vert.gg/transparency-where-how-montecristo-became-collateral-damage-in-the-prosecution-of-chris-badawi-1d943660992e#.m7ra19o3z>

InsightOnEsports, "'Summoning Insight' Episode 49," *YouTube*, June 12, 2015,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlihOMLWVZo&feature=youtu.be&t=1h23m55s>

OGN Casters, "MSI," *The Nexus*, March 23, 2016, <https://nexus.vert.gg/msi-30f7f6cdd946#.j7ak1uwya>

ggMonteCristo, "Monte's Musings: Riot's Caster Cage," *YouTube*, September 24, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwakvAuHobA>

<sup>17</sup> Jacob Wolf, "Why MonteCristo and DoA won't cast at Worlds," *ESPN*, September 16, 2016,

[http://www.espn.com/esports/story/\\_/id/17496928/why-montecristo-doa-cast-worlds](http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/17496928/why-montecristo-doa-cast-worlds)



Figure 5.17: Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles made his League of Legends World Championship debut in 2013, and remained a fixture there for three years.<sup>18</sup>

Riot's decision to exclude Mykles from Worlds validated the fears content creators like James "Obscurica" Chen when they considered criticizing *League*'s developer. Riot forced one of *League of Legends*'s most recognizable and beloved voices out of the spectator sport entirely. Censorship did not silence all independent content creators covering *League*'s professional level, but it had a quieting effect. Mykles' willingness to share his knowledge of the game and the spectator sport filled a need for authoritative voices within *League* discourse. Blacklisting him allowed Riot to control discussion of professional *League* and make it less critical of the company and Western leagues. This laid bare the tension in esports between corporate interests and the user-generated content common to the Web 2.0 world. Despite *League*'s reliance on

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Jacob Wolf, "OGN to launch Overwatch league, DoA and MonteCristo to cast," *ESPN*, September 16, 2016, [http://www.espn.com/esports/story/\\_/id/17558894/ogn-launch-overwatch-league-doa-montecristo-cast](http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/17558894/ogn-launch-overwatch-league-doa-montecristo-cast)

Duncan Shields, "The Thorin Treatment: Celebrating The Full Monte," *Gamurs*, September 18, 2016, <https://gamurs.com/articles/the-thorin-treatment-celebrating-the-full-monte>

<sup>18</sup> Vomygore, "The korean Hype train team fighting style. Tchoo tchoo get out of the way !" *League of Legends Subreddit*, November 9, 2013,

[https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/1q8wp5/the\\_korean\\_hype\\_train\\_team\\_fighting\\_style\\_tchoo/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/1q8wp5/the_korean_hype_train_team_fighting_style_tchoo/)

Web 2.0 media like YouTube, Twitch.tv, and other social media for broadcasting access and visibility for the spectator sport, Riot's clear desire to control its esports stifled the free coverage and commentary of it.

The Mykles incident illustrates Riot Games' struggle to control and influence the highly nebulous, organic, and prolific coverage of its esports. Reddit, one of the most important circulatory devices for *League* coverage, is a huge part of that censorship and control. By virtue of its place as the centerpiece of *League*'s coverage and community, the *League* subreddit is also the site of most coverage censorship.

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### **They Reddit Here First**

Web 2.0 is central to the way that Mykles' situation played out. Mykles used a variety of Web 2.0 media to reach his audience, both as a commentator on Twitch.tv, the vehicle for almost all esports broadcasts, and as a vlogger on YouTube. Further, in large part due to his following, Mykles was able to use the *League* subreddit to circulate his content to larger audiences than would likely have been possible on his own. The high viewership numbers on videos that often reached lengths of over forty minutes owed much to the centralization of *League* content and commentary on the subreddit.

The *League* subreddit's central role in the game's system of discussion and coverage has made it the indispensable vehicle for coverage circulation in that subculture. If a netizen wants to catch the hottest news and coolest or funniest content in the *League of Legends* community, they go to the *League* subreddit. However, beyond serving as a convenient hub for *League* discussions and content visibility, the *League* subreddit also acted as a sieve that allowed all content to be moderated. Moderators can police the behavior of subreddit members and censor

content deemed contrary to the subreddit's rules and objectives as a content dissemination platform.

Tensions between subreddit moderators and *League*'s content creation community come from the *League* subreddit's central position in the community, along with the power given to moderators to act as gatekeepers. In this way, the *League* subreddit adds an additional layer to the traditional mass media model. In traditional media, the editors and producers of mass media act as gatekeepers because they assign stories and determine which ones make it to print. They select the stories that they believe are most newsworthy and filter out coverage that they believe is less relevant. In this way, they, according to Cyrus Saatsaz, "...whittle the large number of available messages into the select few offered to an audience."<sup>19</sup> However, in *League*'s case, the subreddit moderators add an additional, and equally subjective, level of gatekeeping that further curates the messages that reach *League*'s audience.

Moderators do perform essential functions in the anonymous world of the internet. Moderation prevents spam and removes bullies or inflammatory users from subreddits. The mods maintain a relatively stable and respectful discussion space. To ensure neutrality, mods are also not allowed to receive monetary compensation for moderation actions.<sup>20</sup> However, documented incidents within the *League* subreddit call the impartiality of the moderators into question.

Ties between the moderators and Riot Games pose a problem for neutral moderation. Riot proved willing to silence criticism, causing journalists and content creators to avoid opposing the company for fear of their future professional prospects. A similar conflict of interests shapes the subreddit's moderation: some of mods have gone from the subreddit to

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<sup>19</sup> Saatsaz 13

<sup>20</sup> "reddit.com: user agreement," *Reddit.com*, revised May 27, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/help/useragreement>



employment by Riot Games. For example, Riot hired Jordan Triggs, a former subreddit mod to be part of their community outreach team. That possibility clearly promotes friendly relations between mods and Riot Games to keep the door open to a possible job. It gave Riot direct leverage over the subreddit gatekeepers, who also relied on *League*'s popularity for personal success.

In March 2015, the *DailyDot*, an online publication, produced proof of *League* subreddit moderators signing non-disclosure agreements with Riot Games. That kind of relationship between the mods and the game's developers was new and unexpected. Reddit denied that signing NDAs was a breach of the moderators' user agreements, but the combination of moderators' power over subreddit content and their close ties to Riot meant that the subreddit system was ripe for intervention by corporate entities interested in shaping and censoring subreddit discussions.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Lewis, one of esports' most prolific investigative journalists, broke this story. The *League* mods had recently banned Lewis' Reddit account from the subreddit for abusive behavior and comments, so the timing of the story seemed retaliatory. However, he provided screenshots of the NDA and had an established a record of ferreting out shady behavior from teams, players, game developers, and other entities in esports. He had broken stories on a match fixing scandal in *CS:GO* in January 2015, and went on to expose gambling scandals in *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* in July 2016, and a financial conflict of interest between two European

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Lewis, "League Reddit mods signed non-disclosure agreements with Riot Games," *The Daily Dot*, March 28, 2015, <https://dotesports.com/league-of-legends/news/reddit-moderators-riot-games-league-of-legends-nda-1604> GenerationBlue, "League Reddit modes signed non-disclosure agreements with Riot Games," *League of Legends Subreddit*, March 28, 2015, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/30mk3j/league\\_reddit\\_mods\\_signed\\_nondisclosure/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/30mk3j/league_reddit_mods_signed_nondisclosure/) Kevin Morris, "Riot Games non-disclosure agreement," *Scribd*, accessed April 12, 2018, [https://www.scribd.com/document/260225994/Riot-Games-non-disclosure-agreement?ad\\_group=114526X1573490X0e760a51fbbcab738edf302bfcf903a0&campaign=SkimbitLtd&keyword=660149026&medium=affiliate&source=hp\\_affiliate](https://www.scribd.com/document/260225994/Riot-Games-non-disclosure-agreement?ad_group=114526X1573490X0e760a51fbbcab738edf302bfcf903a0&campaign=SkimbitLtd&keyword=660149026&medium=affiliate&source=hp_affiliate)

LCS teams in August 2016. Lewis had always been a divisive personality who engaged in bitter verbal duels with his detractors.<sup>22</sup> His less savory behavior on the *League* subreddit allowed the moderators to impose the clearest case of censorship in esports history.

In April, 2015, the subreddit moderators abused power by permanently banning Lewis' work from the subreddit. Despite his earlier personal account ban, Lewis had started posting links on his social media to specific subreddit comments accompanied by captions like, "Another day, another assclown thinking it benefits the community to shut down independent reporting." According to moderator BuckeyeSundae, Lewis' captions had encouraged his supporters to abuse subreddit commenters, causing several to delete their accounts to escape it. The subreddit mods decided to escalate their ban against Lewis from his existing personal lifetime ban to a ban against all of his work, written, spoken, or otherwise, because they viewed him as inflammatory. BuckeyeSundae justified the decision:<sup>23</sup>

...as time went on, it was clear that Richard was intent on using twitter to send brigades to the subreddit to disrupt and cheat the vote system by downvoting negative views of Richard and upvoting positive views. He has also specifically targeted several individual moderators and redditors in an attempt to harass them, leading at least one redditor to delete his account shortly after having his comment brigaded.

Because of these two things, we have escalated our initial account ban to a ban on all Richard Lewis content. His youtube channel, his articles, his twitch, and his twitter are no longer welcome in this subreddit. We will also not allow any rehosted content from this individual. If we see users making a habit of trying to work around this ban, we will ban them. Fair warning.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Lewis, "Phantoml0rd and CSGOShuffle," *YouTube*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dY3ltGjUBUo>

Richard Lewis, "New evidence points to match-fixing at highest level of American Counter-strike," *The Daily Dot*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.dailydot.com/esports/match-fixing-counter-strike-ibuypower-netcode-guides/>

Richard Lewis, "Jens Hilgers, G2 and Fnatic," *YouTube*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxKSJpBB9ZE>

<sup>23</sup> Richard Lewis, "Richard Lewis on Twitter. 'Another day, another assclown thinking it benefits the community to shut down independent reporting,'" *Twitter*, April 14, 2015, <https://twitter.com/RLewisReports/status/588049787628421120>

BuckeyeSundae, "Subreddit Ruling: Richard Lewis," *League of Legends Subreddit*, April 22, 2015, [https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/33g6xs/subreddit\\_ruling\\_richard\\_lewis/](https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends/comments/33g6xs/subreddit_ruling_richard_lewis/)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

BuckeyeSundae linked a number of Lewis' Twitter posts as evidence for these claims. However, banning Lewis' work on the subreddit would not have any effect on his posts on other social media, where the mods had no power. Really, the ban revealed the moderators' frustrations with the limits of their own power, and illustrated an example of their attempts to transcend those boundaries. The ban's implications, however, were clear: moderators were willing to completely censor a content creator.<sup>25</sup> The ban of Lewis' work went against the principles of the subreddit because his journalism had nothing to do with his personal conduct, just as Mykles' criticisms of Riot Games had nothing to do with his work as a commentator. Removing Lewis' work was a clear example of sacrificing the greater good of his journalism for the moderators' peace of mind vis-à-vis his hostile attitude. By enacting the ban, the subreddit moderators were actively censoring one of esports', and therefore *League*'s, most important watchdogs. The aggregate quality of investigative journalism in the *League* community decreased because the mods found Lewis' personal conduct distasteful or antagonistic. Thus, the moderators directly influenced the state of journalism and content creation in the *League* community instead of serving as neutral watchdogs.

The Lewis incident also acted as a clear threat to journalists. Lewis had been extremely outspoken in his criticism of the subreddit moderators. His subsequent ban discouraged future outspoken voices against the Reddit system. Even disregarding the friendly

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Lewis, "Richard Lewis on Twitter. 'Check out this guy's posting history & you can see how well the 'witch hunting' and 'harrassment' rules are enforced,'" *Twitter*, April 8, 2015, <https://twitter.com/RLewisReports/status/585917274051244033>

Richard Lewis, "Richard Lewis on Twitter. 'Say what you will about the people doing it, there's no doubting the success of the brainwashing and propaganda,'" *Twitter*, April 21, 2015, <https://twitter.com/RLewisReports/status/590592670126452736>

ties between the mods and Riot Games, the subreddit and the developer had actively censored their loudest critics. There was, however, a third party that censored *League* coverage.

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### **Journalists versus the World**

The extent of Riot Games' and the *League* subreddit moderators' control weighed heavily on the conscience of journalists and content creators – particularly those who suggested improvement to the professional game. Ironically, however, for many journalists, the most hostile reception for their work comes from the very community that it is meant to serve, rather than the gatekeepers or agenda setters at the top. According to some veteran esports journalists, the most difficult part of the job is dealing with community anger. A YouTube recording of a talk show hosted by longtime esports journalist Duncan “Thorin” Shields, allowed Richard Lewis to explain that getting into esports journalism is difficult because esports communities are generally hostile to journalists. Professional players, staff, teams, and fans all vocalized displeasure toward journalism, according to Lewis, despite needing journalists to help get publicity.

Write a story about financial corruption, write a story about players being improperly treated, and people lose their...shit. 'What are you doing? That organization might never give [anything] to you again.' Yknow, well, so...what, dude? I've been blacklisted loads of times. They always come back. They always need the journalist in the end. They always do. I just think it's such a...shame that the closest we've ever had to like, kind of real, genuine, moral gatekeepers, as far as I can tell, in esports has been maybe one or two kind of luminaries that've risen through the ranks...and journalists and we just shit on journalists consistently as a community. It's inexcusable – especially when it's based entirely on ignorance.<sup>26</sup>

Lewis was not alone in experiencing hostility from his audience. Other journalists like, Shields, Michale “Drexsin” Lalor – an editor for *esportsheaven* – and Savonn “Skim” Kim, agreed largely with Lewis' sentiments. Kim, for example, said that, “I definitely noticed that a lot of

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<sup>26</sup> Thooorin, “Esports Salon Ep 4: Journalism (feat. Richard Lewis, Drexsin and Skim).”

players...they see us journalists as the enemy...For some reason, we're the people that have it out for them, when in fact, it's actually, the other way around.”<sup>27</sup>

One example of this hostility toward journalists in esports came when news broke, while the World Championship was in full swing, that the roster of a fan favorite team, Korea's ROX Tigers, would disband after the tournament that year. The community and ROX Tigers both attacked *ESPN*'s Jacob Wolf for writing the story, claiming that the article was based on speculation and absolutely false. However, a month later, four of ROX Tigers' starting players' contracts expired, and they posted goodbye messages on social media. The team's entire roster of six players left that offseason.<sup>28</sup>

The article's reception reflected the unreceptive attitudes of the community toward journalism. Commenters on the ROX Tigers' official twitter post of their statement chimed in with low expectations from journalists, saying things like, “See a lot of bad content published my guess is to fulfill a content quota...” “What espn did makes me feel vomiting, say sorry to ROX plz,” and “ESPN causing wild rumours is nothing new from them all they care about [is] click bait titles and people reading their rubbish.” Perhaps the most direct and stern accusation came from ROX themselves, “...we are actively working for the future of this team and hope this ‘news’ will not derail our efforts.” They accused *ESPN* of interfering with the team's efforts to attract sponsors, which could ensure the roster did stick together.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Wolf, “Sources: ROX Tigers to disband after Worlds,” *ESPN*, October 16, 2016, [http://www.espn.com/esports/story/\\_/id/17806540/sources-league-legends-world-championships-2016-rox-tigers-disband](http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/17806540/sources-league-legends-world-championships-2016-rox-tigers-disband)

ROX Tigers (ENG), “Official Statement,” *Twitlonger*, October 17, 2016, [http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n\\_1sp74or](http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1sp74or)

ROX Tigers (ENG), “Official Statement Read: tl.gd/n\_1sp74or,” *Twitter*, October 16, 2016, [https://twitter.com/tigerslol\\_eng/status/787866801954754561](https://twitter.com/tigerslol_eng/status/787866801954754561)

theScore Staff “ROX Tigers post goodbye messages as contracts expire,” *theScore Esports*, November 25, 2016, <https://www.thescoreesports.com/lol/news/11836-rox-tigers-post-goodbye-messages-as-contracts-expire>

<sup>29</sup> ROX Tigers, “Official Statement Read: tl.gd/n\_1sp74or.”

Both the team and its followers had a vested interest in seeing the roster stay together. The Tigers organization had a long history of sponsorship troubles. The organization was not backed by one of Korea's corporate giants, and the team had had to change sponsors three times in their first year.<sup>30</sup> Shields explained that the reason the Tigers would attack Wolf's article was because their sponsorship negotiations likely hinged on the popularity of their starting roster at the time, which had become one of Korea's most successful teams. However, uncertainty about the roster's future would scare away potential sponsors, so the team attempted to maintain its game of smoke and mirrors by turning on Wolf.<sup>31</sup>

Followers hoped to continue cheering not only for one of Korea's most successful teams, but also one of its most outgoing. The Tigers were well-known for comporting themselves differently other teams in Korea, eschewing jerseys for sweater-vests and bowties. The squad's personality had played a central role in pulling in viewers.<sup>32</sup>

The team's popularity illustrated framing – a concept that Saatsaz explained with regards to sports journalism in general. Saatsaz argued that sports journalists are often forced to approach their work so as to appeal to its fans, or framing it.

The sports journalists, and especially those who are assigned to a specific team and region, frame the message to appease both the team and the fan base, some of which have a preference for receiving news that may have a bias for the sake of appeasing their personal beliefs about the team they root for.<sup>33</sup>

The community was saddened by Wolf's article. Following stages of grief, sadness turned to anger after the ROX Tigers released their statement lambasting the article and claiming that it

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<sup>30</sup> ROX Tigers was actually the fifth name the team had played under since its inception in 2015. Its previous names were HUYA Tigers, GE Tigers, KOO Tigers, and Tigers.

<sup>31</sup> Thoorin, "Thorin's Thoughts – ROX Tigers Behave Despicably (LoL)," *YouTube*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx8w8VJUcc>

<sup>32</sup> "ROX Tigers," *Leaguepedia*, edited February 26, 2017, [http://lol.gamepedia.com/ROX\\_Tigers](http://lol.gamepedia.com/ROX_Tigers)

<sup>33</sup> Saatsaz 15

would impede their ability to acquire sponsorships. Thus, journalists in the *League of Legends* community face personal attacks and criticisms for breaking bad news. Lewis was both incredulous and angry at the hostile reaction to Wolf's article:

So you are telling me that I am supposed to believe that Jacob Wolf, somebody who has been attacked repeatedly by the *League of Legends* community despite having as good a track record as you can realistically have if you're breaking news. You're telling me he's decided to put it all on the line, put his job on the line...and make up a story.<sup>34</sup>

His partner, Shields, was equally baffled, "...if [Wolf] has followed all the tenets and the standards and done his research and works for a reputable site, then first of all, not only his reputation is on the line, but that site and his editor's reputation is on the line."<sup>35</sup> Both men argued that, given Wolf's track record for *ESPN*, the *League* community's ill will was derived from a lack of understanding about what journalism entailed. Beyond that, the Wolf incident also highlighted sports fandom's emotional bias based on bonds to teams and players. In Web 2.0, the highly participatory culture amplifies this bias and gives fans a direct line to attack those who go against it.

In fact, none of the criticism of Wolf's article appeared on *ESPN*'s website or other online publications. Rather, the battle over the quality of Wolf's journalism occurred on Twitter and YouTube, two iconic platforms of Web 2.0. Most *League* community members saw the article on Reddit, rather than *ESPN*. Online platforms, in contrast formal online publications, encourage interaction and conversation. However, the firestorm over Wolf's piece clearly illustrated the *League* community's bias against journalists and journalism. In theory, the ROX Tigers, in the midst of the World Championship playoffs at the time of the article's release, clearly had a vested interest in the situation, so their testimony about their roster should have

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<sup>34</sup> Thooorin, "Esports Salon Ep 4: Journalism (feat. Richard Lewis, Drexin and Skim)."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

evoked skepticism. Once the roster's last member, Han "Peanut" Wang-ho, left in December, 2016, ROX did not release any further statements regarding Wolf's article. Their attempt to secure a sponsor by turning the community against Wolf had failed.<sup>36</sup>

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## Conclusion

The Web 2.0 era has made the world a more connected place. The emphasis on user-generated content and social media has created a vibrant, grassroots content creation ecosystem online that is an integral part of the *League of Legends* community. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Twitch.tv, and Reddit all played essential roles in the *League* community. However, despite these amazing gains for fans the *League* ecosystem relies heavily on its subreddit for content distribution and visibility. Because of the subreddit's centrality, censorship looms over journalism and content creation.

The community's heavy reliance on the subreddit as its information lifeline centralized journalism and content creation on a single platform with its own gatekeepers. At the highest level, Riot Games, the developer of *League*, has sole ownership of both the game and the professional leagues, allowing it to silence outspoken critical voices like that of Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles. His repeated criticisms of Riot and Western esports made him many enemies inside the company. The company's huge influence and central role in professional *League* unofficially forces journalists to consider their position and professional goals before criticizing Riot, greatly lowering accountability standards throughout the *League* community.

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Volk, "ROX Tigers players say goodbye on Facebook," *The Rift Herald*, November 25, 2016, <http://www.riftherald.com/lck/2016/11/25/13747518/rox-tigers-lol-players-disband-smeb-pray-gorilla-peanut>



There is also censorship by the moderators of the *League* subreddit, who have powers over the dissemination of content. While, in theory, the moderators are neutral, unpaid volunteers, in 2015, mods had access to Riot resources if they signed a non-disclosure agreement.<sup>37</sup> The case of journalist Richard Lewis clarified the moderators' power to control *League*'s journalists and content creators. They framed this clear-cut case of direct censorship as a personal reprimand rather than a punishment for Lewis' opinions. However, the episode raised questions about the mods' impartiality in dealing with critical voices.

Finally, the community itself serves as the third level of censorship in the *League* community. Many of the journalists and content creators gained popularity using the possibilities that social media and Web 2.0 have provided. However, Jacob Wolf's case shows that those boons can quickly become curses. The inherent bias of sports fans in favor of their favorite teams and players, combined with the community's general bias against journalists has made breaking news content dangerous for journalists' and content creators' reputations.

Such layers of pressure over journalism and content creation created a hostile environment for esports coverage. Teams that desire positive coverage rail against journalists that uncover bad news regarding the team's roster. Journalists like Savonn "Skim" Kim revealed their sense that the community believes esports journalists have it out for esports. The hostility plays out live on social media like Twitter and Reddit for all of the community to see. In an environment of imitation and participation, that hostility has tremendous memetic gravity that feeds upon itself and amplifies as newer users learn to resent and despise journalists from others.

In theory, esports like *League* should benefit from a closer link between their teams, players, personalities, and fans. Web 2.0 platforms like Twitter allow fans to converse with

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<sup>37</sup> Lewis, "League Reddit mods..."

personalities in the professional leagues directly. On Twitch.tv, fans can watch professional players practice live while asking questions of the best players in the world about mindsets, techniques, and strategies. However, the resulting intense connection between the fans and the professional game is also a problem because fans that idolize their teams are emotionally attached to them, leaving news journalism vulnerable to the violent swings of well-known personalities within the *League* community.

Ultimately, hostility toward journalism and content creation has an impact on their output. Journalists hesitate to upset the community at large, the subreddit moderators, or Riot Games itself. The resulting coverage focuses more on what teams and players do in-game, where incontrovertible statistics like wins and losses can back them up, rather than outside of it. The *League* community's organic foundations exhibit Web 2.0's possibilities and its downsides. Many of the features key to esports' surging popularity – a rabid fan base closely connected to its idols, stability provided by a developer very involved in its professional scene, and a central location where content could be easily distributed to the whole community – have since been proven to be double-edged swords. The example of *League of Legends* reveals dark possibilities for the future of neutral and honest journalism, both in esports and the wider world.

## Conclusion

### Symptom of Integration

*“[Riot] did so much for Western esports. You look at where Western esports was before the [League of Legends Championship Series] started and where it is now, and how much money they have invested...I think they created so much interest in Western esports by having the LCS and by meticulously leveling up the quality of the broadcasts and the structure of the league.*

*-Christopher “MonteCristo” Mykles<sup>1</sup>*

The world of spectator sport has changed. The foundation of sport had long been the athletic. However, in recent decades, spectator leisure has added new experiences in the digital world. Computer gamers are now being paid six figure salaries with included benefits. They travel internationally, wear jerseys, appear in popular ads, and sell out venues like the Staples Center and Madison Square Garden. Government departments regulate esports leagues, and pros get athletic visas to work in foreign countries. Conventional mass media can no longer ignore the rise of esports, and articles have already begun appearing in the *New York Times* and other national publications.

The sudden, meteoric rise of *League of Legends*, which became stable, profitable, and public, proved just how dynamic Web 2.0 is, how integrated the world has become, and how changes in the internet have comprehensively affected global culture. Studying esports like *League* highlights Web 2.0's power in contemporary culture. No culture has been more affected by this than that of geeks. A traditionally downtrodden culture has now become a defining characteristic of the present day. National identities, the systemic propagation of culture, gender relations, as well as journalism and content creation in the Web 2.0 world are all linked in some way to this technocratic cultural surge. Esports are the bluntest representation of this. The rise

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<sup>1</sup> Blitz Esports LoL, “MonteCristo on his ‘caster crucifixion’ and what he admires about Riot,” *YouTube*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bukAhrTLGLk>.

of virtual spectator sport illustrates fundamental shifts in culture caused by the new internet in the twenty-first century.

Web 2.0 made the world smaller and information quicker. One manifestation has been in global community-building made possible through new media like live streaming, YouTube, and Reddit. Subcultures grow at breakneck speed now through centralization on subreddits. The fans are closer to their celebrities than ever before through live streams, and culturally resonant moments are preserved on YouTube and other social media. *League* expresses this power. The *League of Legends* community is home to 100 million monthly players spread across thirteen regional servers worldwide. That entire community emerged in less than a decade.<sup>2</sup>

This increased cultural accessibility contributed to the rise of centers of play. Success of esports like *League* created national reputations for countries like rising technological power, South Korea. North America and China's regional leagues have moved to franchise-based spectator sport models. Other esports leagues in regions like Brazil, the C.I.S., and Japan are growing rapidly enough to begin making names for themselves on the international stage.<sup>3</sup>

These emergent regional identities are part of increasing cultural connectedness. *League*'s larger culture, which is connected to esports, gaming, and other geek subcultures, grew through a memetic framework. The widespread sharing of memes and the use of commonplaces like usernames unified *League*'s community of discourse. These cultural carriers reflect larger culture's topography, whose interconnected subcultures are warped and bent by ideas with great

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<sup>2</sup> Phil Kollar, "The Past, Present and Future of League of Legends Studio Riot Games," *Polygon*, September 14, 2016, <https://www.polygon.com/2016/9/13/12891656/the-past-present-and-future-of-league-of-legends-studio-riot-games>

"Servers," *League of Legends Wiki*, edited November 1, 2017, <http://leagueoflegends.wikia.com/wiki/Servers>

<sup>3</sup> Leo Howell, "LPL to implement franchising system," *ESPN*, May 1, 2017, [http://www.espn.com/esports/story/\\_/id/19287373/lpl-implement-franchising-system](http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/19287373/lpl-implement-franchising-system)

"Evolution of the NA LCS," *LoL Esports*, June 1, 2017, [http://www.lolesports.com/en\\_US/articles/evolution-of-the-na-lcs](http://www.lolesports.com/en_US/articles/evolution-of-the-na-lcs)

cultural significance. This shared language spreads and attracts new speakers, who bring with them the influence of their own subcultures and tastes. Cultural terminology's effect on connected subcultures expresses the Web 2.0 world's increasing closeness, where vast geographic spaces mean less and less in a globally integrated era.

The great freedom of expression engendered by Web 2.0, however, has also created new types of exclusion. *League*'s subculture, like geek culture as a whole, remains a battleground over masculinity and gender. The creation of a geek masculinity that emphasizes deep knowledge and specialization in the game, as well as technological affinity, over athletic masculinity marked another step in geek identity's contemporary coalescence. However, this change did not change attitudes toward women. The geek form of masculinity is still a form of exclusion that others women by associating them with inferior skill, competitive drive, and commitment to the game – an emphasis that shifts its focus from women's abilities to their bodies, which are often exaggerated and oversexualized in elements of game design and scrutinized in the non-diegetic world.<sup>4</sup> This, combined with an emphasis on retrograde gender roles and stereotypes based on a cult of female sensitivity, reflect larger issues in a geek culture that benefits from the advent of Web 2.0 but maintains an antiquated concept of gendered inequality. *League*'s largely male population has created an unfriendly environment for women that has left the spectator sport with few female role models and no female players. In their efforts to create a particular geek identity, *League* and communities like are more obsessed with exclusion than inclusion, despite their own place as an effeminized social group.

Exclusion is also present in coverage of professional *League*. In spite of Web 2.0's tools that enable content creation and dissemination, the new internet also enables censorship. The

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor 118-120

rise of subreddits as centralized hubs for cultures and subcultures created relatively easy distribution for journalists and other content creators. However, their centrality also enables moderators and corporate interests to affect what content does and does not make it to the public eye. The *League* subreddit, a central discussion hub for all things game-related, created a content filter under the inescapable influence of Riot Games. Ownership of *League* has given Riot a position of unparalleled in the traditional spectator sport world, allowing it to censor coverage of the professional game directly or with unspoken threats of banishment. Honest journalism and outspoken criticism suffer in a closed, autocratic sport system, where the wrong article or YouTube video can end a journalist or commentator's career in *League*. This reflects larger quandaries of sport journalism as a whole, where esports content creators must account not only for their continued relationships with sources, but their professional futures vis-à-vis the games they cover, as well. In a time of increasing hostility toward journalism, *League* shows that even the newest subcultures would rather quiet the press than bear its criticism.

In the end, this thesis represents a first look at the history of *League* and the place of esports as sport and cultural history. Other interesting areas remain to explore, such as esports labor history, a more detailed examination of esports within Korean historiography, and a more comprehensive look at geek masculinity with larger frameworks of sexism. Further, this thesis focused exclusively on *League*, which is only one of several widely popular global esports. Together, esports have become important economic, social, and cultural phenomena on a global level, and reflect many of the Web 2.0 world's essential changes, so the topic can still expand in both depth and breadth.

Web 2.0's defining characteristic is rapid change. In just two years of study, so much about *League*'s structural and cultural place has shifted. Although the deeper themes explored

here remained consistent, the details and the pace of events changed daily. Already, esports are sparking debate by calling the term “sport” into question, and with it, many of the ways that culture interacts with sport in the analog realm. By blurring the line between the virtual and analog worlds, esports like *League* have shown that Web 2.0 brought technology into cultural centrality in ways that few anticipated. These games have played a role in the increasing globalization of the world, the character of its press and entertainment, and the identity of its politics. They may be new, but they will be remembered as anything but fleeting.

## **Appendices**



## Appendix A: Usernames of Professional Korean *League of Legends* Players

Name	Username	Debut Split	Team	Country
Kim He-jae	dong	Champions Spring 2012	DDoL	KR
Lee Hyung-rae	Hwattoo	Champions Spring 2012	DDoL	KR
Son Myung-gyu	UlmangE	Champions Spring 2012	DDoL	KR
Kim Su-man	zzamTiger	Champions Spring 2012	DDoL	KR
Kang Sang-hoon	Chilly moon	Champions Spring 2012	DDoL	KR
Kim Ji-yong	TcAL	Champions Spring 2012	Little Hippo	KR
Lee Sang-jun	Kevin	Champions Spring 2012	Little Hippo	KR
Yeom Do-sun	Leon	Champions Spring 2012	Little Hippo	KR
Oh Jin-woo	ggoni	Champions Spring 2012	Little Hippo	KR
Do Hyung-rok	5gamdo	Champions Spring 2012	Little Hippo	KR
Bok Han-gyu	FantasyStar (later ReaperED, then ReaperED)	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Blaze	KR
Kang Chan-yong	Ambition	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Blaze	KR
Shin Dong-jin	Helios	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Blaze	KR
Ham Jang-sik	Lustboy	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Blaze	KR
Kang Hyung-woo	Cpt Jack	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Blaze	KR
Jang Gun-woong	Woong	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Frost	KR
Jung Min-sung	RapidStar	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Frost	KR
Lee Hyun-woo	CloudTemplar (later Relax, then CloudTemplar again)	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Frost	KR
Hong Min-gi	MadLife	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Frost	KR
Choi Yoon-sub	Locodoco	Champions Spring 2012	MiG Frost	KR
Kim Gyu-ha	TowerFury	Champions Spring 2012	MKZ	KR
Park Yong-woo	MidKing	Champions Spring 2012	MKZ	KR
Kang Tae-yang	SunRiver	Champions Spring 2012	MKZ	KR
Jeong Jun-gu	junegi (later Frolic)	Champions Spring 2012	MKZ	KR
Shin Sang-hyuk	losys	Champions Spring 2012	MKZ	KR
Yoon Ha-woon	MaknooN	Champions Spring 2012	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Kim Nam-hoon	HooN	Champions Spring 2012	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Kim Dae-woong	MOKUZA	Champions Spring 2012	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Chae Woo-cheul	ViNylCat	Champions Spring 2012	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Lee Woo-suk	Hiro	Champions Spring 2012	NaJin e-mFire	KR

Chae Seong-yub	LØAD	Champions Spring 2012	NEB	KR
Kim Dong-gyu	Fascinate	Champions Spring 2012	NEB	KR
Yeon Hyung-mo	Acttosin (ActScene, later Sin)	Champions Spring 2012	NEB	KR
Park Se-yeon	Yaong	Champions Spring 2012	NEB	KR
Seon Ho-san	Badagaje (later Space)	Champions Spring 2012	NEB	KR
Gwang Sun-hyuk	Rounders	Champions Spring 2012	NeL	KR
Kim Dong-un	Kady	Champions Spring 2012	NeL	KR
Min Kyung-hwan	Garnet	Champions Spring 2012	NeL	KR
Jung Seong-jae	GodFather	Champions Spring 2012	NeL	KR
Jang Jun-ho	The Other	Champions Spring 2012	NeL	KR
Lee Hyung-jun	Vitamin	Champions Spring 2012	StarTale	KR
Yoo Sang-wook	Ryu	Champions Spring 2012	StarTale	KR
Kim Jung-gyun	kkOma	Champions Spring 2012	StarTale	KR
Go Dong-bin	Joker (later Score)	Champions Spring 2012	StarTale	KR
Won Sang-yeon	MaFa	Champions Spring 2012	StarTale	KR
Shin Yoon-gi	Devil (later Milk Holic)	Champions Spring 2012	SuperStar	KR
Choi Seon-hwi	SunJa (later SunChip)	Champions Spring 2012	SuperStar	KR
Cho Jae-hyuk	NK Adonis	Champions Spring 2012	SuperStar	KR
Choi In-kyu	YaNgSin (later Ingoo, then DanDy)	Champions Spring 2012	SuperStar	KR
Kwon Jun-hyuk	gDeveloper	Champions Spring 2012	SuperStar	KR
Koo Bon-taek	Expression	Champions Spring 2012	Team Hunters	KR
Kim Tae-hee	FDT	Champions Spring 2012	Team Hunters	KR
Won Jun-ho	MulrOc (later ReSEt)	Champions Spring 2012	Team Hunters	KR
Kang Won-jun	Nymp	Champions Spring 2012	Team Hunters	KR
Shin Jong-myun	Rewrite	Champions Spring 2012	Team Hunters	KR
Jeon Ho-jin	a Lilac (later Lilac)	Champions Spring 2012	Team OP	KR
Lee Sang-jung	Cornsalad	Champions Spring 2012	Team OP	KR
Lee Hyun-jin	Nolja	Champions Spring 2012	Team OP	KR
Kim Sung-hoon	ashart	Champions Spring 2012	Team OP	KR
Choi Hyun-il	Paragon	Champions Spring 2012	Team OP	KR
Park Gwang-gi	Cannot	Champions Spring 2012	XD	KR
Choi Jae-woo	Chicken	Champions Spring 2012	XD	KR

Lee Hyung-suk	webtoon	Champions Spring 2012	XD	KR
Kim Jae-sung	SmallBrain	Champions Spring 2012	XD	KR
Park Sang-duk	Mad	Champions Spring 2012	XD	KR
Kang Han-wool	May	Champions Spring 2012	Xenics Storm	KR
Cho Jae-hwan	H0R0 (later Beelzehan, then H0R0 again)	Champions Spring 2012	Xenics Storm	KR
Kim Seung-min	ManyReason	Champions Spring 2012	Xenics Storm	KR
Bae Ji-hoon	SBS	Champions Spring 2012	Xenics Storm	KR
Jung Eon-yeong	Impact	Champions Spring 2012	Xenics Storm	KR
Hwang In-seung	Warpath	Champions Summer 2012	GJR	KR
Ji Doo-yeon	Senaim	Champions Summer 2012	GJR	KR
Lee Gi-cheol	yoshi	Champions Summer 2012	GJR	KR
Bae Han-bin	ElecTrouble	Champions Summer 2012	GJR	KR
Kim Se-hyun	LongDary	Champions Summer 2012	GJR	KR
Park Sang-myun	Shy	Champions Summer 2012	Azubu Frost	KR
Cho Jae-geol	watch	Champions Summer 2012	NaJin Sword	KR
Jang Nu-ri	Nurininim (later Cain)	Champions Summer 2012	NaJin Sword	KR
Kim Sung-soo	Fantastic Song (later SSONG)	Champions Summer 2012	NaJin Sword	KR
Kim Jong-in	Troll Kim (later PraY)	Champions Summer 2012	NaJin Sword	KR
Choi Cheon-ju	ChuChu (later Cheonju and Acorn)	Champions Summer 2012	RoMg	KR
Jung Seung-hee	Elf	Champions Summer 2012	RoMg	KR
Lee Kwan-hyung	Nyang (later Solo, then ChuNyang, then CNyang, then Heart)	Champions Summer 2012	RoMg	KR
Kim Joon-sung	Sound	Champions Summer 2012	RoMg	KR
Kim Jae-yul	Senryaku	Champions Summer 2012	RoMg	KR
Jeong Hui-cheol	Pecko	Champions Summer 2012	CJ Entus	KR
Kim Yoon-jae	LongPanda	Champions Summer 2012	CJ Entus	KR
Kim Beom-seok	Kkinsh (later Muse, then Kish)	Champions Summer 2012	CJ Entus	KR
Kim Joon-seob	emboob	Champions Summer 2012	CJ Entus	KR
Yoon Seung-taek	Eryuk	Champions Summer 2012	CJ Entus	KR
Sin Hyeok	5cean (likely later became gosu)	Champions Summer 2012	StarTale	KR
Jeong Yoon-seong	Ring Troll	Champions Summer 2012	LG-IM	KR
Kang Sung-hyun	Duelist (later KangQui)	Champions Summer 2012	MVP Blue	KR
Jeong No-chul	NoFe	Champions Summer 2012	MVP Blue	KR

Kim Kang-hwan	HanKun (later Hermes)	Champions Summer 2012	MVP Blue	KR
Lee Han-kil	VeryBerry (later Bust)	Champions Summer 2012	MVP Blue	KR
Lee Ho-jong	Flame	Champions Winter 2012-2013	Azubu Blaze	KR
Bae Eo-jin	Dade	Champions Winter 2012-2013	CJ Entus	KR
Choi In-seok	inSec	Champions Winter 2012-2013	CJ Entus	KR
Lee Gwang-hyung	SoLo	Champions Winter 2012-2013	GSG	KR
Lee Ji-hoon	Easy (later EasyHoon)	Champions Winter 2012-2013	GSG	KR
Lee Jung-hyun	ManDu (later PoohManDu)	Champions Winter 2012-2013	GSG	KR
Kim Jae-yeol	Clear (later When Rain Falls)	Champions Winter 2012-2013	GSG	KR
Kwon Min-woo	Lasha	Champions Winter 2012-2013	Incredible Miracle	KR
Son Chang-hoon	Wall	Champions Winter 2012-2013	KT Rolster A	KR
Yoon Kyung-sup	Zero	Champions Winter 2012-2013	KT Rolster A	KR
Im Kyung-hyun	Ragan	Champions Winter 2012-2013	KT Rolster B	KR
Lee Byung-kwon	KaKAO	Champions Winter 2012-2013	KT Rolster B	KR
Yoon Sung-young	Homme	Champions Winter 2012-2013	MVP White	KR
Jung Woo-gwang	MIma (later Mima)	Champions Winter 2012-2013	MVP White	KR
Gu Seung-bin	imp	Champions Winter 2012-2013	MVP White	KR
Cho Hyun-chol	ming9	Champions Winter 2012-2013	MVP White	KR
Bae Jun-sik	Bang	Champions Winter 2012-2013	NaJin Shield	KR
Song Kyung-ho	Smeb	Champions Spring 2013	Incredible Miracle	KR
Kim Chan-ho	Ssumday	Champions Spring 2013	KT Rolster B	KR
Kim Hyuk-kyu	Deft	Champions Spring 2013	MVP Blue	KR
Kim Ju-ho	FLahm	Champions Spring 2013	MVP Blue	KR
Cho Se-hyeong	Mata	Champions Spring 2013	MVP Ozone	KR
Back Young-jin	Save	Champions Spring 2013	NaJin Shield	KR
Lee Jae-wan	a Wolf (later Wolf)	Champions Spring 2013	NaJin Shield	KR
Yeo Chang-dong	TrAce	Champions Spring 2013	ahq e-Sports Club Korea	KR
Cheon Min-ki	Promise	Champions Spring 2013	ahq e-Sports Club Korea	KR
Kwon Ji-min	Loray (later IceBear, then Casper, then Wraith)	Champions Spring 2013	ahq e-Sports Club Korea	KR
An Sun-ho	SuNo	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 1	KR
Kim Ae-jun	Raven	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 1	KR
Han Jin-hui	StarLast	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 1	KR

Bae Seong-ung	Bengi	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 2	KR
Lee Sang-hyeok	Faker	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 2	KR
Chae Gwang-jin	Piglet	Champions Spring 2013	SK Telecom T1 2	KR
Kim Jae-hun	Miso (later Trickster, then FeniX)	Champions Summer 2013	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Oh Jang-won	Roar	Champions Summer 2013	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Jang Hyeong-suk	Looper	Champions Summer 2013	MVP Ozone	KR
Park Min-seok	Stark	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Blast	KR
Heo Won-seok	Quality (later WonSuck, later PawN)	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Blast	KR
Choi Sun-ho	Boink (later Ink, then Chei)	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Blast	KR
Kang Kyung-min	DayDream	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Storm	KR
Shin Jin-yeong	Coco	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Storm	KR
No Dong-hyeon	Arrow	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Storm	KR
Lim Hye-sung	comet	Champions Summer 2013	Xenics Storm	KR
Back Seung-min	riris	Champions Summer 2013	Chunnam Techno University	KR
Lee Jong-beom	Piccaboo	Champions Summer 2013	Chunnam Techno University	KR
Park Hye-min	Joy	Champions Summer 2013	Chunnam Techno University	KR
Jeon Joo-hwan	NonameD	Champions Summer 2013	Chunnam Techno University	KR
Hwang Won-jun	Raccoon	Champions Summer 2013	Chunnam Techno University	KR
Kim Sang-moon	Nagne	Champions Summer 2013	NaJin Black Sword	KR
Park Jae-gwon	PLL	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Lee Seo-haeng	KurO	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Jeong Jae-ho	Scarlet	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Lee In-yong	Bbuing	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Lee Jae-ha	Sylph (later Mowgli)	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Yu Byeong-jun	Ggoong	Champions Summer 2013	NaJin White Shield	KR
Lee Jae-min	Zefa	Champions Summer 2013	NaJin White Shield	KR
Kang Beom-hyeon	Gorilla	Champions Summer 2013	NaJin White Shield	KR
Jeong In-cheol	Chop	Champions Summer 2013	NaJin White Shield	KR
Lee Da-yun	Spirit	Champions Summer 2013	MVP Blue	KR
Jang Gyeong-hwan	MaRin	Champions Summer 2013	SK Telecom T1 2	KR
Lee Chang-seok	Ganked By Mom (later GBM)	Champions Summer 2013	CJ Entus Frost	KR

Kim Eul-jin	Reign over (later Reignover)	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle	KR
Kim Jun-hwan	GGyuAng	Champions Summer 2013	Incredible Miracle	KR
Jung Chul-woo	Apple	Champions Summer 2013	MiG Blitz	KR
Yoon Du-sik	Prime	Champions Summer 2013	MiG Blitz	KR
Go Su-jin	GGoGGo	Champions Summer 2013	MiG Blitz	KR
Choi Won-ho	Ryuna	Champions Summer 2013	MiG Blitz	KR
	Bestial	Champions Summer 2013	MiG Blitz	KR
Kim Jin-hyun	Emperor	Champions Winter 2013-2014	CJ Entus Blaze	KR
Kang Yang-hyun	BaeMe	Champions Winter 2013-2014	CJ Entus Blaze	KR
Shin Min-jae	minjae	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team NB	KR
Lee Seok-hyun	asd	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team NB	KR
Lim Si-hyun	MyLittlePony	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team NB	KR
Lee Seung-min	BetKyo	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Jeong Jae-woo	Ondal	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Lee Ho-seong	Leopard (later Duke)	Champions Winter 2013-2014	KT Rolster Bullets	KR
Yoon Young-min	Peng	Champions Winter 2013-2014	NaJin Black Sword	KR
Noh Yeong-in	Gamsu	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Alienware Arena	KR
Kim Hui-chan	Pera	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Alienware Arena	KR
Kim Dong-hyeon	Nova	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Alienware Arena	KR
Kim Yong-yeon	Kite	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Alienware Arena	KR
Gwak Seok-ho	Jelly	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Alienware Arena	KR
Jeong In-chul	Chop	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team Dark	KR
Kim Ji-hwan	savilla	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team Dark	KR
	Plls	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team Dark	KR
Kim Hyeong-jin	Its now	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team Dark	KR
Lee Sang-hyeon	gi bao	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Team Dark	KR
Leen Sang-hyun	RealFoxy	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Kim Dong-hyun	Utan E	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Choi Ban-seok	MuMu	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Jin Air Greenwings Stealths	KR
Jin Sung-joon	Mystic	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Jin Air Greenwings Stealths	KR
Kim Han-saem	GimGoon	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Xenics Storm	KR
Back Da-hoon	Swift	Champions Winter 2013-2014	Xenics Storm	KR

Song Eui-jin	RooKie	Champions Spring 2014	KT Rolster Arrows	KR
Ha Seung-chan	Hachani (later Comeback)	Champions Spring 2014	KT Rolster Arrows	KR
Kim Dong-ha	Hanlabong (later Khan)	Champions Spring 2014	Prime Optimus	KR
Yang Seung-bin	Old B	Champions Spring 2014	Prime Optimus	KR
Noh Geon-woo	Ninja	Champions Spring 2014	Prime Optimus	KR
Lee Jin-yong	ZetNjin (later Fury)	Champions Spring 2014	Prime Optimus	KR
Lim Doo-sung	Violet	Champions Spring 2014	Incredible Miracle	KR
Ki Dae-han	Expect	Champions Spring 2014	Midas FIO	KR
Oh Yeong-gyo	SuNiN	Champions Spring 2014	Midas FIO	KR
Lee Jun-woo	Nexus	Champions Spring 2014	Midas FIO	KR
Han Gi-hyeon	Lactea	Champions Spring 2014	Midas FIO	KR
Kim Ju-seong	ANNA (later Sharkbari, then Olleh)	Champions Spring 2014	Midas FIO	KR
Jang Hyeong-seok	Hawk	Champions Spring 2014	Samsung Galaxy Ozone	KR
Jung Gun-hee	Gun	Champions Spring 2014	Samsung Galaxy Ozone	KR
Kim Yeong-hoon	BoRoona (later BoriSal)	Champions Spring 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Ju Min-gyu	Limit	Champions Spring 2014	NaJin Black Sword	KR
Kim Dae-ho	Vision (later cvMax)	Champions Spring 2014	Samsung Galaxy Blue	KR
Kim Do-yeop	GuGer	Champions Spring 2014	NaJin White Shield	KR
Kim Jin-sun	Pure	Champions Spring 2014	NaJin White Shield	KR
Jung Byung-wook	Ren	Champions Spring 2014	Xenics Storm	KR
Choi Byung-cheol	Alvingo	Champions Spring 2014	Xenics Storm	KR
Oh Gyu-min	Ohq	Champions Spring 2014	Xenics Storm	KR
Bul Le-tin	Wisdom	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Kim Tae-il	Frozen	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Son Seung-ik	S0NSTAR	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Bak Jong-ik	TuSin	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 2	KR
Son Seung-young	Thy	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 1	KR
Lee Tae-gyeong	Smurph	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 1	KR
Lee Seong-yun	Bory	Champions Summer 2014	Incredible Miracle 1	KR
Kim Hui-chan	Rock	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Shin Min-jae	Vin	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Nah Woo-hyung	Pilot	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR

Lee Eun-teak	XD (later Sweet)	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Kim Hang-min	Radar	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Falcons	KR
Kim Sung-jin	SuDai	Champions Summer 2014	Bigfile Miracle	KR
Kim Joo-hyun	Beast	Champions Summer 2014	Bigfile Miracle	KR
Kim Seong-jin	Huhi	Champions Summer 2014	Bigfile Miracle	KR
Jo Yong-in	Core (later Core JJ)	Champions Summer 2014	Bigfile Miracle	KR
Ho Jin-sup	LinLan	Champions Summer 2014	Bigfile Miracle	KR
Song Young-jun	Fly	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Stealths	KR
Lee Sang-hyun	Chaser	Champions Summer 2014	Jin Air Greenwings Stealths	KR
Kim Se-young	Procxin	Champions Summer 2014	MKZ	KR
Byun Se-hoon	Skatch	Champions Summer 2014	Samsung White	KR
Kim Gang-yun	Trick	Champions Spring 2015	CJ Entus	KR
Jeong Jong-bin	Max	Champions Spring 2015	CJ Entus	KR
Lee Ho-jin	Lee (later hojin)	Champions Spring 2015	GE Tigers	KR
Kim Min-kwon	Ares	Champions Spring 2015	Incredible Miracle	KR
Jung Jae-woo	Fixer	Champions Spring 2015	KT Rolster	KR
Yoon Wang-ho	Peanut	Champions Spring 2015	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Park Dan-wong	TANK	Champions Spring 2015	NaJin e-mFire	KR
Im Jae-hyeon	Tom	Champions Spring 2015	SK Telecom T1	KR
Jeon Ik-soo	ikssu	Champions Summer 2015	Rebels Anarchy	KR
Nam Tae-yoo	lira	Champions Summer 2015	Rebels Anarchy	KR
Sun Yong-min	Mickey	Champions Summer 2015	Rebels Anarchy	KR
Kwon Sang-yoon	Sangyoon	Champions Summer 2015	Rebels Anarchy	KR
No Hoi-jong	SnowFlower	Champions Summer 2015	Rebels Anarchy	KR
Lee Dong-geun	IgNar	Champions Summer 2015	Incredible Miracle	KR
Moon Ji-won	Spooky	Champions Summer 2015	Incredible Miracle	KR
Park Tae-jin	Winged	Champions Summer 2015	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Lee Seong-hyuk	Kuzan	Champions Summer 2015	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Lee Seong-jin	CuVee	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Seo Jun-cheol	Eve	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Park Jong-won	BlisS	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Kim Ji-hoon	Ace	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR



Lee Min-ho	Crown	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Jang Kyung-ho	Luna	Champions Summer 2015	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Seo Hyun-seok	Soul	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Yoon Sang-ho	Catch	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Oh Seung-ju	SaSin	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Lee Chan-ho	do it	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Shin Jung-hyun	Nuclear	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Kim Seung-hoo	dan	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Park Ki-sun	Secret	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Han Ki-hoon	viviD	Champions Summer 2015	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Yoon Seong-hwan	Seonghwan	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	afreeca Freecs	KR
Heo Man-heung	Lindarang	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	afreeca Freecs	KR
Park Jun-hyung	Bubbling	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Kim Ha-neul	Sky	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Ha Jong-hoon	Kramer	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Ui Jin-park	Untara	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Jang Yong-jun	Ghost	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Jin Sung-min	Blanc	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Seok Hyeon-jun	Hipo	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Kim Joon-seo	Crush	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Lee Ho-seong	Edge	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Seo Jin-sol	Ssol	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Kim Kang-hee	Roach	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Jang Jun-su	Zzus	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Longzhu Gaming	KR
Lee Jae-ha	Sylph (later Miss)	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	ROX Tigers	KR
Kwon Young-jae	Helper	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Lee Seung-ju	Stitch	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	Samsung Galaxy	KR
Sung Yeon-jun	Flawless	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Lee Gang-pyo	SoaR	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	SBENU Sonicboom	KR
Kang Sun-gu	Blank	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2016	SK Telecom T1	KR

Kang Min-seung	Haru	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Kwak Bo-seong	BDD	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	CJ Entus	KR
Kim Jae-hee	Crazy	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Kang Myung-gu	Tempt	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Lee Dong-wook	LoKeN	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Kim Han-gi	KeY	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Choi Hyeon-woong	BlesS	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Eun Jong-seop	Totoro	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Ever	KR
Kim Jun-yeong	SoHwan	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Lee Dong-wook	Crash	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	Longzhu Gaming	KR
Kang Gun-mo	ADD	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	MVP	KR
Kim Kyu-suk	Beyond	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	MVP	KR
Ahn Joon-hyung	Ian	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	MVP	KR
Oh Hyun-sik	MaHa	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	MVP	KR
Hae Seong-min	Cry (later Zet)	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2016	ROX Tigers	KR
Jin Jae-sung	Firetrap (later Part)	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	bbq Olivers	KR
Um Sung-hyeon	UmTi	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Park Jin-sung	Teddy	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Oh Ji-hwan	Raise	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	Jin Air Greenwings	KR
Son Min-hyeok	Punch	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	Kongdoo Monster	KR
Heo Seong-hoon	Huni	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	SK Telecom T1	KR
Kim Joon-hyung	Profit	LoL Champions Korea Spring 2017	SK Telecom T1	KR
Kim Geun-seung	Malrangg	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Ever8 Winners	KR
Park Wi-rim	Cepted	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Ever8 Winners	KR
Kim Deul	Deul	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Ever8 Winners	KR
Kwok Hoon-kwak	Ella	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Ever8 Winners	KR
Kim Ki-in	Kiin	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Ever8 Winners	KR
Kim Tae-yang	Ssun	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	KT Rolster	KR
Kim Kwang-hee	Rascal	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Longzhu Gaming	KR

Lee Woo-jin	Cuzz (later Lucy)	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Longzhu Gaming	KR
Yoon Seok-jun	Justice	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	Longzhu Gaming	KR
Kim Min-soo	MightyBear	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	ROX Tigers	KR
Kim Tae-hoon	Lava	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	ROX Tigers	KR
Kim Seon-gyu	Crow	LoL Champions Korea Summer 2017	ROX Tigers	KR

## Appendix B: Usernames of Professional Chinese *League of Legends* Players

Name	Username	Debut Split	Team	Country
Liu Mou	PDD	LPL Spring 2013	Invictus Gaming	China
Chen Xin-Lin	illuSioN	LPL Spring 2013	Invictus Gaming	China
Liu Zhi-Hao	Zzitai	LPL Spring 2013	Invictus Gaming	China
Ge Yan	Kid (later KidKid)	LPL Spring 2013	Invictus Gaming	China
Sun Ya-Long	XiaoXiao	LPL Spring 2013	Invictus Gaming	China
Gao Di-Ping	Gogoin	LPL Spring 2013	OMG	China
Ouyang Wei-Qi	bigpomelo (later pomelo)	LPL Spring 2013	OMG	China
Yu Jia-Jun	Cool	LPL Spring 2013	OMG	China
Guo Jun-Liang	san	LPL Spring 2013	OMG	China
Yin Le	LoveLin (later Drug, later Allen, later LoveLing)	LPL Spring 2013	OMG	China
Peng Zhen-Ming	LightAluka (later Aluk0, then Aluka)	LPL Spring 2013	Positive Energy	China
Chen Yi	Ziv	LPL Spring 2013	Positive Energy	China
Rao Jing	Jing	LPL Spring 2013	Positive Energy	China
Zhu Jia-Wen	NaMei (formerly Devil)	LPL Spring 2013	Positive Energy	China
Li Hao-Yu	Sicca	LPL Spring 2013	Positive Energy	China
Xiao Wang	Godlike (later Ackerman, then Godlike again)	LPL Spring 2013	Royal Club	China
Liu Jun-Jie	Lucky	LPL Spring 2013	Royal Club	China
Jian Zi-Hao	Uzi	LPL Spring 2013	Royal Club	China
Wang Xin-Rui	Rui	LPL Spring 2013	Royal Club	China
Yao Yuan	Dreams (later Yao)	LPL Spring 2013	Team Livemore	China
Song Lei	Wayoff	LPL Spring 2013	Team Livemore	China
Huang Hao-Yi	Snowy	LPL Spring 2013	Team Livemore	China
Yu Rui	F1sh (later TnT, then Peco, then HappyY)	LPL Spring 2013	Team Livemore	China
Sun Hao-Ming	Dragon	LPL Spring 2013	Team Livemore	China
Wei Han-Dong	CaoMei	LPL Spring 2013	World Elite	China
Ming Kai	Troll (later Clearlove, then Clearlove7)	LPL Spring 2013	World Elite	China
Yu Jing-Xi	Misaya	LPL Spring 2013	World Elite	China
Gao Xue-Cheng	WeiXiao	LPL Spring 2013	World Elite	China
Feng Zhuo-Jun	FZZF	LPL Spring 2013	World Elite	China
Ni Jia-An	Easy	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Luo Sheng	BSYY	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China

Chen Li-Bin	Leaf (later Yeluo)	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Li Wen-Xiao	SS	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Li Jiliang	Leon	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Chen Lin-Jun	Jun	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Liu Yi-Fan	Fan	LPL Spring 2013	Wayi Spider China	China
Que Zi-Xiang	Yi	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Zhou Yu-Long	Hensen	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Huang Zi-Kun	Mortred	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Dai Wen-Jie	youmeng	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Xiang Hao-Kai	HaoKai	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Lan Hao	Pgggggg	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Gan Jun-Jie	ChouD1	LPL Spring 2013	Wings of Aurora	China
Liu Yang	Warm	LPL Summer 2013	Positive Energy	China
Zhou Qi-Lin	NoName	LPL Summer 2013	LMQ	China
Zhang Jia-Zhi	PandaB (later Bao)	LPL Summer 2013	LMQ	China
Xian Yu	XiaoWeiXiao	LPL Summer 2013	LMQ	China
Li Wei-Jun	TS (later SWXG, then Vasilii)	LPL Summer 2013	LMQ	China
Zhang Hong-Wei	Mor (later MorZB)	LPL Summer 2013	LMQ	China
Ho Guoyu	Olto	LPL Summer 2013	Young Glory	China
Sun Yuze	Syz (later Captain57, then Cpt)	LPL Summer 2013	Young Glory	China
Huang Li	YanSir	LPL Summer 2013	Young Glory	China
Chen Junliang	Dragon (later ZhenLong)	LPL Summer 2013	Young Glory	China
Ke Yi	Lovecryboy (later Conan)	LPL Summer 2013	Young Glory	China
Tong Yang	Koro1	LPL Spring 2014	EDward Gaming	China
Zeng Long	U	LPL Spring 2014	EDward Gaming	China
Zhao Zhi-Ming	Fireloli (later Mitty, then Iceloli)	LPL Spring 2014	EDward Gaming	China
Yang Zhao-Kan	At	LPL Spring 2014	EDward Gaming	China
Ke Jun-Jia	Cttflame	LPL Spring 2014	EDward Gaming	China
Liu Hong-Jun	Kitties	LPL Spring 2014	Invictus Gaming	China
Fan Mo-Chen	Do	LPL Spring 2014	Invictus Gaming	China
Fu Yang	Star	LPL Spring 2014	LGD Gaming	China
Zhu Yong-Quan	Quan (later TBQ, then Quan again)	LPL Spring 2014	LGD Gaming	China
Qu Ziliang	Styz	LPL Spring 2014	LGD Gaming	China

Chen Bo	Pyl	LPL Spring 2014	LGD Gaming	China
Hu Bin	xiyang	LPL Spring 2014	OMG	China
Yang Ming-Yu	Ycc	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Huang Qing	LovC	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Fang Hong-Ri	DaDa7 (later DaDa77, then SunnGoo)	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Guo Gui-Cheng	Carzy	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Guo Xiao-Shi	Face	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Ming Bao-Ce	Summer	LPL Spring 2014	Positive Energy	China
Wang Long-Jie	Kmi	LPL Spring 2014	Royal Club	China
Feng Zhong-Hao	nct	LPL Spring 2014	Royal Club	China
Le Yi	LeY (later leym)	LPL Spring 2014	Royal Club	China
Huang Hui	XJJ	LPL Spring 2014	Royal Club	China
Yang Sheng	YS	LPL Spring 2014	Royal Club	China
Teng-Yang Tian-Xia	Ruo	LPL Spring 2014	World Elite	China
Chen Zhi-Yuan	suk1M (later SukiM)	LPL Spring 2014	World Elite	China
Li Jun-Feng	Lovecd	LPL Spring 2014	World Elite	China
Wei Zhen	We1less (later GODV, then Lucifer, then PAinEvil, then godv)	LPL Summer 2014	LGD Gaming	China
Li Ying-Jie	XQ	LPL Summer 2014	LGD Gaming	China
Hu Zhen Wei	Cloud	LPL Summer 2014	OMG	China
Jiang Nan	Cola	LPL Summer 2014	Star Horn Royal Club	China
Lei Wen	corn	LPL Summer 2014	Star Horn Royal Club	China
Chen Jian-Liu	MingB	LPL Summer 2014	World Elite	China
Sun Yan	xr	LPL Summer 2014	Team WE Academy	China
He Zhi-Hong	Soist (later Rabbits97)	LPL Summer 2014	Team WE Academy	China
Su Han-Wei	xiye	LPL Summer 2014	Team WE Academy	China
Han Jin	SmLz	LPL Summer 2014	Team WE Academy	China
Zhang Zhe	yuzhe	LPL Summer 2014	Team WE Academy	China
Weng Shi-Jie	Number1	LPL Summer 2014	Young Glory	China
Ye Can	YinFu	LPL Summer 2014	Young Glory	China
Hou Guoyu	DianGun	LPL Summer 2014	Young Glory	China
Chen Yu-Hao	Mouse	LPL Spring 2015	EDward Gaming	China
Yu Jie	x1u	LPL Spring 2015	Energy Pacemaker	China
Yan Jun-ze	LetMe	LPL Spring 2015	Gamtee	China

Lei Hui-Guo	Danger (later hu1)	LPL Spring 2015	Gamtee	China
Li Yuan-Hao	xiaohu	LPL Spring 2015	Gamtee	China
Zhao Xiao-yu	Tale	LPL Spring 2015	Gamtee	China
Dong Shi-chun	Sinkdream	LPL Spring 2015	Gamtee	China
Tang Xin	Candy (later Candyseven)	LPL Spring 2015	Master3	China
Fan Qi-Fang	Skye	LPL Spring 2015	Team King	China
Liu Shi-yu	mlxg	LPL Spring 2015	Team King	China
Qin Fen	King	LPL Spring 2015	Team King	China
Wang Cheng	Wuxin	LPL Spring 2015	Team King	China
Li Xuan Jun	Flandre	LPL Spring 2015	Snake Esports	China
Lu Fan	BAKA	LPL Spring 2015	Snake Esports	China
Yang Fan	KRYST4L	LPL Spring 2015	Snake Esports	China
Wang Zu-Jing	Carry	LPL Spring 2015	Snake Esports	China
Wang Bin	HeTong	LPL Spring 2015	Snake Esports	China
Tian Ye	Meiko	LPL Summer 2015	EDward Gaming	China
Xie Jin-Shan	Jinjiao	LPL Summer 2015	EDward Gaming	China
Zeng Tao	Pokemon	LPL Summer 2015	Invictus Gaming	China
Tang Jintai	Time	LPL Summer 2015	Invictus Gaming	China
Xue Chang-Jun	Ao	LPL Summer 2015	Team King	China
Lisheng Wei	Xiaoxi	LPL Summer 2015	LGD Gaming	China
Huang Zhen	crisis	LPL Spring 2016	Energy Pacemaker.All	China
Fan Chao	EShen	LPL Spring 2016	Energy Pacemaker.All	China
Zhang Cheng	Romant1c	LPL Spring 2016	Energy Pacemaker.All	China
Xia Heng	JieZou	LPL Spring 2016	Energy Pacemaker.All	China
Xu Zhao	ss17	LPL Spring 2016	Hyper Youth Gaming	China
Ye Jia-Bin	March	LPL Spring 2016	Hyper Youth Gaming	China
Wen Fu-Hua	Rio	LPL Spring 2016	Invictus Gaming	China
Cai Bo	Mo	LPL Spring 2016	Invictus Gaming	China
Xie Dan	Eimy	LPL Spring 2016	LGD Gaming	China
Feng Yujin	XY	LPL Spring 2016	Master3	China
Xu Mingshu	PentaQ	LPL Spring 2016	Master3	China
Jin Hao	Savoki	LPL Spring 2016	Master3	China
Hong Yan	Scenery (later MLZZ, then JueJue)	LPL Spring 2016	Master3	China

He Wei	City	LPL Spring 2016	Master3	China
Wang Yu	Fishball	LPL Spring 2016	OMG	China
Liu Shi Yu	5	LPL Spring 2016	OMG	China
Yang Jubao	Dark	LPL Spring 2016	OMG	China
Zhang Yuze	bei	LPL Spring 2016	OMG	China
Luo Ci-Rui	Luo	LPL Spring 2016	OMG	China
Shi Lin-Jiang	Deceit	LPL Spring 2016	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Bao Bo	V	LPL Spring 2016	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Zhou Yi-xiang	Sask	LPL Spring 2016	Royal Never Give Up	China
Cheng Wang	Wuxx	LPL Spring 2016	Royal Never Give Up	China
Zeng Zhanran	Zzr	LPL Spring 2016	Snake Esports	China
Tan Qi	Martin	LPL Spring 2016	Snake Esports	China
Peng Jiawei	Jia	LPL Spring 2016	Snake Esports	China
Coa Hai	CoLiN	LPL Spring 2016	Snake Esports	China
Zhu Xiao-Long	Loong	LPL Spring 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Duan Deliang	Duan (later Caveman)	LPL Spring 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Yang Hao	Duji	LPL Spring 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Li Yuan-Hui	Punished (later Funny)	LPL Spring 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Xu Hao	Endless	LPL Spring 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Ke Changyu	957	LPL Spring 2016	World Elite	China
Xiang Ren-Jie	Condi	LPL Spring 2016	World Elite	China
Wang Haili	WuShuang	LPL Spring 2016	World Elite	China
Li Xinnan	Yu	LPL Summer 2016	LGD Gaming	China
Zhou Hao	Sweet	LPL Summer 2016	IMay	China
Chen Yu Tian	World6	LPL Summer 2016	OMG	China
Xie Tian Yu	icon	LPL Summer 2016	OMG	China
Zhong Gengxuan	SoftRR	LPL Summer 2016	Newbee	China
Peng Yi-Bo	Peng	LPL Summer 2016	Vici Gaming	China
Feng Zhou	Soul (later Soulmate)	LPL Spring 2017	Game Talents	China
Hu Jian-xin	Maestro	LPL Spring 2017	IMay	China
Tu Xin-cheng	Ben4	LPL Spring 2017	IMay	China
Yu Wen-Bo	JackeyLove	LPL Spring 2017	Invictus Gaming	China
Wang Liu-Yi	Megan	LPL Spring 2017	Invictus Gaming	China



Feng Lei	Marge	LPL Spring 2017	Invictus Gaming	China
Tang Sheng	Intruder	LPL Spring 2017	LGD Gaming	China
Lin Wei Xiang	Lwx	LPL Spring 2017	Newbee	China
Liu Qinsong	Pinus (later Crisp)	LPL Spring 2017	Newbee	China
Wang Zijun	Alone	LPL Spring 2017	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Liu Xudong	Ali	LPL Spring 2017	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Shi Sen-Ming	Ming	LPL Spring 2017	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Tao Heng	Again	LPL Spring 2017	Qiao Gu Reapers	China
Wan Kun	Mint	LPL Spring 2017	Snake Esports	China
Liang Song-xi	Onion	LPL Spring 2017	Vici Gaming	China
Tang Hai-Qin	Ocean	LPL Spring 2017	Vici Gaming	China
Xie Zhenying	XiaoAL	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Li Guopeng	Dian	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Li Zhen	Lz	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Peng Ze	Babi (later Bananafish)	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Huang Chen	He	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Wang Yi	fenfen (later Brain)	LPL Summer 2017	Suning Gaming	China
Li Shun Jie	Starlight	LPL Summer 2017	IMay	China
Chen Long	West	LPL Summer 2017	Invictus Gaming	China
Gao Zhen Ning	Ning	LPL Summer 2017	Invictus Gaming	China
Hu Zhi Wei	Y1HAN	LPL Summer 2017	Royal Never Give Up	China
Wang Nong Mo	y4	LPL Summer 2017	Royal Never Give Up	China
Zhou Chao	LaoZhou	LPL Summer 2017	World Elite	China
Ke Zhi	ZBB	LPL Summer 2017	World Elite	China
Guo Hao Tian	Lies	LPL Summer 2017	DAN Gaming	China
Zhao Ah Wei	q1	LPL Summer 2017	DAN Gaming	China
Wu Yao	Cat	LPL Summer 2017	DAN Gaming	China
Zhang Ming	Qiuqiu	LPL Summer 2017	DAN Gaming	China

### Appendix C: Usernames of Professional Taiwan/Macau/Hong Kong *League of Legends* Players

Name	Username	Debut Season	Team	Country of Origin
Chen Yi	Ziv	LMS Spring 2015	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Kang Chia-Wei	Albis	LMS Spring 2015	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Liu Shu-Wei	Westdoor	LMS Spring 2015	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Chou Chun-An	An	LMS Spring 2015	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Sa Sang-Ching	GreenTea	LMS Spring 2015	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Yang Yu-Wei	MapleSnow	LMS Spring 2015	DarlingYou	Taiwan
Yeh Yen-Tsing	ILLusion	LMS Spring 2015	DarlingYou	Taiwan
Tseng Chien-Lun	CooCooDai	LMS Spring 2015	DarlingYou	Taiwan
Fu Chin-Yu	Unlimited	LMS Spring 2015	DarlingYou	Taiwan
Liu Min-Hung	QuietRain	LMS Spring 2015	DarlingYou	Taiwan
Wang June Tsan	Stanley	LMS Spring 2015	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Xue Hong-Wei	DinTer	LMS Spring 2015	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Lau "Kurtis" Wai Kin	Toyz	LMS Spring 2015	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Wang Yong Jie	GoDJJ	LMS Spring 2015	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Yen Hsiang-Chun	CCB	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Huang Po-Chun	Jcain	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Wang Tsung-Chih	Ysera	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Han Chen	Lat (later Vayn3z, then 3z)	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Liang Teng-Li	RD	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Ke Kai-Sheng	HoHotDoG	LMS Spring 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Tseng Cheng-Wei	HanShao	LMS Spring 2015	Machi Crew	Taiwan
Cheng Wei-Hsiang	HanJi	LMS Spring 2015	Machi Crew	Taiwan
Pan Chia-Hao	LeeMid	LMS Spring 2015	Machi Crew	Taiwan
Cheng Hao	HoneyRain	LMS Spring 2015	Machi Crew	Taiwan
Tsai Tsung-Yu	ThreshMelong	LMS Spring 2015	Machi Crew	Taiwan
Lam Ka Chun	LOFS	LMS Spring 2015	Midnight Sun	Hong Kong
Leung "Anson" Tsz Ho	Empt2	LMS Spring 2015	Midnight Sun	Hong Kong
Michael Lau	Wish	LMS Spring 2015	Midnight Sun	Hong Kong
Wong Chun Wai	Tour	LMS Spring 2015	Midnight Sun	Hong Kong
Tang Hoi Chun	Chunx	LMS Spring 2015	Midnight Sun	Hong Kong

Chen Kuan Ting	Morning	LMS Spring 2015	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Chen Peng-Nien	Winds	LMS Spring 2015	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Wong Xing-Lei	Chawy	LMS Spring 2015	Taipei Assassins	Singapore
Li Chieh	Jay	LMS Spring 2015	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Chou Lu-Hsi	Steak	LMS Spring 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Chen Kuan-Ting	REFRAIN	LMS Spring 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Huang Yi-Tang	Maple	LMS Spring 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Hsiung Wen-An	NL	LMS Spring 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Hu Shuo-Jie	SwordArt	LMS Spring 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Lyu Jhong-Da	Zonda	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Chen Shao-Yuen	MiHanna	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Chen Chen-Chi	Achie	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Chang Bo-Wei	BeBe	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Chang Jia-Wei	Awei (later Weiiii)	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Chang Shao-Lo	Stone	LMS Summer 2015	Assassin Sniper	Taiwan
Yeh Chih-Hua	Yezi	LMS Summer 2015	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Shi Yue-Ting	Breaker	LMS Summer 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Fan Chih-Wei	YO	LMS Summer 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Ko Kai-Sheng	K	LMS Summer 2015	Logitech Snipers	Taiwan
Wang You-Lin	BoBo	LMS Summer 2015	Machi 17	Taiwan
Chen Jun-Dee	Dee	LMS Summer 2015	Machi 17	Taiwan
Ceng Jian-Hong	Dreamer	LMS Summer 2015	Machi 17	Taiwan
Shen Wei-Ting	TheFeeling	LMS Summer 2015	Machi 17	Taiwan
Xie Chia Wei	Apex	LMS Summer 2015	Machi 17	Taiwan
Cheng Pin-Lun	CorGi	LMS Summer 2015	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Chen Xiao-Xian	Mission	LMS Summer 2015	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Wang Yu-Jeng	Orange	LMS Summer 2015	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Wu Jia-Hua	Pony	LMS Summer 2015	Taipei Assassins	Hong Kong
Lu Tzu-Hsien	Yue	LMS Summer 2015	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Kung Yu-Te	Domo	LMS Summer 2015	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Hung Hau-Hsuan	Karsa	LMS Summer 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Yau Li-Hung	MMD	LMS Summer 2015	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Xue Zhao-Hong	Mountain	LMS Spring 2016	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan

Xue Bo-Yun	XUE	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Chen Yen-Chun	AJ	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Chang Jen-Pu	Syuan	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Liu Shih-Chieh	CandyBB	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Yi Zhong Chen	SpeaR	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Lam Ka Fu	KuKu	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Macau
Chien Wen Su	Rabi2	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Shih Hung-Yu	Never	LMS Spring 2016	COUGAR e-Sport	Taiwan
Shen Bo Ru	Rins	LMS Spring 2016	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Huang Jian-yuan	Breeze	LMS Spring 2016	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Chang Boa-hao	exciting	LMS Spring 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Zou Wei-Yang	SuwaKo (later Wako)	LMS Spring 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Liu Bing-Xin	LBB	LMS Spring 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Sie Ming-Syuan	Suki (later Zest)	LMS Spring 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Tung Tung	Nexus	LMS Spring 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Gong Nok Hin	Chillyz	LMS Spring 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Cheung Wo Kwai	GodKwai	LMS Spring 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Chia Chun Hsu	MarS (formerly jeffeRy)	LMS Spring 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Ling Jing Jia	Taizan	LMS Spring 2016	Machi 17	Taiwan
Liao Chan-Chin	Ender	LMS Spring 2016	Machi 17	Taiwan
Fei Chuan-Yuan	Julian	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Huang Jin-long	Ninuo	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Sheng Wei-liu	Wulala	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Ng Kwok-Man	SkULL	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Ling Kai Wing	Kaiwing	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Dai Hao-cyuan	Payne	LMS Spring 2016	Midnight Sun	Taiwan
Chu Chun-Lan	FoFo	LMS Spring 2016	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Chen Chin-Han	Lilv	LMS Spring 2016	Taipei Assassins	Taiwan
Wang You-Chun	BayBay	LMS Summer 2016	ahq e-Sports Club	Taiwan
Lai Chap-Yin	Wind	LMS Summer 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Wu Liang-Te	XiaoLiang	LMS Summer 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Lam Kwok-Wa	Gear	LMS Summer 2016	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Chen Cheng-Lun	RLun	LMS Summer 2016	J Team	Taiwan

Lo Hung Sing	PaSa	LMS Summer 2016	Machi 17	Hong Kong
Lian Xiu-Qi	Benny	LMS Summer 2016	Team Mist	Taiwan
Liu Wen-Hong	Rain	LMS Summer 2016	Team Mist	Taiwan
Wu Jiu-Yong	Zor (later SiuSiu)	LMS Summer 2016	Team Mist	Taiwan
Hsu Kai-Yueh	Mist	LMS Summer 2016	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Huang Jun-Ji	Unified	LMS Spring 2017	Fireball	Taiwan
Fei Jiun-Yuan	DreamSha	LMS Spring 2017	Fireball	Taiwan
Zhang Bo Xin	SoCool	LMS Spring 2017	Fireball	Taiwan
Liu Yuhung	Betty	LMS Spring 2017	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Hsu Bao Yuan	Nestea	LMS Spring 2017	Hong Kong Esports	Hong Kong
Huang Chu Xuan	Gemini	LMS Spring 2017	Hong Kong Esports	Taiwan
Poon Kok-Sing	Veki	LMS Spring 2017	Hong Kong Esports	Malaysia
Hu Jin-Shan	Epic	LMS Spring 2017	Wayi Spider	Taiwan
Lin Cheng-Ying	Chingz	LMS Spring 2017	eXtreme Gamers	Taiwan
Chung Yen-Chen	Madness	LMS Summer 2017	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Lin Hsin-Yu	Cyo	LMS Summer 2017	Flash Wolves	Taiwan
Leung Chung Hong	Moonblack	LMS Summer 2017	Flash Wolves	Hong Kong
Chen Yu Ming	Alex	LMS Summer 2017	J Team	Taiwan
Hsieh Yu-Ting	Pk	LMS Summer 2017	Raise Gaming	Taiwan
Huang Chen-Yang	Laba	LMS Summer 2017	Raise Gaming	Taiwan
Yang Chia-Yu	Wuji	LMS Summer 2017	Raise Gaming	Taiwan
Lin Chih-Chiang	Koala	LMS Summer 2017	Raise Gaming	Taiwan
Chen Kuan-Yu	Ran	LMS Summer 2017	Raise Gaming	Taiwan

## Appendix D: Usernames of Professional North American *League of Legends* Players

Name	Username	Debut Season	Team	Country
Nicholas Smith	NickWu	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
Tyler Nicholls	Lautemortis	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
Samuel Chu	Chuuper	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
Neil Hammad	PR0LLY	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
Josh Abrantes	brunch Ü	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
Abe Nguyen	MeyeA	Spring 2013	Complexity	USA
George Georgallidis	HotshotGG	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	Canada
Steve Chau	Chauster	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Austin Shin	LiNk	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Michael Tang	bigfatlp	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	Canada
Yiliang Peter Peng	Doublelift	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Zaqueri Black	Aphromoo	Spring 2013	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Joe Esfahani	Voyboy	Spring 2013	Team Curse	USA
Brandon DiMarco	saintvicious	Spring 2013	Team Curse	USA
Jacky Wang	Nyjacky	Spring 2013	Team Curse	China
David Roberson	Cop	Spring 2013	Team Curse	USA
Cody Sigfusson	Elementz	Spring 2013	Team Curse	Canada
Darshan Upadhyaha	ZionSpartan	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Brian Cao	Fat	Spring 2013	Good Game University	Canada
Josh Atkins	NintendudeX	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Danny Le	Shiphtur	Spring 2013	Good Game University	Canada
Justin Dinh	Jintae	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Brandon Phan	DontMashMe	Spring 2013	Good Game University	Canada
Miles Hoard	Daydreamin	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Angelo Cortez	I am Anjo	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Lyubomir Spasov	Bloodwater	Spring 2013	Good Game University	USA
Alan Nguyen	KiWiKiD	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	USA
Albert Rengifo	Crumbzz	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	Canada
David Jeong	DJ LAMBO	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	USA
William Li	scarra	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	USA
Michael Santana	Imaqtpie	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	USA

Jordan Blackburn	Patoy	Spring 2013	Team Dignitas	USA
Patrick Glinsman	MegaZero	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Clark Smith	ClakeyD	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Tyler Spesick	ecco	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Zach Malhas	Nientonsoh (later Nien)	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Michael Tribble	Nysylli	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Dylan Newton	AtomicN	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Peter Lim	Heartbeat	Spring 2013	Team MRN	USA
Marcus Hill	Dyrus	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	USA
Brian Wyllie	TheOddOne	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	Canada
Andy Dinh	Reginald	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	USA
Shan Huang	Chaox	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	Canada
Justin Tran	Wild Turtle	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	Canada
Alex Chu	Xpecial	Spring 2013	Team SoloMid	USA
Benny Hung	Sycho Sid (later Benny)	Spring 2013	Team Vulcun	USA
Jake Puchero	Xmithie	Spring 2013	Team Vulcun	Philippines
Zachary Hoschar	mandatorycloud (later mancloud)	Spring 2013	Team Vulcun	USA
Christopher Buechter	Zuna	Spring 2013	Team Vulcun	USA
Jake Lowry	Muffinqt	Spring 2013	Team Vulcun	USA
Hai Lam	Hai	Summer 2013	Cloud9	USA
Will Hartman	Meteos	Summer 2013	Cloud9	USA
An Le	Balls	Summer 2013	Cloud9	USA
Zachary Scuderi	SneakyCastro (later Sneaky)	Summer 2013	Cloud9	USA
Daerek Hart	LemonNation	Summer 2013	Cloud9	USA
Cristian Rosales	Cris	Summer 2013	Velocity eSports	USA
Andrew Erickson	Nk Inc	Summer 2013	Velocity eSports	USA
Joseph Bourassa	Vileroze	Summer 2013	Velocity eSports	USA
Ainslie Wyllie	frommaplestreet	Summer 2013	Velocity eSports	Canada
Evan Stevens	Evaniskus	Summer 2013	Velocity eSports	USA
Tyson Kapler	InnoX	Spring 2014	Evil Geniuses	Canada
Eugene Park	Pobelter	Spring 2014	Evil Geniuses	USA
Thomas Slotkin	Thinkcard	Spring 2014	Evil Geniuses	USA
Robert Lee	ROBERTxLEE	Spring 2014	Evil Geniuses	USA

Kenneth Tang	Ken	Spring 2014	Evil Geniuses	USA
Apollo Price	WizFujiN (later Apollo)	Spring 2014	Team Coast	USA
Diego Ruiz	Quas	Spring 2014	Team Curse	Venezuela
Christian Rivera	IWillDominate	Spring 2014	Team Curse	USA
George Liu	Zekent	Spring 2014	Team Curse	USA
Michael Kurylo	Bunny FuFu	Spring 2014	Team Curse	USA
Cruz Ogden	Cruzerthebruzer	Spring 2014	Team Dignitas	USA
Greyson Gilmer	goldenglue	Spring 2014	Team Dignitas	USA
Jamie Gallagher	Sheep	Spring 2014	XDG Gaming	Canada
Jonathan Nguyen	Westrice	Summer 2014	Complexity	USA
Kevin Jeon	Kez	Summer 2014	Complexity	USA
Royce Newcomb	Bubbadub	Summer 2014	Complexity	USA
Terry Chuong	babyeator (later Baby, then Big)	Summer 2014	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Johnny Ru	Altec	Summer 2014	Evil Geniuses	USA
Nicolas Haddad	Gleebglarbu	Summer 2014	Team SoloMid	USA
Kevin Yarnell	Hauntzer	Spring 2015	Gravity	USA
Steven Kim	CaliTrlolz (later CaliforniaTrlolz)	Spring 2015	Team 8	USA
Braeden Schwark	PorpoisePops (later Porpoise)	Spring 2015	Team 8	Canada
Andrew Pham	Slooshi	Spring 2015	Team 8	USA
Kang Jun-hyeok	Dodo8	Spring 2015	Team 8	Korea (USA)
Stephen Nguyen	CloudNguyen	Spring 2015	Team Dignitas	Canada
Andrew Zamarripa	Azingy	Spring 2015	Team Dignitas	USA
Keenan Santos	Rhux	Spring 2015	Team Impulse	USA
Adrian Ma	Adrian	Spring 2015	Team Impulse	USA
Yuri Jew	KEITHMCBRIEF (later Keith)	Spring 2015	Team Liquid	USA
Cuong Ta	Flaresz	Spring 2015	Winterfox	USA
Ryan Nget	ShorterACE	Spring 2015	Winterfox	USA
Charlie Lipsie (Coach)	Charlie	Summer 2015	Cloud9	China (USA)
Tony Gray (Coach)	Zikzlol (later Zikz)	Summer 2015	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Brian Baniqued	otter	Summer 2015	Enemy	USA
Adam Krauthaker	Bodydrop	Summer 2015	Enemy	USA
Bradley Marx (Coach)	Lazy	Summer 2015	Enemy	USA
Cole Gregory (Coach)	fragnat1c	Summer 2015	Enemy	USA



Matthew Schneider (Coach)		Summer 2015	Team 8	USA
Chad Smeltz (Coach)	History Teacher	Summer 2015	Team 8	USA
Devin Nash (Coach)	Mylixia	Summer 2015	Team Dignitas	USA
Andy Ta	Smoothie	Summer 2015	Team Dragon Knights	Canada
James Lattman	LattmaN	Summer 2015	Team Dragon Knights	USA
Austin Yu	Gate	Summer 2015	Team Impulse	China (USA)
Trevor Hayes	Stixxay	Spring 2016	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Galen Holgate	Moon	Spring 2016	NRG	USA
Colin Earnest	Solo	Spring 2016	Echo Fox	USA
Anthony Barkhovtsev	Hard	Spring 2016	Echo Fox	Canada
Jonathan Armao	Grigne (later Grig)	Spring 2016	Echo Fox	USA
William Chen	Stunt	Spring 2016	Echo Fox	USA
Dylan Falco (Coach)	Dylan	Spring 2016	Immortals	Canada
Kevin Koo-hyuk Kwon	KonKwon	Spring 2016	NRG	Korea (USA)
Tadayoshi Littleton (Coach)	Hermit	Spring 2016	NRG	USA
Oleksii Kuziuta	RF Legendary	Spring 2016	Renegades	Ukraine
Maria Creveling	Remi (previously Remilia, now Sakuya)	Spring 2016	Renegades	USA
Nickolas Surgent	Hakuho	Spring 2016	Renegades	USA
David Tu (Coach)	Hermes	Spring 2016	Renegades	USA
Billy Yu	BillyBoss	Spring 2016	Team Dignitas	USA
Barento Mohammed (Coach)	Raz	Spring 2016	Team Dignitas	Canada
Feng Wang Xiao	Feng	Spring 2016	Team Impulse	China (USA)
Meng Zhang	beibei	Spring 2016	Team Impulse	China (USA)
Samson Jackson	Lourlo	Spring 2016	Team Liquid	USA
Matt Elento	Matt	Spring 2016	Team Liquid	USA
Joshua Harnett	Dardoch	Spring 2016	Team Liquid	USA
Parth Naidu (Coach)	Parth	Spring 2016	Team SoloMid	USA
Jake Fyfe (Coach)	Ginko	Summer 2016	Echo Fox	USA
Simon Jeon (Coach)	heavenTime	Summer 2016	Echo Fox	Korea (Canada)
Benjamin deMunck	LOD	Summer 2016	EnVyUs	Canada
Brandon Chen	Brandini	Summer 2016	Phoenix1	USA
Kevin Pires	Zentinel	Summer 2016	Phoenix1	USA
Rami Charagh	Inori	Summer 2016	Phoenix1	Iraq (USA)

Alec Warren (Coach)	BonQuish	Summer 2016	Phoenix1	USA
Jovani Guillen	fabbbyyy	Summer 2016	Team Liquid	USA
Vincent Wang	Biofrost	Summer 2016	Team SoloMid	China (USA)
Juan Garcia	Contractz	Spring 2017	Cloud9	USA
Joseph Haslemann	Joey	Spring 2017	Counter Logic Gaming	USA
Matthew Higginbotham	Akaadian	Spring 2017	Echo Fox	USA
Timothy Cho (Coach)	Timkiro	Spring 2017	Echo Fox	Canada
Li Yu Sun	Cody Sun	Spring 2017	Immortals	China (USA)
Derek Shao	zig	Spring 2017	Phoenix1	Canada
Jordan Robison	Shady	Spring 2017	Phoenix1	USA
Jung Young-bin	Youngbin	Spring 2017	Team Liquid	Korea (USA)
David Lim (Coach)	Varsix	Spring 2017	Team Liquid	Canada
Nick Smith (Coach)	Inero	Summer 2017	Echo Fox	USA
Michael Yeung	MikeYeung	Summer 2017	Phoenix1	USA

## Appendix E: Usernames of Professional European *League of Legends* Players

Name	Username	Debut Season	Team	Country of Origin
Simon Payne	Fredy122	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	Great Britain
Jérémy Petit	ViRtU4l	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	France
Tony Carmona	ShLaYa	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	France
Rim Amanieu	Nono	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	France
Tomas Špiliasukas	Karalius	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	Lithuania
Hugo Padioleau	Dioud	EU LCS Spring 2013	against All authority	France
Dan Van Vo	Godbro	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Dennis Johnsen	Svenskeren	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Viktor Stymne	cowTard	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Sweden
Carl Lückmann	ForellenLord	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Germany
Søren Bjerg	Bjergsen	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Kasper Poulsen	TheTess	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Martin Lynge	Deficio	EU LCS Spring 2013	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Eric Peugeot	Spontexx	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	France
Jakob Mebdi	YamatoCannon	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Sweden
Tobias Magnusson	Malunoo	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Sweden
Marcel Feldkamp	dexter1 (later dexter)	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Germany
Maciej Ratuszniak	Shushei	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Poland
Eryk Wilczyński	HosaN	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Poland
Tobias Wall-Horgen	Muvert	EU LCS Spring 2013	DragonBorns	Sweden
Mike Petersen	Wickd	EU LCS Spring 2013	Evil Geniuses	Denmark
Stephen Ellis	Snoopeh	EU LCS Spring 2013	Evil Geniuses	Great Britain
Henrik Hansen	Froggen	EU LCS Spring 2013	Evil Geniuses	Denmark
Peter Wüppen	Yellowpete	EU LCS Spring 2013	Evil Geniuses	Germany
Mitch Voorspoels	Krepo	EU LCS Spring 2013	Evil Geniuses	Belgium
Paul Boyer	sOAZ	EU LCS Spring 2013	Fnatic	France

Lauri Happonen	Cyanide (later CyanideFI)	EU LCS Spring 2013	Fnatic	Finland
Enrique Cedeño Martinez	xPeke	EU LCS Spring 2013	Fnatic	Spain
Bora Kim	YellowStaR	EU LCS Spring 2013	Fnatic	France
Christoph Seitz	nRated	EU LCS Spring 2013	Fnatic	Germany
Evgeny Mazaev	Darien	EU LCS Spring 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Danil Reshetnikov	Diamondprox	EU LCS Spring 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Alexey Ichetovkin	Alex Ich	EU LCS Spring 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Evgeny Andryushin	Genja	EU LCS Spring 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Eduard Agbaryan	Edward (formerly and later GoSu Pepper)	EU LCS Spring 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Samuel Fernández	Samux	EU LCS Spring 2013	Giants Gaming	Spain
Sebastián Esteban	Morden	EU LCS Spring 2013	Giants Gaming	Spain
Juan Navarro	Exterminare	EU LCS Spring 2013	Giants Gaming	Spain
Yon Mangas Cayetano	Jimß0wnz	EU LCS Spring 2013	Giants Gaming	Spain
Aarón Collados	Babeta	EU LCS Spring 2013	Giants Gaming	Spain
Kevin Rubiszewski	KevIn	EU LCS Spring 2013	SK Gaming	Germany
John Velly	hyrqBot	EU LCS Spring 2013	SK Gaming	France
Carlos Rodriguez Santiago	ocelote	EU LCS Spring 2013	SK Gaming	Spain
Adrian Wübbelmann	CandyPanda	EU LCS Spring 2013	SK Gaming	Germany
Patrick Funke	Nyph	EU LCS Spring 2013	SK Gaming	Germany
Mojtaba Aflaton	Shacker	EU LCS Summer 2013	Evil Geniuses	Great Britain
Johannes Uibos	puszu	EU LCS Summer 2013	Fnatic	Estonia
Andrey Plechistov	D4rker	EU LCS Summer 2013	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Erih Sommermann	Voidle	EU LCS Summer 2013	Gambit Gaming	Estonia
Morten Rosenquist	Zorozero	EU LCS Summer 2013	Lemondogs	Denmark
Erlend Holm	Nukeduck	EU LCS Summer 2013	Lemondogs	Norway
Erik van Helvert	Tabzz	EU LCS Summer 2013	Lemondogs	Netherlands
Bram de Winter	wewillfailer	EU LCS Summer 2013	Lemondogs	Germany
Alfonso Aguirre Rodriguez	Mithy	EU LCS Summer 2013	Lemondogs	Spain
Jakub Turewicz	Kubon	EU LCS Summer 2013	MeetYourMakers	Poland

Konrad Kukier	Mokatte	EU LCS Summer 2013	MeetYourMakers	Poland
Krystian Przybylski	Czaru	EU LCS Summer 2013	MeetYourMakers	Poland
Marek Kukier	Makler	EU LCS Summer 2013	MeetYourMakers	Poland
Marek Kręgiel	Libik	EU LCS Summer 2013	MeetYourMakers	Poland
Vytautas Melinauskas	extinkt	EU LCS Summer 2013	Ninjas in Pajamas	Lithuania
Aleš Kněžínek	Freeze	EU LCS Summer 2013	Ninjas in Pajamas	Czech Republic
Mimer Ahlström	Mimer	EU LCS Summer 2013	Ninjas in Pajamas	Sweden
Adrian Wetekam	Kerp	EU LCS Summer 2013	Team ALTERNATE	Germany
Alvar Martin Aleñar	Araneae	EU LCS Summer 2013	Team ALTERNATE	Spain
Jakub Grzegorzewski	Creaton	EU LCS Summer 2013	Team ALTERNATE	Poland
Alexander Bergström	Jree	EU LCS Summer 2013	Team ALTERNATE	Sweden
Matti Sormunen	WhiteKnight108	EU LCS Summer 2013	Team ALTERNATE	Finland
Ilyas Hartsema	Shook	EU LCS Spring 2014	Alliance	Netherlands
Joey Steltenpool	YoungBuck	EU LCS Spring 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Netherlands
Maurice Stückenschneider	Amazing	EU LCS Spring 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Germany
Konstantinos Tzortziou	ForgIven (later FORGIVENGRE)	EU LCS Spring 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Greece
Petar Georgiev	Unlimited	EU LCS Spring 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Bulgaria
Martin Larsson	Rekkles	EU LCS Spring 2014	Fnatic	Sweden
Johan Johansson	Hulberto	EU LCS Spring 2014	Gambit Gaming	Sweden
Jakob Burke	fury III	EU LCS Spring 2014	Gambit Gaming	Germany
Markus Tingvall	Kottenx	EU LCS Spring 2014	Millenium	Sweden
Jesse Le	Jesiz	EU LCS Spring 2014	SK Gaming	Denmark
Matthew Taylor	Impaler	EU LCS Spring 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	Great Britain
Amaury Minguerche	Moopz	EU LCS Spring 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	Germany
Rasmus Skinneholm	MrRalleZ	EU LCS Spring 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	Denmark
Maxime Poinssot	Migxa	EU LCS Spring 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	France
Marcin Wolski	Selfie (later SELFIE, then Kori, then Selfie again)	EU LCS Spring 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	Poland
Marcin Mączka	Xaxus	EU LCS Spring 2014	Team ROCCAT	Poland
Marcin Jankowski	Jankos	EU LCS Spring 2014	Team ROCCAT	Poland

Remigiusz Pusch	Overpow	EU LCS Spring 2014	Team ROCCAT	Poland
Pawel Koprianiuk	Celaver	EU LCS Spring 2014	Team ROCCAT	Poland
Oskar Bogdan	Vander (later Vander)	EU LCS Spring 2014	Team ROCCAT	Poland
Karim Benghalia	Airwaks	EU LCS Summer 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Switzerland
Pawel Pruski	Woolite	EU LCS Summer 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Poland
Džiugas Repčys	Mazzerin	EU LCS Summer 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Lithuania
Ram Djemal	Brokenshard	EU LCS Summer 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Israel
Søren Holdt Frederiksen	Soren	EU LCS Summer 2014	Copenhagen Wolves	Denmark
Sebastian Robak	niQ	EU LCS Summer 2014	Gambit Gaming	Poland
Lucas Simon-Meslet	Cabochar	EU LCS Summer 2014	Gambit Gaming	France
Jean-Victor Burgevin	loulex	EU LCS Summer 2014	Gambit Gaming	France
Aleksi Kaikkonen	Hiiiva	EU LCS Summer 2014	Gambit Gaming	Finland
Raymond Tsang	kaSing	EU LCS Summer 2014	SUPA HOT CREW	Great Britain
Fabian Diepstraten	Febiven	EU LCS Spring 2015	Fnatic	Netherlands
Pierre Medjaldi	Steelback	EU LCS Spring 2015	Fnatic	France
Felix Edling	Betsy	EU LCS Spring 2015	Gambit Gaming	Malaysia (Sweden)
Kristoffer Pedersen	P1noy	EU LCS Spring 2015	Gambit Gaming	Denmark
Jorge Casanovas Moreno-Torres	Werlyb	EU LCS Spring 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Federico Lizondo	Fr3deric	EU LCS Spring 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Isaac Flores Alvarado	PePiiNeRo (later xPePii)	EU LCS Spring 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Adrián Pérez González	Adryh	EU LCS Spring 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Fernando Soria	Rydle	EU LCS Spring 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Andrei Pascu	Odoamne	EU LCS Spring 2015	H2k-Gaming	Romania
Petter Freyschuss	Hjärnan	EU LCS Spring 2015	H2k-Gaming	Sweden
Nicolai Nisbeth	Nisbeth	EU LCS Spring 2015	MeetYourMakers	Denmark
Marius Hæsumgaard	Blizer300	EU LCS Spring 2015	MeetYourMakers	Denmark
Jesper Strandgren	Jwaow	EU LCS Spring 2015	MeetYourMakers	Sweden
Lewis Simon Felix	NoXiAK	EU LCS Spring 2015	MeetYourMakers	Germany
Kiss Tamás	Vizicsacsi	EU LCS Spring 2015	Unicorns of Love	Hungary

Mateus Szkudlarek	Kikis	EU LCS Spring 2015	Unicorns of Love	Poland
Tristan Schrage	PowerOfEvil	EU LCS Spring 2015	Unicorns of Love	Germany
Pontus Dahlblom	Vardags	EU LCS Spring 2015	Unicorns of Love	Sweden
Zdravets Iliev Galabov	Hylissang	EU LCS Spring 2015	Unicorns of Love	Bulgaria
Lenny Uytterhoeven	Lenny	EU LCS Summer 2015	Copenhagen Wolves	Belgium
Christophe van Oudheusden	Je suis Kaas	EU LCS Summer 2015	Copenhagen Wolves	Belgium
Karl Krey (Coach)	Dentist	EU LCS Summer 2015	Copenhagen Wolves	Germany
Hampus Abrahamsson	PromisQ (later sprattel)	EU LCS Summer 2015	Elements	Sweden
Martin Mogensen (Coach)	Mart	EU LCS Summer 2015	Elements	Denmark
Luis Sevilla Petit (Coach)	Deilor	EU LCS Summer 2015	Fnatic	Spain
Dmitry Sukhanov (Coach)	Moo	EU LCS Summer 2015	Gambit Gaming	Russia
Kévin Ghanbarzadeh (Coach)	Shaunz	EU LCS Summer 2015	Gambit Gaming	France
Oskar Lundström	G0DFRED	EU LCS Summer 2015	Giants Gaming	Sweden
David Alonso Vicente (Coach)	Lozark	EU LCS Summer 2015	Giants Gaming	Spain
Jesper Svenningsen	Niels (later Zven)	EU LCS Summer 2015	Origen	Denmark
Titus Hafner (Coach)	LeDuck	EU LCS Summer 2015	Origen	Germany
Hampus Myhre	Fox	EU LCS Summer 2015	SK Gaming	Sweden
Lukas Schenke (Coach)	Material Boy	EU LCS Summer 2015	SK Gaming	Germany
Etienne Michels	Steve	EU LCS Summer 2015	Team ROCCAT	France
Erberk Demir	Gilius	EU LCS Summer 2015	Unicorns of Love	Germany
Fabian Mallant (Coach)	Sheepy	EU LCS Summer 2015	Unicorns of Love	Germany
Jérémy Valdenaire	Eika	EU LCS Spring 2016	Elements	France
Johan Olsson	Klaj	EU LCS Spring 2016	Fnatic	Sweden
Luka Perković	PerkZ	EU LCS Spring 2016	G2 Esports	Croatia
Glenn Doornenbal	Hybrid	EU LCS Spring 2016	G2 Esports	Netherlands
Peter Thomsen	Atom	EU LCS Spring 2016	Giants Gaming	Denmark
Lennart Warkus	Smittyj	EU LCS Spring 2016	Giants Gaming	Germany
Tinh Tri Lam	k0u	EU LCS Spring 2016	Giants Gaming	Norway
Joachim Rasmussen	betongJocke	EU LCS Spring 2016	Giants Gaming	Sweden

Morgan Granberg	Hustlin	EU LCS Spring 2016	Giants Gaming	Sweden
Nicolai Larsen (Coach)	Hazel	EU LCS Spring 2016	Origen	Denmark
Ana Negueruela (Coach)	Bali	EU LCS Spring 2016	Origen	Spain
Martin Hansen	Wunderwear (later Wunder)	EU LCS Spring 2016	Splyce	Denmark
Jonas Andersen	Trashy	EU LCS Spring 2016	Splyce	Denmark
Chres Laursen	Sencux	EU LCS Spring 2016	Splyce	Denmark
Kasper Kobberup	Kobbe	EU LCS Spring 2016	Splyce	Denmark
Mohammad Karim Tokhi	Safir (previously Jébus)	EU LCS Spring 2016	Team ROCCAT	Afghanistan
Karim Bbahlá (Coach)	ImSoFresh	EU LCS Spring 2016	Team ROCCAT	Belgium
Fabian Lohmann (Coach)	Grabbz	EU LCS Spring 2016	Team ROCCAT	Germany
Charly Guillard	Djoko	EU LCS Spring 2016	Unicorns of Love	France
Rudy Beltran	Rudy	EU LCS Spring 2016	Unicorns of Love	Sweden
Nubar Sarafian	Maxlore	EU LCS Summer 2016	Giants Gaming	Great Britain
Augustas Ruplys	Toaster	EU LCS Summer 2016	Origen	Lithuania
Nicholas Korsgaard (Coach)	NicoThePico	EU LCS Summer 2016	Origen	Norway
Mihael Mehle	Mikyx	EU LCS Summer 2016	Splyce	Slovenia
Jonas Elmarghichi	Memento	EU LCS Summer 2016	Team ROCCAT	Sweden
Victor Etlar Eriksen	Reje	EU LCS Summer 2016	Team Vitality	Denmark
Fabian Schubert	Exileh	EU LCS Summer 2016	Unicorns of Love	Germany
Mads-Brock Pedersen	Broxah	EU LCS Spring 2017	Fnatic	Denmark
Rasmus Winther	Caps	EU LCS Spring 2017	Fnatic	Denmark
Finlay Stewart (Coach)	Quaye	EU LCS Spring 2017	Fnatic	Great Britain
Olof Medin	Flaxxish	EU LCS Spring 2017	Giants Gaming	Sweden
Martin Kordmaa	HeaQ	EU LCS Spring 2017	Giants Gaming	Estonia
Barney Morris	Alphari	EU LCS Spring 2017	Misfits	Great Britain
Steven Liv	Hans sama	EU LCS Spring 2017	Misfits	France
Hussain Moosvi (Coach)	Daku	EU LCS Spring 2017	Misfits	UAE
Max Günther	Satorius	EU LCS Spring 2017	Origen	Germany
Jakub Rokicki	Cinkrof	EU LCS Spring 2017	Origen	Poland



Ambrož Hren	Phaxi	EU LCS Spring 2017	Team ROCCAT	Slovenia
Baltat Alin-Ciprian	AoD	EU LCS Spring 2017	Team Vitality	Romania
Andrei Dragomir	Xerxe	EU LCS Spring 2017	Unicorns of Love	Romania
Rosendo Fuentes	Send0o	EU LCS Summer 2017	G2 Esports	Spain
Leon Krüger	Lamabear	EU LCS Summer 2017	Mysterious Monkeys	Germany
Sofyan Rechchad	CozQ	EU LCS Summer 2017	Mysterious Monkeys	Netherlands
Florent Soler	Yuuki60	EU LCS Summer 2017	Mysterious Monkeys	France
Fayan Pertijs (Coach)	Gevous	EU LCS Summer 2017	Splyce	Netherlands
Milo Wehnes	Pridestalker	EU LCS Summer 2017	Team ROCCAT	Netherlands

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