

Mistakes Were Made

Work in Progress
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Ian “Zies” Guzmán



WARNING

THIS IS ABOUT GAMING AND YOU MAY ENJOY IT.

– Travis “Samox” Beauchamp, *The Smash Brothers*

GL HF

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As a work in progress, anything and/or everything can/might/could/will probably change around depending on feedback, editing, revisions, et cetera. All feedback, comments, questions, ideas, and **especially constructive criticism** is welcome and encouraged throughout the entire process. Thanks in advance if you help me in any way. :D

Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds, look on my works, ye Mighty, and
Despair.

Suggested Reading Tips:

- Ludo (plural: ludi): Optional details, description, character awareness, et cetera^{1,2,3...} located at bottom of page.
- Logbook entries: Optional chapters^X, artifacts, lore, data, documents, other optional content encountered or collected, et cetera^{A,B,C...} located in Logbook.

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Little Failures



Thousands Root for Favorite Failures at Packed Stadium

— *October 1, 2016*

Yesterday, thousands upon thousands of eSports fanatics found themselves at the 2016 League of Legends World Championship at Cologne, Germany's WASD Stadium. Fans cheered on as the best European team assisted Korea in winning yet another world championship.

"We're ecstatic and truly humbled to see such a positive turnout," commented Riot Games' Dustin "Redbeard" Beck, "and we're ready to see Korea win by default, once again because genetics, bro."

Sources suggest that while these players have now been competing for years and for hundreds of thousands of dollars, some parents still disagree with the path their children have taken.

"I am disappointed that my son has taken to playing video games for a living," said the father of Zealt's Matthew "Rinns" Larsson. "We raised him on the values and traditions that have worked for years, but his decision to stray is upsetting. I guess our parenting just wasn't good enough and now we have to deal with our little failure."

Rumors have surfaced that at the Analyst Desk, OGN caster Duncan "Odysseus" Mykles collected the tears of Pierce "Hyperdrift" Peng (who favored Zealt to emerge victorious). Sources predict that Odysseus will add his newly acquired tears to his multi-million dollar hype train, which he conducts on a daily basis commuting to and from Korea.

Millions of failures around the world watched as the little failures from Europe lost to Korea's failures. Europe and America once again managed to lose out on the first place prize (\$2,500,000) after their year-long struggle to remain relevant in the eSports scene.

Part One

These three words were always the last thing an OASIS user saw before leaving the real world and entering the virtual one:

READY PLAYER ONE

– *Ready Player One*

I've begun to wonder if Donnelley's voyage here was as prosaic as it was presented. How disappointed not to have found the bones of the holy man! No wonder he hated the inhabitants so. To him, they must have seemed like barnacles mindlessly clinging to a mercy seat. Why cling so hard to the rock? Because it is the only thing that stops us from sliding into the ocean...into oblivion.

– *Dear Esther*

eSports in 2014 might be reaching unprecedented popularity and stature around the world, yet one thing remains true – Korea is number one. If eSports were a game of Civilization, then Korea discovered the right eSports technologies first and built the Wonder.

– Rob Zacny

*They see you as small and helpless,
They see you as just a child,
Surprise when they find out that a warrior will soon run wild.*

*Prepare for your greatest moments,
Prepare for your finest hour,
The dream that you've always dreamed is suddenly about to flower.*

*We are lightning,
Straying from the thunder,
Miracles of ancient wonder.*

*This will be the day we've waited for.
This will be the day we open up the door.
I don't wanna hear your absolution,
Hope you're ready for a revolution.
Welcome to a world of new solutions.
Welcome to a world of bloody evolution.
In time your heart will open minds,
A story will be told,
And victory is in a simple soul...*

– RWBY, "[This Will Be the Day](#)"

Starting Technologies

1

Civilization

“Corporation, noun: An ingenious device for obtaining individual profit without individual responsibility.” Ambrose Bierce

Casual conversation, fused with the soft aroma of food, drifted throughout the restaurant. Echoes of an enduring and lively civilization filled the floor. Conversations and carefree laughter clashed and intertwined midair: the voices of the mothers and fathers pleased with and at ease with life, and the giggling of children too young to have any worries. A calm and familiar song played for all the customers of the restaurant, a song neither too boring to lull the people asleep nor too raunchy that may fall under the category of offensive. Within the confines of the orange-lit room, nothing in life could be better.

Customers lined up to place their orders. For some it was simple: a burger, some fries, and a soda. For others, not quite so: four, no, six, no, eight burgers, two medium fries, four small sodas. Damn, a dollar short. Make that just two small fries, then. And then they would be irritated anytime they were politely asked to repeat their confusing order. Then there were those with special needs: no onions, please—and a please was rare—hold the tomatoes or no lettuce were common as well.

Taking the orders were those wishing they could be elsewhere, all wishing they could have it better. The high schooler, the least experienced of the bunch, was always assigned with the cleaning tasks so that he would never be in the position to spit into the burgers or pocket a few dollars in the collective blind spot of the cameras. The college students, all in need of four years' work experience before being eligible for an entry level position, dealt with the loud, hungry crowd. The college graduates¹ were here only because nowhere else would pay. They were the most skilled of the unskilled:² they knew at which precise temperatures and at which exact angle to handle the meat. All employed to do menial tasks for meager earnings, and at the mercy of the dollar, they were locked in place for the foreseeable future.

But they deserved their earnings because they were unskilled, and this was the best way to get started. And they were employed by good, kind people, with worthy, noble intentions. They ought to be grateful for this opportunity and for this income, it was the same job and pay their grandparents had. Besides, business was booming this quarter, with profits on the rise and labor aplenty. Never worry about the lack of labor:³ should we be in need of any, simply hire the next schmuck to enter the doors. You want a job? You need a job? Come one, come all, anyone can do this work, welcome aboard. It is important to always have a crew expendable.

1 they were adults, but clearly irresponsible if employed here

2 it was what their majors had prepared them for

3 corporate would say

No...necessary.

No...crucial.

No...vital!

It is vital to always have a crew expendable.

All those struggling to make it by need to figure things out on their own: their struggles are their own fault, no one else's. Don't come crying to us for a raise. We're in the business of serving food and making profits, not providing living wages. Don't be so selfish. Think of the company's wellbeing. Don't like it? Door's right there. Next!

The men and women behind the counter scurry about, performing their mind-numbing jobs to the laziest of their ability. The clock was the only thing keeping them sane, and each time they peered in its direction, they would be absolutely certain that each second had passed by twice as quickly as the one prior. Only three hours left until there's only one hour left before the half-hour left before my designated five-minute break,⁴ then just another hour before the last hour of the work day. All the while orders flooded in. The faces of the cashiers were bombarded with dialects and accents and teenagers and coins and profanity. The food was prepared and served and taken without so much as a thank you muttered in return.

But it was payday and they would finally reap the minimal fruits of their labor. The workers received a blue card with all of their earnings in it. Using the card would result in a fee. A fee each time they would check their remaining balance, each time they would withdraw funds, a fee for transferring funds from the card to any other account. But it was worthwhile because it saved the company paperwork and signatures and time and money and thus, in the long run, brought in more profit. It was a good move, an intelligent business decision, made by the intelligent, wealthy, educated men running the company who are never to be doubted.

Those who were done for the day walked out the doors of the restaurant and saw their evening counterparts entering to complete the work yet to be done. And evermore the cycle continued.

Exiting the doors onto the packed and busy streets, the workers dispersed and became part of the crowd. Upon steel pillars and platforms, metallic trains came to screeching halts.⁵ On the roads, vehicles of all sizes and of all purposes sped about in all directions as pedestrians flowed around them like water. A unifying song, a song without rhythm or melody, emanated from the drivers who honked their horns every chance they got. Every few blocks the city's anthem of emergency sirens reverberated across the streets and most people stopped in place and looked both ways⁶ before crossing at the red light.

⁴ only five of the hour or half-hour mandated by law, or they could pick up smoking as an excuse to need regular smoke breaks to be productive

⁵ recorded voices announced this stop and the next stop, and warned passengers to stand clear of the closing doors, please

⁶ and drivers checked their mirrors

People on the sidewalks were of all ages and creeds and dreams, but the things they most valued were not theirs. All cars on the street, and all that education they had earned, and all the homes in which they lived, still had to be paid off. All the vehicles parked at every street, all the local businesses who advertised their services on billboards and public transportation, all was debt. And best not let anything default else our education go out of business, else our public transportation no longer drive in profits, else our hospitals bleed negative income.

And of course the banks would be closing at precisely the same time the standard work day came to a close. The hours of operation were somehow always set to inconvenience those who worked steady jobs for questionable pay.

And of course, whenever it just so happened to be rush hour, the homeless would just so happen to be camped out in front of the restaurants and the bus stops and the subway stations and the jewelry stores and the bakeries and the markets.

Of course.

They would shake their cups so that their coins would ring, and please, they would plead, and God bless you, would say the more patriotic ones, and evermore until no one watched.⁷ Meanwhile the world walked on without even the slightest of a damn. But they only ignored the homeless because every penny donated meant another penny shy for food or water or rent, and another penny closer to end up like them.

As the employed made their way home, they would bear witness to the state of their crumbling neighborhoods. Countless streets housed entire apartment buildings boarded off with blue plywood and overgrown in foliage.⁸ Homes were colored of Rooms for Rent, and shaded of Price Reduced, and tinged of For Sale By Owner.

The evicted and derelict homes became canvases for graffiti artists, and had become plots of land solely for the purpose of garbage disposal.⁹ Three, four, five homes per block.

Outside the homes, parked cars read 4/S¹⁰ with ten digit numbers posted underneath. Six, seven, eight cars per block.¹¹

They closed the door behind themselves, the cold air faded away, and finally they were home, safe, and all the troubles of the world seemed to dissipate.

7 And when no one watched they would peer down and flick their thumbs around and tap away at the slim, bright screen. Day in and day out they would tap at the screen and drag around the pinch around. And as the working day drew to a close, they would text and ask for favors, just one more night and I'll find another place, just one more night, please. What about Jordan from our Sociology class, do you still have his number? We were roommates. Surely he'll have space for a night or two. Please.

8 with vines that climbed and hugged buildings from the very bottom to the very top

9 where insects and rodents would reproduce

10 or 4/\$ or 4S or 4:S or 4\$ or FS or F\$ or F:S

11 Years ago there would be music playing and chats and laughter and dancing in the streets, but those times were dead.

2

NeoTokyo

“What is happiness? The feeling that power increases—that resistance is overcome.” Friedrich Nietzsche

He walked up the flight of stairs, entered his room and dropped onto his bed. As he lay there, the grease that had accumulated on his hands and face and clothes were slipping onto his sheets. The red numbers on his desk changed from 5:39 to 5:52 to 6:18. For every number that changed, the room grew darker and darker, and the sounds outside softer and softer. At least it was finally Friday.

He took off his heavy, stained uniform and worked his way downstairs. He heard recorded laughter coming from the television, and then saw two blue-lit bodies sitting on the couch staring at the screen, empty bottles scattered across the floor, a sweating bottle tightly clasped in their hands. They took no note as he entered the bathroom.

The warm water dropped down on him, tapping against his skull, cleansing away the grime that had gathered that day, and slowly the filth trickled down. He kept the water on until it aged his fingertips.

He dried himself off and stood in the tub thinking many thoughts and pondering many ideas until he spontaneously sprang back into active consciousness.

Leaving the bathroom he headed towards the kitchen in the dark, making as little noise as possible. The refrigerator hummed loudly as he got nearer. Yellow light poured onto the walls behind him, but of course there was nothing there: two bottles of beer, a gallon of milk half empty, and a stick of butter half gone. Working his way back toward the stairs, a small creature ran into him.

He’s home! the thing would yell, passing by at such impeccable timing. He would push it against the wall just in time so its cries would be ignored. Go pick up some food! one parent would say. And do something productive today instead of just sitting in front of your computer all night long! would say the other. And bring those last two beers over before you go! Their empty gazes were glued to the television screen as they went bottoms up.

Of course.

Of course, of course, of course!

The cool air slapped his face as he walked down the street.¹ He took out a cigarette and held it between his lips for five, six, seven street tiles. His hand brought up the lighter and lit the cigarette. His lungs came to life and became jubilant, reunited with an old companion. He walked on, hands in pockets, sucking on the sweet, indulging stick, walking past the Chinese restaurant a few tiles before turning back.

What up? a familiar face in the dark would ask, holding out a fist.

A shrug, their fists bumped.

1 The yellow street lights hitting the desolate streets flickered on and off every now and then.

Yeah, life sucks on my end too, as they smoked outside the restaurant.

Sesame chicken! the short Chinese man behind the counter would yell. A'ight, I'll catch ya later, bro, he got his food² and disappeared into the night.

Ha'f a chicken wih pok fied wice an' chicken wih broccoli an' wie wice! He inhaled deeply and threw away what remained. Fo'teen fity! the tiny man would say. An' wememba... smoking *ba'* fo' you! Nomo' smoking! same as he had told the friend.

He hesitated at the doorway of his home, placed the bag inside and walked back to the nearest bodega. He withdrew all of the funds on the card that he got from work that day, paying twelve dollars³ for fees in the process in addition to the ATM's \$2.75 fee. Returning home, he checked his pockets to recall where he had left his cash and where he had left the now empty card.

What took you? We're starving! And where are those beers!?

He took out one of the styrofoam containers and dropped the bag on the table. Back in his room, the only light he could see were the red numbers on the desk: 7:43. He flicked the light switch and saw his room exactly as he had left it that morning: his garbage and papers exactly where they were, his boxes and books left untouched, his bed unmade, now with grease. Posters of his favorite games and musicians and animes and teams were mounted onto his walls.⁴ If only there was more wall than posters.

He sat down in his chair, put on his headset, and turned on his computer. He took out the blue card and laid it above his mouse. His monitors brightened, he typed his password, and his background came into focus. He opened up his browser and clicked a bookmark to Pandora, immediately his preferred music began to play.

He clicked another bookmark, instantly the page loaded. Twitch's featured stream was a speed runner. A blue man ran towards the right⁵ shooting peas out of his arm, he jumped and climbed ladders, a quick menu, the blue man turned gray and he would shoot out a white boomerang. A timer would show whether or not this was a new record and by how many seconds or milliseconds better or worse it was compared to the world record and the player's best record.

Below the featured content was a list of other games being streamed, all sorted by live viewers. First on the list was his game of choice: *League of Legends*.

No Sinik, no Inertia, no Crescendo, no Equinox, no Eumoda – players who consistently drew in tens of thousands of viewers. The current top streamer had around seven thousand viewers. Espada, Team Ampersand's mid laner, was a very strong player. Well known for his humorous and risky antics in game, Espada was a favored streamer for many excitable people.

2 the Chinese man mumbled something

3 almost two hours' work

4 some signed by the developers or writers or artists or animators or voice actors or other influential people in that field

5 they always ran right

He dashed toward a half-health Orianna with Spirit Rush, he dropped the Ignite, landed the Charm, dashed further forward to dodge the Command: Attack, Fox-Fires locked onto the low health target, he tossed out the orb, and dashed back toward safety, tanking two, three, four turret shots in the process. A blind monk emerged from the darkness. He waited for the precise moment to Flash away from the Sonic Wave. A webcam recorded his reactions throughout the course of the game and between his games while rap music played in the background.

“I Ignited her at the beginning because I knew I could get the kill even without starting off with Charm. If I didn’t juke the Ult with another dash I would’ve definitely died, though. At the same time I knew I couldn’t tank the turret for too long. If an enemy stays in the lane with that amount of health when she knows my abilities and summoner spells up, the jungler was clearly nearby. If I played that better I could’ve saved Flash, though. He could have probably dived me and he would have been fine, but didn’t know where my jungler was, so he probably didn’t want to go too ham.”

On discussion forums he could see many topics: statistics for this patch, YouTube clips of stupid or funny or creative things that people have done or have had happen to them, artwork of their favorite characters. The more active topics made their way to the top of the page: rumors of certain teams acquiring new players, rumors of new teams on the horizon, threads dedicated to an amazing play a Korean player just did a few hours ago. Jokes and praise and ridicule and criticism and toxicity from all over the world found its way onto the internet as communities trash talked, argued, and poked fun at everyone.

Cryo420 Posted 3 hours ago

I don't think Dendra had the best performance las season but if Royale can stup up their game im sure they can pull of first place this season. Maybe not internationally but at least in NA.

coooldude17 Posted 3 hours ago

Dude, Dendra is fucking horrible. Royale should kick him and pick up a better player, Dasher could do way better then Dendra. Hell fucking Marlworlf could do better on roayal then on fucking arcadia. If royale's management had any idea how to form and run a good team they'd definety could get Marlworlf as quick as possible

ehugz Posted 2 hours ago

The only reason you think MW would be a good replacement for Dendra is because you're only thinking of stats and numbers but youre completely forgetting about the way Arcadia plays. MW is only able to put up good scores and win some games because Arcadia's playstyle is more often then not high risk, high reward. If he can get some kills he can make game changing plays simply because roamy assassins are difficult as hell to deal with. Marlwolf just knows when it's best to leave lane and knows hwo to decieve

the person he's lining against. If MW is targeted and fails for the first ten minutes of the game Arcadia loses hands down. Royale's success would not improve if they had MW because as a team Royale is far more aggressive if there's even a 80% chance of winning a skirmish.

Since nothing was happening he decided to stream. He began his broadcast and all his social media pages instantaneously announced that he had gone live. In a matter of minutes three hundred viewers were drawn in.⁶

"Hello," he said lazily into his headset's microphone as he waved lazily at his webcam. "I'm eating right now, so I'll just answer questions for a while before I get into a game." Twitch chat filled up with comments and questions and faces typed in by his viewers.

"Chinese food. Chicken with broccoli. The place near here is pretty good I guess, but I mean, I haven't really tasted much of the cooking from a lot of other different Chinese restaurants. I'm sure they're mostly the same." He skimmed past the stupid questions and silly comments until he found something worth answering.

"Mmm, I'm not too sure about all that talk about replacing Dendra. I mean, you have to consider the vastly different playstyles of the teams competing that season and this upcoming season. I think it's extremely stupid to not take teams in general into consideration. Every player has his strengths and weaknesses. You can look at numbers all you want, but ultimately you need the context of how the games played out and how the team played as a unit before criticizing a single player for poor performance or praising another for immaculate performance."

He chewed with a closed mouth and lifted his microphone away as he continued reading questions.

"I'm drinking water. Not much of a fan of soda all the time. Maybe once a week I'll drink some soda or something."

"Where do I live? Check the FAQ below."

"Uh, yes, I do have a fortune cookie... 'Learn Chinese, Spring.' Choon, teean. Choontyan. Help, I can't pronounce. 'It is very possible that you will achieve greatness in your lifetime.' Well, isn't that comforting news?" he asked his viewers as he tossed the paper into the air.

"Am I gay? Really? You assholes. I'm just gonna add that to the FAQ this time around."

"Alright, I'll start playing in a bit, let me get some more water while I log on. I'm gonna play some ads for a minute or so. Thanks to those of you not using Ad-Block, keep being awesome."

⁶ three thousand viewers a few minutes later

He went downstairs careful to place his feet as close to the edges of the steps as possible. Moving as quietly and as unnoticeable as a slithering solid snake, he refilled his cup and took a few sips on the way back. The loud television competed with the loud smacking of lips and the loud chewing of food while blue light bounced off the monitor.

The eyes of the mouths were fixed on the screen, which displayed a pair of lovers kissing under a chestnut tree.⁷ The channel would then resume the broadcast: a pundit would be angered about jobs being taken by non-Americans, and talk about an incompetent politician in the East whose country had a poor understanding and execution of democracy.⁸ He also spoke of a senator who, earlier that week, had stated that the only way anyone could fail and be poor in this country was if they were lazy and didn't do their fair share of work. Anyone can make it in this country, he had said, and ultimately nothing stood in the way other than sheer determination.

Melting back into the cover of darkness, he made his way upstairs, again taking gentle, precise steps. Back in his room, the younger brother was clicking around with the mouse.

“Get out,” he sighed as he pushed the kid out, locking the door, and “Oh hi,” as he rested his hands back on his mouse and keyboard.⁹

A tab with the name DeusRex blinked orange in the game's window.

(20:29) DeusRex: yo lets duo

NeoTokyo: lol, why?

DeusRex: u and me close

(20:30) NeoTokyo: Sounds legit, inivite me

“So it looks like Rex wants to chill for a bit. I know you guys like our crazy-stupid teamwork and shenanigans.”

(20:32) DeusRex: get on raidcall

“You wanna dick around or play to win, Toke?” a laid back voice asked from his headset.

“I'm down for whatever, man,” he responded holding his left Shift key.

“A'right then, we dickin' around. Time to make some YouTube worthy plays.”

They got into the matchmaking queue and waited for the system to find suitable teammates and opponents of the same or similar skill level.¹⁰ Music poured into his ears as he played a typing game to ensure his fingers remained quick and precise. With only a few mistakes made, he scored 151 words per minute with a typing accuracy of 93.4%. He moved on to another game to test his accuracy and reflexes with his mouse:

7 one wore a ring, the other did not

8 the pundit of course wore a red, white, and blue tie so that the audience would not doubt the spokesman's Americanness

9 The blue card he had set near his mouse was gone. Fool me once, mom and dad, shame on you, fool me twice...

10 which took a few minutes since they both ranked quite highly

a rhythm game where he had to keep up with the beat and melody of the music. The more difficult songs were the faster ones he preferred.

A match was found and some familiar names showed up on their team.

amp Toxiform: tokyo ban LB pls

DeusRex: Let me jungle, I got this shit

“Try’n leave Lee open.”

Aleor: phyros u mind if I mid? D: i wanna practice ahri

Royale Phyros: :/

Royale Phyros: ://///

Royale Phyros: sure go ahead

amp Toxiform: don’t worry ill support u phy

“I think they heard you, Rex,”

“The scumbags. They *did* show Lee and Renekton early. . . guess I’ll go a bit tanky so we can dive the shit out of ‘em. Kinda just wanna rush double Sunfires and proxy or push all game.”

Warlord Shen NeoTokyo	Popstar Ahri Aleor	Woad Ashe Royale Phyros	Charred Maokai DeusRex	Janna amp Toxiform
Mafia Graves Pompow	Renekton ButTrauma	Zyra RefleX	Justicar Syndra amp Espada	Bee Sin SimJim

Teams and champions locked in. They quickly loaded into the game, browsing social media while the slow loaders caught up to 100%.

[00:02] NeoTokyo (Shen) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:03] DeusRex (Maokai) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:03] Royale Phyros (Ashe) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:06] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): tokyo, prepare urs

[00:08] [All] NeoTokyo (Shen): lol

[00:10] [All] NeoTokyo (Shen): I’ve taped it closed

[00:13] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): you think

[00:13] Aleor (Ahri) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:15] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): i can’t

[00:15] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): break through tape?

[00:16] amp Toxiform (Janna) purchased Scrying Orb (Trinket)!

[00:16] amp Toxiform (Janna) purchased Stealth Ward!

“You should gank him early. Teach him who needs the tape,”

[00:18] [All] NeoTokyo (Shen): it’s duct tape, super durable

[00:19] [All] Aleor (Ahri): lol

[00:19] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): lol

“That’s Daze’s smurf, right? It’s like you guys are made for each otha. You should change the answer to your new FAQ question, you two flirt like you’re married.”

“You should be marriage counselor—who helps online couples get the most out of cybering.”

“Ehh...” a ping dropped in the fog of war at the bottom right quadrant of the minimap, “Come to their Blue. Might need taunt.”

[01:20] **amp Toxiform (Janna)**: q or e?

[01:24] **DeusRex (Maokai)**: Q if they show up

[01:25] **DeusRex (Maokai)**: otherwise e

“I’m going to bail if they show up with more than two people. You’re gonna get us killed just for Blue. I has a feel.”

“Nah, man, they’re either going our Blue or their Red. Sim won’t consider the Tree invade.”

“Wanna bet?”

“...nah, nevermind.”

[01:47] **amp Toxiform (Janna)**: doesn’tl ook like their comgin

“I’m headin’ top,”

[02:03] **[All] ButTrauma (Renekton)**: where u hiding, tokyeo?

“Let me get four before I go up,”

“Lee’s probably here. Also he has no wards.”

“Ah, I see ‘im. Comin’, comin’, come to tri—tri, tri, tri. Let me block the next Q.”

“He has no Ignite.”

[06:26] **[All] SimJim (Lee Sin)**: y u so fat tree? : |

“You goin’ back?”

“Yeah, gonna wait a few seconds for a pink.”

[07:03] **[All] DeusRex (Maokai)**: sorry

[07:05] **[All] DeusRex (Maokai)**: i drank my milk

[07:06] **[All] DeusRex (Maokai)**: and ate my vegetables

[07:07] **[All] DeusRex (Maokai)**: growing up

[07:53] **[All] RefleX (Zyra)**: But I heard milk makes you shrink

[07:58] **[All] SimJim (Lee Sin)**: I’m pretty sure that’s just you

[08:21] **[All] ButTrauma (Renekton)**: lmao

[08:23] **amp Toxiform (Janna)** purchased **Sight Ward!**

[08:24] **[All] ButTrauma (Renekton)**: and i thought iwasa a troll

[08:30] **[All] RefleX (Zyra)**: qq

“Haven’t seen top in a while. Not sure if he’s in our jungle or what.”

[10:32] **NeōTokyo (Shen)** signals to be careful

[10:32] **DeusRex (Maokai)** signals to be careful

“None of my camps were cleared. I swear I’m going to walk into them doing Dragon. Or...not. The fuck? Where are they?”

[11:12] **ButTrauma has drawn first blood!**

[11:14] **ButTrauma has slain amp Toxiform for a double kill!**

[11:18] **ButTrauma has slain DeusRex for a triple kill!**

[11:18] **ButTrauma is on a killing spree!**

“Well, top’s almost dead.”

[11:20] amp Toxiform (Janna): wtf
[11:22] amp Toxiform (Janna): is renek doing down here
[11:52] NeoTokyo (Shen): We pinged.
[12:23] DeusRex (Maokai): drag ~ 18:00
[13:02] ButTrauma is on a rampage!
[13:03] amp Toxiform (Janna): zzz
[13:05] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): lol
[13:06] [All] ButTrauma (Renekton): no hawkshot?
[13:10] [All] Royale Phyros (Ashe): i need dmg :(
[13:32] Royale Phyros (Ashe): welp I'm sure this game's over
[13:35] Royale Phyros (Ashe): sunfires all around
[14:57] amp Toxiform (Janna): should just wait at blue
[14:59] amp Toxiform (Janna): with sunfires
[15:00] amp Toxiform (Janna): and jump them

Full Sunfire Cape teams, they would find, were ineffective against good Syndra players. But many laughs were had and the collective viewers of NeoTokyo's stream and DeusRex's stream approved of the laid back game.

"Invite me for another, dude," he told DeusRex. As they waited for the matchmaking system to find suitable players again, he opened up Thunderbird to check his emails, ones sent to his personal address, ones sent to the email for his gaming handle, and the school email he used to talk with old classmates who knew nothing about video games.

A typical list of emails cluttered his Unread folder: sales for computer parts, new books and eBooks added to a particular site's collection, announcements of his favorite streamers going live, and other such automated notifications.¹¹ He glanced over subject titles and senders before clicking Mark As Read.

One particular email stood out: "Confidential – Team Final Frontier Gaming" sent by a Simon Penn. Final Frontier Gaming was a website he joined some years ago and still frequented from time to time. He shared his knowledge of the game, his thoughts on the competitive scene,^A and it was where many of his viewers came from.

Confidential – Team Final Frontier Gaming
Fri, Oct 7, 2016, 14:00 (7 hours ago)
Simon Penn <penn@ffgaming.tk>
to me

NeoTokyo,

It is with great pleasure that I write this email to you. As you can no doubt tell by the subject, we are finally looking to form a team to compete in the upcoming North American Series and you are one of our priorities.

11 that he had forgotten to opt out of for the hundredth time

This is an initial proposition to ask if you are interested in playing for and representing Final Frontier Gaming. As one of our priority players I will share the list of other priority players we are looking to acquire:

Crescendo – Support – Captain
NeoTokyo – Top
DeusRex – Jungle
Marlwolf – Mid
Zodiac – Marksman

I believe I have made a pretty good job choosing roles, but I will be willing to talk to you guys about moving around if the need arises. On the occasion that Marlwolf is unwilling or unable to swap teams, we will instead opt for WildCat.

Because this is going to be a newly formed team and we will be going into this cold, we have set aside a budget to pay for a player's travel, as well as a salary for at least three months. As you know Riot guarantees a stable salary for teams that qualify into the LCS, so making it there will be tougher than simply being on FFG.

Feel free to reply with any questions you may have or talk to me on Skype (contact information available at FFG's contact page). Please respond with an official answer by the end of next week and we can discuss things in more depth.

Furthermore, please try to keep this under wraps for the time being until we can make an official announcement. Try not to show things off on stream (like the subject title for this email) and try not to talk about or hint towards this on social media. I cannot stress enough how important this is to us.

Thanks, and game on.

Sincerely,
Simon "Shellshock" Penn
Founder, Final Frontier Gaming
<http://ffgaming.tk>

"Fuckin' Tokyo! You fucker! Why didn't you accept the match?"

"Shit. Fuck! Did you...uh...d'you get an email from...Shellsh—Shelly?"

"Oh, from Penny? Yeah, I got it. Thought you already saw that shit. So that's why you didn't accept? Anyway, yeah, I'm down for that thing he said."

He scanned the email again, read it over one more time, two more times, three more times, highlighted the email address to make sure there was no sleazy kerning. He navigated to Final Frontier Gaming's contact page to see if they matched. He copied the From field and the email from the contact page, pasted both onto Notepad, and they matched. It was Shellshock.

He took off his headset, placed it on his desk. He reclined all the way back on his chair, leaned his head against his chair and let out a long sigh. His computer quietly

hummed at him, had been ever since he turned it on but only now had he noticed.¹²

Twitch chat filled with comments and faces:

GatJ8: he's gone full retard thanks obaam

Alhir: think he's ahveing an allergive reaction to rex

Oafy92: dam hes so srs right now : | : | : |

"Sorry guys, just gimmie a few minutes," he told the headset on the desk.

Reply.

How soon would the team get together? Is there a gaming house, or are we just doing this online for the time being? Would I have to bring my own machine if there's a gaming house or will computers be provided for us? Are there any existing sponsorships or partnerships between FFG and other companies? When would we first be paid? Myriad questions, myriad typos, myriad twitchy fingers.^B

He read over his questions two times, three times, four times, looking for typos, looking to see if his grammar and spelling were correct, looking to see if there was anything else he wanted to ask. He hovered over Send ten, eleven, twelve seconds.

Send.¹³

He put his headset back on and held Shift, "Alright, let's go."

"Cool." DeusRex has invited you to a game.

Rap played into his ears: . . . *none of their kids serve in the infantry, the odds are stacked against us like a casino, think about it, most of the army is black and latino, and if you can't acknowledge the reality of my words, you just another stupid motbafucka out on the curb, tryn'a escape from the ghetto with your ignorant ways, but you can't read history at an illiterate stage, and you can't raise a family on minimum wage, why the fuck you think most of us are locked in a cage.* . . .

When teammates and opponents were found they accepted the match. And the next one, and the next, and the next, and they played into the wee hours of morning. They shared links of videos they found funny, articles the other may be interested in. They played *Scrolls*, *Binding of Isaac*, *Rouge Legacy*, *Spelunky*, and *Hotline Miami* between the lengthy queues—they played anything that would keep the mind awake and the fingers active. They celebrated their victories and learned something, anything, from their defeats, and time continued forever onward, 2:13, 3:43, 4:48.

"I don't know about you, dude, but I'm tired as fuck. Thinking of calling it a night."

"It ain't even five yet. Don't be a lil' bitch."

"Fuck that, man, I've got a lot of stuff to consider in the coming week."

"Yeah, I guess. Viewers gonna be pissed at you for not doing SubWars, though."

12 These were the very fans and the very RAM and the very hard drives and the very motherboard he had saved up for and purchased and put together a few years ago. How far they've come.

13 He looked down at the slip of paper he had thrown away, picked it up and slid it into his wallet.

“Fuck ‘em. No! Just kidding, I love you guys. Like my own flesh and blood. We’ll just . . . do one tomorrow or later this week.”

“Aight, you heard him guys. So just check the Twitters and the Facebooks at some point later this week.”

“Oh I heard that yawn, don’t try to hide it. And you said it wasn’t even five.”

“Well I might as well get up early¹⁴ tomorrow, as wel—”

“Yeah okay, man, whatever. Anyway, if anyone’s tuned into my stream,¹⁵ thanks for watching. Sorry for not doing our weekly SubWars tonight but we’ll make it up to you. Maybe I’ll be on tomorrow, otherwise check later in the week for fun games and stuff. Bye,” he waved and yawned at his webcam.¹⁶

14 early meaning sometime in the afternoon

15 six thousand live viewers

16 as the wooden floor creaked outside his door

3

Beyond the Sword

[“Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”](#) Bhagavad Gita

He would open the door to find pages taped on the outside. He would snatch them off before the parent could reach.

Why are you still awake? What are you thinking?! would ask the parent.

He would unfold the pages to find bills, water \$294.11, phones \$250, electricity \$239.17.

When are you going to be a responsible paren—person and pay your own god damn bills?

When are you going to put that degree of yours to use and be a CEO somewhere?

You don't even fucking understand the world anymore, there are no fucking jobs, dad.

Stop making excuses and apply yourself already.

Stop being an irresponsible human being and asking your son to pay your bills for you, mom.

You have no idea what the real world is like, son, you're too young and inexperienced to understand. Don't argue with us, we know best.

The world's changed so fast these past ten years that you have no idea what you're even talking about.

I know enough about being a family, and I know you wouldn't embarrass us by disobeying your parents. It's your duty to help a family member. Think of your younger brother; is this the kind of role model you want to be for him?

He's your responsibility; I didn't choose to have him. How about you think about yourself and your own image and yourself as a role model: you think having parents who can't pay their own bills and would rather pay for cable and a few beers will help him in the future?

Just do what we tell you and grow up already, you're twenty-two for God's sake. It doesn't matter if the world's changed, you're obviously too lazy to get a nice job at a nice office and work with important people who actually make a difference in the world, and actually make money doing it.

Oh, they change the world alright, and they fucking make money alright, while they starve the rest of us out of it. You guys just don't fucking get it. Sooner or later it's gonna bite you in the ass, and by then it'll be too late for you guys to do anything. We don't live in a same world anymore. We've moved on and you just don't want to understand: we live in a digital age.

4

DeusRex

“And on the pedestal these words appear: ‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’ Nothing beside remains.” Percy Bysshe Shelley

A roaring crowd held up placards with insignias and messages written with markers. Well into the back of the room, hands waved ecstatically. Fists struck the air as voices chanted in unison “FFG! FFG! FFG!”

Rays of red and blue lights from above surfed around the crowd of people standing on their seats.

“FFG! FFG! FFG!”

Confetti fell from nowhere, camera crews followed reporters onto the stage and camera lights flashed from all directions.

“FFG! FFG! FFG!”

He ignored it all as he embraced the team. NeoTokyo moved closer holding his fist forward.

Bzzt, his pillow rumbled. Bzzt.

He tapped his phone and the alarm stopped. With burning eyes and mucus in his throat, he lifted himself up and strolled towards the bathroom, his hands acting as his eyes for the moment.¹ A cold breeze snuck in through the tiniest space between the walls and window.

“George?” asked a calm voice with a knock. Continuing to brush his teeth, he unlocked and opened the door.

“I’m going now to see Madelyn, are you coming?”

He spit the toothpaste out, looking at her through the mirror, “I’m gonna be goin’ later with Geoff’n Erica.”

“Okay, any idea what time?”

He pointed at his left wrist with his right hand.

“Uh,” she took out her phone, “12:50.”

He showed two fingers. Three, and seesawed his hand.

“Okay, I’ll let her know. Oh, and I left some eggs and sausages on a plate if you want any. I’m on my way now, though. Tell Geoffrey and Erica I said hi. I love you, George.”

“Love you, mom.” Breakfast had become cold, but it was still food. He ate with one hand, checked his phone with the other.

(12:52) Erica: puerta! D:

A knock. “Your mom opened the door for me,” she said as she hugging him and leaning in to kiss him on the cheek.

“Want some?” he asked holding the plate to her.

“Mmm, I think I’ll just wait to eat with Geoff,” she said inspecting the plate.

1 He saw the couch with his hands and avoided stubbing his toe.

“Were you watching us stream yesterday?”

“Mhm,” she quickly nodded twice.

“When ‘e asked about that email from Shel—well, lemme just show you.”

She read from his phone, her eyes slowly opening wide, silently she gasped.

“Ohmygosh!” she burst out with embracing arms.

“Waitwaitwait, nothin’s final yet, still not quite on a stable salary, or even in the official League. But I may have to disappear for a bit to dedicate my time to practice with the team and make sure we’re actually a quality team. I’m not even sure if I’ll be staying in New York for this since Shelly mentioned travel will be paid. I’m assuming there’s a gaming house. I also have to let Madelyn know, she’d’ve been the first person I told, but I’d really rather tell her in person.”

“So let’s go tell her!”

“Gotta call Tokyo, though, see if he’s up,”

The line rang three, four, five times. No answer.

“Let’s head over ta his place if he’s not picking up. Keep calling him while I get ready.”

As they left the apartment she hit the call button again.² She kept her phone to her ear as they walked down eight, nine, ten street tiles.³

“Oh. Tokyo, *ilevántate!* We’re coming over. . . No seas *bebé*, it’s like one o’clock. Get up. . . Geoff says hi.”

“I bet he did.”

They walked down the street, fingers locked together, discussing their week, this person and that video, this game and that episode. The streets were empty and quiet compared to the crowds and honking of the day prior.

At the curb of a major intersection a group of people sat on chairs, with a mountain of books piled on a table.⁴ Above them, on streetlights and tree branches, hung pairs of boots and sneakers that had always been there.

Nearby posters read “Prepare To Meet Thy God! Amos 4:12.” A man with a megaphone shouted such and such things about a “Jesu’ Crito” and a “Dios” and a “Rey.” There would be no point in asking her to translate.⁵

Atop a distant building a large billboard read “3 Million!” They walked past abandoned stores and derelict plots of land that had become a home for stray cats and plastic boxes and wooden boxes and smashed CRT monitors and bulky VCRs. This land

2 for the fifth or somethingth time.

3 street tiles that had black blotches of various pasted onto them, tiles that had come in contact with all sorts of bodily fluids, tiles that were aged and cracked

4 all titled *Santa Biblia*

5 Opposite the zealots, leaning against a store, a group of men discussed things loudly. One of them burst out “Half these niggas don’t even know what they fighting for!” as he tossed the previous day’s paper on the ground.

would not sell, it was far too filthy to clean and turn into profit. Other areas were boarded off with plywood to keep the junk and the strays and the destitute out.⁶

There were more window shoppers tapping at their pockets than there were actual shoppers within the doors.

They continued past broken, littered, and tarnished homes with letters sprayed on them.⁷ Cars outside the occupied homes were cars with numbers scribbled on them, cars recently cleaned and washed.

She called again, no answer. They sat on the steps outside, laughing, joking, talking. "Last I checked, ten minutes wasn't twenty, Geoff."

"Fuck you," their fists met.

The girl hugged him and they quickly kissed each other on the right cheek.

"Aight, so where we goin'?"

"Don't care, man, up to you."

"I know, let's just get whatever at the deli."

"Aight."

"So, dude, we gotta play our asses off if we want FFG in the series. Oh, does Erica know?"

"Yap, he showed me the email."

"I think we can duo 'n' play some serious games for a while to see what we can do best before getting together with the rest of the team."

"Puedo ser coach y give you guys pointers cuando hagan tonterías."

"Might be worth a shot. Have you spoken with anyone else from the team since you got the email, George?"

"Nah, but I think I saw Zodiac on while we were in-game. He din't message me or anything. Maybe he was AFK or didn't wanna say anythin' in case it showed up on stream."

"Maybe we should talk with them, like set up a Skype call and set up some practice games. You already have everyone added, right?"

"Yeah, I'm sure we've both played enough games with and against 'em to be on each other's friends list. Ya thinkin' this'll be the actual team, or you think someone'll decline?"

"Uh...I don't know. To be honest, though, I'm not too sure what to think of Crescendo. No one's seen him competing at any competitive LANs and all we know is he's good at winning games with solo queue teams if they listen to his calls. I don't think that'll translate well into competitive play against practiced and coordinated teams with months or years of experience and structure."

"I can kinda see that making an impact in competitive play. What d'you know about Zodiac or WildCat?"

6 Small business from the area advertised their services on the plywood: cheap divorce lawyers, bed bug removal, and cheap moving.

7 He could decipher one to read "Jesus loves you"

“Zodiac? Uh, well I know he played with a makeshift team at an MLG a while ago. He was playing with some other players we see in queue from time to time like Daze and... Shuriken, before she was picked up by Royale. And well, you know WildCat: king of solo queue with his god damn three accounts in Challenger. Kid’s insanely good. If he were to join the team, I’d be extremely surprised since I’d imagine existing teams would be fighting with every penny just to have him on their starting lineup. Anyway, then there’s this other dude who goes by the name DeusRex. He’s so shit, I don’t even think he belongs in Diamond, he’s like some high Gold, low Plat, if you ask me.”

“I’ve heard this NeoTokyo guy is pretty bad, too. That nigga ain’t anythin’ special... at all.”

They ordered their sandwiches and ate up further discussing whatever crossed their minds, with their newfound opportunity the focal point of conversations.

“Holy shit, though, can’t believe we actually made it to the top. And now this.”

“Ha, and to think you fuckin’ hated the game when I introduced you to it.”

“Well yeah, but it was like a completely different game back then. New patches and content and shit resulted in a game that plays way differently and has some more competitive depth to it.”

“It’s a’most like you owe me for showin’ you the game, now,”

“Mmm, well. Oh, I got it, I found FFG first, so Shellshock knows about you through me. I think we’re even.”

“By the way, d’you know what happened to... damn, what was her name?... that first grade teacher we had...”

“Oh yeah, hah! Fuckin’... god damn, what *was* her name. Why in the fuck can’t I remember?”

“You got us caught playin’ Pokemon and she took our Gameboys.”

“Dude, I had like no health on Croconaw, he was my last Pokemon and I somehow beat Whitney. And then she wouldn’t give me the badge. I’m pretty sure you would’ve reacted the same way.”

“You remember what she said after?” he asked withholding a snicker.

“Oh yeah. I fuckin’ remember. That sonovabitch had the god damn audacity to lecture us, the entire class, that video games were a waste of time and would get us nowhere. ‘One day you’ll be working in an office’ she said, ‘and you’ll have to fill out paperwork all day and you’ll have no time for toys and computers and your Pókemans and your playboys. One day you’ll thank me.’”

“*Ella* no dijo playboys. She didn’t, did she, George?”

“She actu’lly did.”

“*Ab*, so you remember she said that because a few years later you two found out what playboys *really* were, verdad?... *Hombres*.”

“Well, first of all, we remember her exact words because we then set out to prove ‘er wrong. . .so mission accomplished on that front. Second, you may not have heard of it, Erica, but we have this thing called *el internet*, now. Don’t need no magazines.”

“Oh god, why did I even say anything.”

“Yo, George, you still have the Playboy Advance SP search in your history?”

“Nah, I’m not that advanced yet, I can’t Google that until I find some good search results for Playboy Color.”

“Okay, voy a escuchar my music y ustedes pueden seguir caminando down the street talking about your playboys so everyone *else* can hear.”

“But dude, you haven’t heard about the magic of the PlayCube, yet.”

—

“Y ella? Mirala, que guapa. Y blancita como tu.”

“No, dude. Would *you* react positively if some random guy walked up to you randomly on the street or bus and complimented you or asked you out? Don’t fucking lie, you’d think he was a creep, wouldn’t you?”

“Pues, depende how he looks.”

“Something tells me you’re just saying that because you can’t bring yourself to admit it’s weird. Besides, you pretty much just said it’s all about looks. If you’ll talk to him because he looks cute or whatever, doesn’t that just mean the only reason he’s talking to you is because he thinks you’re cute or hot or whatever?”

“Mira, solo estas overcomplicating something that’s easy. You’ll probably never see her again y ni te va concer if you bump into each other on the street. Just go talk to her.”

“Where do you stand on this George?”

“I think I’m stickin’ with Geoff on this one. Look at it this way, if I had just randomly asked you out an’ you din’t know me, you woulda probably looked at me all weird. Yeah like that. But since we went to school together, there’s kinda already a reason for me to talk to you, like to ask what the homework was or whatever.”

“C’mon, Erica, don’t look so sad face. . .if I go talk to her, then will you be satisfied?”

“I think you should just go find out. Doesn’t look like she’s gonna say anything for a while. While you go over there I’ll poke her cheeks until I make ‘er smile. Look, see, he’s goin’ over ta her. You should be his official wingwoman for talkin’a strangers. Look at ‘er, he hasn’t said anything and already she’s turnin’ . . .ro-ho.”

“Roja. Rosada.”

“Oh, right. Yeah, that. See look, she’s all coy now and she’s makin’ ‘er body smaller. She must feel uncomfortable as fuck right now. The hell, why’d he point at you? Well, look at that, clearly a no. Happy now?”

“Well, ahi te va, Erica.”

“Probably ni trataste.”

“Well, if that’s how you think it went down. . .Maybe we can try again later, preferably with something on the line. Like a lunch or a few dollars.”

“Okay, enough bantering, you two. Let’s get inside.”

“How about next time you just go talk to some guy and see if he doesn’t react the same way? I’m telling you, hardly anyone expects to be bothered when they’re staring at their phone or just standing around. I’ll buy you lunch if you try it.”

“Fine, proxima vez we get the chance.”

“Good afternoon. How may I help you?”

“Hi, here to see King, Madelyn.”

“...305, left as you get off the elevator.”

“Thanks. Kay, I’m goin’ up the stairs.”

“Why? Si los elevators estan right here.”

“Well, if you wanna be trapped close quarters with people here, go right ahead.”

“Let me jog up the stairs with you, Rex.”

“Wait! Por lo menos hold the door for me!”

“Aight, left off th’elevators Uh...should be...this...way?”

“What if it turns out she trolled us and the room’s actually right?”

“There! *There’s* 305!” she sighed, relieved.

“Well, ladies first,” he swayed both arms toward the door.

“Aww, aren’t you just the *most* adorable, George?”

“Maddy!” she exclaimed rushing into the room.

“After you, Geoff.”

“¿Cómo estás?” she asked as their hug ended.

“Muy bien. Thanks so much for coming, Erica. Geoff! Haven’t seen you in a while, I was glad when I heard you would be coming.”

“Yeah I finally had a weekend off from work. M’glad to see you’re doing well, dude.”

“Heyo, Sis.”

“Hey, George. Hah! What the fuck? Flowers?”

“That’s not all. Cup your hands.”

“Aww, it’s so cute. I didn’t know they made Metroid plushies.”⁸

“They don’t. I got it custom made, jus’ for you, Sis.”

“Thanks, George. He shall be named...Squishy.”⁹

“Estos asientos are *really* comfortable! It’s like they want tu cuarto to be a lounge or something.”

“So, George, mom told me you and Geoff had something big come up?”

“Hah, god damn it, ma. Yeah, let me pull up the email.”

She flicked her thumb upward on the screen and the permanent smirk on her face turned into a wide grin.

“No, nono, this is horrible. This is like the worst thing possible... I won’t be able to watch your games from here. I highly doubt anyone could hook up a computer to the big monitor so I can see you in your glorious moments.”

8 as she inspected the parasite with delicate hands

9 as she instantly hugged it close to her face.

“Fuckin’ Madelyn! Such a troll. You learnin’ from Geoff?”¹⁰

“Haha! Relax, I saw an opportunity so I took it. I can’t believe you’re both going to be fighting for a spot in the LCS. I feel like I should ask you both for autographs and strictly start referring to you as NeoTokyo and DeusRex.”

“¿Sabes *qué*, Maddy? I think I should get autographs now too...while they’re rare. Then tal vez I can make some good dough online when the time is right.”

“Sign me up for that, Erica. Once you’re in the LCS you should fly us over to Riot to see you guys play in person.”

“Soon’s you get better. How long the doctors thinkin’ you’ll have to stay for chemo?”

“Well, they’re not exactly *saying* so I think they can’t even determine how long I’ll have to be here. They’re just trying to be cautious is all.”

“Then iremos when they play in Worlds.”

“How about we just worry about you gettin’ healthy for the time being?”

“That’s sweet of you, George, but I’m sure I’ll be fine. Right now you’ve a chance to do something good, something you enjoy doing...and you’ll have Geoff with you the whole way. Stop worrying about your little sis for a bit and focus on doing the best you can. Please? For me? Could you forget about my problems? Let me work on getting better, and I’ll let you focus on playing your best. Sound like a plan?”

“...well a’right, if you’re givin’ me permission to clear my mind, I’ll do just that. And this nigga right here, he’s gonna keep me distracted so I won’t go on tilt.”

“I’ll do my best. I’m probably better at that than I am on Rainbow Roa—god damn red shell!”

His phone rumbled. “Gimmie a minute, I’ll be right back.”

¹⁰ NeoTokyo’s phone played an alert tune^C

5 Machina

“The real problem is not whether machines think, but whether men do.” B.F Skinner

He would walk down long hallways, past other patients who were admitted for numerous reasons. Men and women in their dress shirts, in their white coats, with clipboards and folders in their hands took intentional strides at New York pace. They would look down at their phones, picking, and tapping, and sliding, and typing every second of every minute of every hour of every day.

Of course all financial and monetary regulations for health would have to pass through national politics. Yet those writing and passing legislation were chess players who had no clue their pawns were starving, no clue their knights had no horses, no clue his rooks were asleep on the job, and believed everyone lived happily ever after in their white palace like the king and queen. Of course they would think themselves king, the best piece—what experienced person wouldn't?

He would take the stairs up or down a few levels. He would enter a restroom, he would check under the stalls to see if he was alone. He would wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, until all was clear.

He would turn on the hand dryers, turn on a faucet and ask himself why.

Why.

Why? as warmth trickled down his face.

Why was she so strong?

Why could she handle it all? as he slammed his hands on the counter.

Why could she ignore it more than he could?

Why could she never break from her smile?

Why could she never admit to her pain? as his vision blurred.

Why would she not tell him how he could help?

Why is she okay with the way things are?

Why could she endure? as tears stacked on his nose.

Why could he not see the world through her eyes?

Why could she not see the world through his?

Why was she so much stronger than he was? as he punched an indentation into the tiled wall the shape of an upward-pointing arrow.

He would return to the room checking his phone, joining in on the conversation at hand.

You're bleeding from your left hand, she said this time.

Shit, must've been when the door closed on my hand.

And ever so slightly her smile would fade.

6 Pandango

“Words have the power to both destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world.” The Buddha

“So erythrocytes are the most abundant type of cells found in the blood. They typically last about one hundred twenty days, with most of the iron being recycled but some of it must be replaced. Normally erythrocytes are highly flexible cells that transport oxygen and carbon dioxide. Sickle cell anemia, however, causes RBCs to be” bzzt “much less flexible, and causes them to get caught. The bone marrow is res—”

Confidential – Team Final Frontier Gaming
Tue, Oct 11, 2016, 12:03 (0 minutes ago)
Simon Penn <penn@ffgaming.tk>
to me

Pandango,

Final Frontier Gaming is inviting you to be a member of our team to compete in the upcoming *League of Legends* North American series. We cannot give you the list of other people we have invited, but as of yet, two players have accepted our invitation. We are in need of a mid laner for the team, but of course roles can be swapped around if the need arises.

We have set aside a budget to pay for a player’s travel, as well as a salary for at least three months. As you know Riot guarantees a stable salary for teams that qualify into the LCS, so making it there will be tougher than simply being on FFG.

Feel free to reply with any questions you may have or talk to me on Skype (contact information available at FFG’s contact page). Please respond with an official answer by this Friday and we can discuss things in more depth.

Please try to keep this under wraps for the time being until we can make an official announcement. Try not to show things off on stream and try not to talk about or hint towards this on social media. I cannot stress enough how important this is to us.

Thanks, and game on.

Sincerely,
Simon “Shellshock” Penn
Founder, Final Frontier Gaming
<http://ffgaming.tk>

“Jorge!”

“... what?”

“What is it in the blood that allows it to transport oxygen?”

“Oh. Hemoglobin.”

“Yes. Hemoglobin is responsible for carrying—”

A once in a lifetime opportunity, a rare one, in the palm of my hands and I can respond in just a few seconds, and my future could change forever. In the palm of my hands.

Who could the other players be? Two of them accepted already, possibly new people, unlikely that already salaried and sponsored players would take a risk with a newly formed team. Maybe someone wasn't able to keep their mouth closed and some information was leaked...the internet detectives would know something by now if that were the case.

“Alright, so then I'll see you guys Friday. Email me if you have any questions.”

God damn. Still one more class before calling it a day, but only three days to decide. Fuck it, I'll just have to get home 'sfast as possible and see if there's any news. Who could be the other two players who haven't decided yet? Maybe they're already in an LCS team and are negotiating for better deals?

Fuck, am I even good enough to compete at top tier? Can I play at the same level as the greatest of North American mid laners? Dasher? MissInk? Zoroichi? Who'm I missing? Phynos. Marwolf. Do I have what it takes, or have I just gotten lucky up until now? That can't possibly be. I must be doing something right. Anything. I couldn't have gotten this far without having mitigated the mistakes I make while playing. Of course I can hang in top tier. If this works out, it'll be my job to mitigate mistakes. That I can do.

Who'll be on the team, though? Are they assholes who rage in solo queue? What if *they* just got lucky? That couldn't possibly be the case, could it? If I got this far by doing at least one thing right, they surely must have as well. And they can be anyone I play with on a daily basis.

What'll mom and dad think when I tell them about this? They'll probably want to see numbers or automatically think I'm getting scammed. Why are there still no eSports leagues in universities? I thought this was the place where we pioneer into the future, not stick to the same methods for decades. This'd all be far easier to explain and actualize if it weren't just a huge gambit raising red flags for everyone. Fuck.

Fuck!

Bzzt.

(12:22) Michelle: Yo where are you?

Shit...forgot again.

Call sender.

“Hey, Jorge, where are you?”

“Hey, Michelle, something came up during class. I'm going to have to skip next class and shit. Something important came up.”

“...Jorge, something always comes up with you. At this point I don't even know if I want to keep trying with you.”

“First of all, let me just say sorry. I know I haven’t kept my word these past two or so weeks, but I’ve been finding it difficult to adjust to university. For this thing that’s come up, I only have a few days to do some research on it, and maybe something big will come out of it. So if you’re willing to put off one more day of my stupidity, I’ll be all yours from here on.”

“You know what? To be perfectly honest, I want to accept that offer. But I don’t know if you’re just going to keep doing the same thing day after day, week after week. Maybe I just need to set my expectations low and this relationship can work, but I really, really don’t think that’s what I want to do. Can you at least tell me what it is that’s so important that we can’t go to lunch as scheduled? You don’t sound as ecstatic and kawaii as always. How serious is this?”

“...there’s...there’s this thing called eSports. It’s...more or less it’s competitive gaming, as...as a spectator sport. I was just invited to a team, and I have to let them know by Friday if I want in. I don’t know if it’s a reputable organization, though, so that’s what I’m going to go find out for like the next two or three days. If you want to know why I’m going so far as to skip class and our planned lunch, I can show you a few videos and articles about what this is and why it’s so important to me.”

“So you’re saying that some game is just going to—”

“It’s, it’s not *just* a game.”

“Fine, okay. But you’re saying this competitive gaming thing is more important than even going to your next class?”

“If you let me show you the videos of past events and tournaments I think you’d quickly see why I’m taking this so seriously.”

“...I’ll just...I’ll talk to you later, then, if you’re going to be busy doing stuff. I don’t know how long I’ll be willing to remain calm about this whole thing, though, so you’re off the hook...for now.”

“Alright, cool. I’ll call you later tonight if I get the chance. And I’ll let you know what happens with all this.”

“...yeah.”

She’s fucking pissed at me. Damn it, Shellshock. Agh! The only thing that could make this day any worse is a Teemo shroom.

I know what my parents are going to say, already. Why am I even bothering trying to convince them? If I go for this, would they kick me out of the house? What would I have to do to make this shit work? How would I get them on board without severing ties?

...So if you're lonely, You know I'm here waiting for you, I'm just a crosshair; I'm just a shot away from you, And if you leave here, You leave me broken, shattered, a lie, I'm just a crosshair; I'm just a shot, then we can die...

Music bled into his mind while he worked his way off campus. Students rushed in every direction, some running,¹ some at the pace of snails,² others standing in groups talking and laughing and overall enjoying the best years of their lives.

Upon the grassy knolls stood the eldest trees on campus, towering above even some buildings. From time to time landscaping crews worked on the vantage point: they would pull the weeds and cut the thin, young vines eager to grow. They left the ancient, clunky roots growing out of the soil to absorb all the nutrients and all the sunlight, to provide further nourishment and wealth and health, and to preserve the prestige of the old guard.

He exited from the black gates of campus and walked to the bus stop. Vehicles flooded the streets, vehicles driven by people who had gone through the same educational system he was in,³ and they were people who would perpetually fill roles because it was what tradition had dictated. They had all been processed and developed and trained by the scholastic assembly line to complete tasks to certain expectations and then move on to the next task and the next and the next. They had all been rewarded with letters and numbers⁴ that would be forever attached to their résumés alongside their other lists of accomplishments, one after the other after the other, with no time to think any further and with no time to reflect or criticize—there, another task, do that! it must be done! it is as those before me have done! no time to improve on it! it must be done now! immediately! why isn't it done yet, do you not want more letters and numbers to add to your résumés?

And do not burden yourself with the worry of educational costs. If you follow in our footsteps we will ensure we set you up with internships⁵ and eventually you will begin to make profits, just like us. In the meantime, look at this grand oasis we have built to train your mind. The fauna and shrubbery are sure to keep your mind at peace, and look at all of these events we have for students, just like you—no, *especially* for you. I do not speak as a businessman—I speak as a friend, and an educator. Look at all of these people, they are just like you. Think of this, think of now; do not worry about the world outside the school or where we find the money for this. When the time is right you will earn a dollar, one by one. We are resolute in our structure, it has worked for us for centuries and there is no need to change it now. We have all of this down to a science—this is the safest way to make it through life. Listen to the politicians, they have it all figured out: the only way you could possibly fail is if you are too lazy to work. They, too, have gone through this system, and so it is to be trusted. You are in

1 probably to meet up with some friends for lunch, or for a class

2 who were probably done with classes for the rest of the day

3 the people who had followed in the footsteps of others

4 and the higher the number or the close to the beginning of the alphabet the letter was, the more you ought to be proud and happy for

5 that pay in exposure and require you to be available all the time, always have your phone charged and on when in an internship

the right hands, always—just do as we say. Do not take unnecessary risks, do not step where there are no more footsteps to follow, only those with years of experience can do that. Stay where there is sure footing, there is no need for you to attempt to carve your own footprints into the cement with a plastic knife. If you fail, you will be laughed at, no one can handle being laughed at, especially not a young person like yourself who has not experienced the troubles and difficulties of life. Always consider what others think of you, for they keep you grounded in reality. We urge you to stay where it is safe, we will provide you with a future.

—

- [37:52] Pompow (Nasus) has targeted ARC Marlowolf – (Lux)
 [38:13] Bls SaintSpark has slain ARC MechaHive for a double kill!
 [38:16] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): :(
 [38:25] Pandango has slain Tahr for a double kill!
 [38:13] Pandango has ended Tahr's killing spree! (Bounty: 500G)
 [38:25] Pandango has slain JessThePinkMan for a triple kill!
 [38:25] Pandango is unstoppable!
 [38:25] Your team has scored an ace!
 [38:29] [All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu): real
 [38:29] [All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu): dat flash q
 [38:34] [All] Pandango (Karthus): lol
 [38:35] [All] Pandango (Karthus): wat r u talking about?
 [38:36] [All] Pandango (Karthus): i didnt' flash
 [38:37] [All] ARC Marlowolf (Lux): long range skittles doe
 [38:46] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): damn panda ur pr
 [38:47] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): pretty good at lying
 [38:50] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): I know the perfect job for oyu
 [38:53] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): the governemtn
 [38:54] [All] Pompow (Nasus): xD
 [38:56] [All] ARC Marlowolf (Lux): he's just kidding
 [38:57] [All] ARC Marlowolf (Lux): there are no jobs
 [38:57] [All] Crescendo (Sona): :p
 [38:59] [All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu): rofl
 [38:59] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): 4659 bar
 [38:59] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu) has slain Baron Nashor!
 [39:03] [All] Pandango (Karthus): lol wtf
 [39:06] Pompow (Nasus): oshit u landed the smite
 [39:10] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): lol
 [39:10] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): stfu
 [39:16] [All] Pandango (Karthus): will pentakill for monies
 [39:18] [All] Pandango (Karthus): pls
 [39:25] Crescendo (Sona) has targeted the Inner Turret

- [39:26] Pompow (Nasus) is on the way
[39:26] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): too low im scared
[39:30] Crescendo (Sona): - _____ -
[39:42] Pompow (Nasus): drag soon
[39:46] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): Cresh pls b
[39:47] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): plssssssssssss
[39:50] Crescendo (Sona): Either you help me take tower.
[39:50] Crescendo (Sona): And we keep pushing.
[39:52] Crescendo (Sona): Or I go alone, die, and we lose towers.
[39:53] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu) is on the way
[39:55] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): y u always take ur team hostage? qq
[39:57] Crescendo (Sona): Because win.
[40:00] UltimateBurrto (Lucian): Saint stop crying in jungle and man up
[40:03] UltimateBurrto (Lucian): ur crying so much I can see a river
[40:05] [All] Pandango (Karthus): saint won't stop crying in your jungle
[40:07] [All] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): qq
[40:10] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): i have a hug for him
[40:12] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): come to bot inhib
[40:20] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): I said bot not top
[40:27] Crescendo (Sona): B after.
[40:37] [All] ARC Marlowf (Lux): pls responderino
[41:05] Crescendo (Sona) purchased Sight Ward!
[41:10] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu) purchased Sight Ward!
[41:23] Crescendo (Sona): TP/Karthus ult cd?
[41:30] Pompow (Nasus): 1min
[41:34] Crescendo (Sona): Pressure top while we take bot?
[41:35] Pompow (Nasus) is on the way
[41:40] UltimateBurrto (Lucian): all mia
[41:47] Crescendo (Sona): Want a ward in top jungle?
[41:50] Pompow (Nasus): i'm good
[42:18] Pandango (Karthus) signals that enemies are missing
[42:24] Crescendo (Sona): They're probably all going up towards you.
[42:26] Crescendo (Sona): We'll take bot if they do.
[42:48] Crescendo (Sona) has targeted the Inhibitor
[42:48] Crescendo (Sona) has targeted the Inhibitor
[42:49] Crescendo (Sona) has targeted the Inhibitor
[42:57] Pompow (Nasus): lol they sent 3
[43:10] Pompow (Nasus): have FH
[43:11] Pompow (Nasus): tanky as fuck
[43:15] Pompow (Nasus): they gonna iwsh they hadn't let the dogs our
[45:53] Crescendo (Sona) signals to be careful

- [45:59] **Bls SaintSpark (Amumu)**: bar 1 min
- [46:03] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: why you guys no come to me?
- [46:07] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: I just want to give you cupcakes
- [46:14] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: also
- [46:14] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: saint
- [46:14] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: cresencdo
- [46:16] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: y u block minimap? > :C
- [46:21] **[All] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu)**: real
- [46:26] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: everyone else
- [46:28] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: y u no stream?
- [46:32] **[All] Pandango (Karthus)**: lol
- [46:34] **[All] Pandango (Karthus)**: I want you to tryhard, son
- [46:35] **Pompow (Nasus)**: 51:40 lux falsh
- [46:36] **[All] Pandango (Karthus)**: don't be so
- [46:40] **[All] Pandango (Karthus)**: ENTITLED
- [46:43] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: D:
- [46:43] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: k
- [46:44] **Crescendo (Sona)** is on the way
- [46:45] **Bls SaintSpark (Amumu)** is asking for assistance
- [46:46] **Pandango (Karthus)** is on the way
- [46:46] **Pandango (Karthus)** is on the way
- [46:55] **Crescendo (Sona)** signals to be careful
- [46:56] **UltimateBurrito (Lucian)** signals that enemies are missing
- [46:57] **Crescendo (Sona)** signals to be careful
- [46:59] **Pandango (Karthus)**: we baiting or gettign?
- [47:00] **Pompow (Nasus)**: get
- [47:03] **Crescendo (Sona)** has targeted **ARC MechaHive – (Volibear)**
- [47:03] **Crescendo (Sona)** has targeted **Tahr – (Aatrox)**
- [47:07] **UltimateBurrito (Lucian)** is asking for assistance
- [47:13] **ARC Marlowolf** has ended **Pandango's** killing spree! (Bounty: 437G)
- [47:15] **UltimateBurrito (Lucian)** has slain **Baron Nashor!**
- [47:15] **[All] Pompow (Nasus)**: these junglers doe
- [47:16] **[All] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu)**: lol
- [47:16] **[All] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu)**: saint is that you?
- [47:16] **[All] xNietzsche (Jinx)**: woooloolool
- [47:16] **[All] Pandango (Karthus)**: pc
- [47:16] **Crescendo (Sona)** has targeted **ARC Marlowolf – (Lux)**
- [47:17] **UltimateBurrito (Lucian)** has targeted **xNietzsche – (Jinx)**
- [47:17] **[All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu)**: fkn sky lazrz
- [47:18] **Pandango** has slain **Tahr** for a double kill!
- [47:18] **[All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear)**: h4h4h4h4h oyur so funny

[47:18] Pandango has slain xNietzsche for a penta kill!
 [47:19] Your team has scored an ace!
 [47:20] UltimateBurrto (Lucian): lol gj
 [47:20] Crescendo (Sona) is on the way
 [47:20] Crescendo (Sona) is asking for assistance
 [47:24] [All] ARC MechaHive (Volibear): ggs
 [47:24] Enemy team agreed to surrender with 4 votes for and 0 against!
 [47:24] [All] ARC Marlowf (Lux): ggwp
 [47:25] [All] UltimateBurrto (Lucian): gg
 [47:25] Crescendo has started a surrender vote. Type /surrender or /nosurrender
 [47:25] [All] Crescendo (Sona): GG ^ u ^
 [47:26] [All] Pandango (Karthus): good agme duderinos :D
 [47:26] [All] JessThePinkMan (Lulu): geeg
 [47:27] Enemy team agreed to surrender with 5 votes for and 0 against!
 [47:28] [All] Bls SaintSpark (Amumu): gg wp
 Victory!

Alright, back to work. Let's see... Simon "Shellshock" Penn, played *Counter-Strike* for Collateral Gaming, from 2004 to 2007—aged seventeen to twenty at the time. That'd make him...two thousand *seven*, plus *nine* to sixteen, twenty-nine. After playing he coached for two years, then managed for another two. Damn. This guy knows what's up.

Founded Final Frontier Gaming after leaving Collateral on good terms. Hmm. FFG...guides, forums, contests, online tournaments. NeoTokyo: most popular streamer, he plays every role pretty well whenever we're in the same game. Currently offline. Hmm.

NeoTokyo...has been duoing with DeusRex for the last...every game. Tokyo: Shen, Renekton, Vlad, Shen, Aatrox, Yorick, Rumble, Rumble, Garen, Tee—Teemo. Such Teemo. My top laner—hello, Kyoto.

Rex: Bli—is that a...jungle Blitz? Elise, Zac, Hecarim, Alistar, Elise, Lee Sin, J4, Eve, Eve. My jungler—hello, Deus Ex Machina.

"Jorge, when did you get home?"

"Oh hey, ma. I got back about an hour ago. I came home early since I have to do some research on something important."

"You already have a big paper due?"

"It's not for school. Is...uh...is dad home?"

"He'll be around in a minute—he stepped out to pick up some things at the store."

"Well, since you're here I might as well explain it to you. There's this thing called eSports, it's people playing video games professionally, for money, for glory...fame, too, I guess. It's like sports, but for video games. Let me show you a video—so this was earlier this month, World Championship where only the two best teams from the world played. Neither was an American team partly because...well most Americans

don't know what eSports is or how big it is, so there are very few ways for people to get anywhere near the top and onto a world stage.”

“Wait, is that a stadium?”

“Yeah. Tens of thousands of people in attendance. With millions more watching online.”

“Why online? Can't they put this on TV?”

“Well, it's been tried about a decade ago, but honestly there are a lot of conflicts, and established organizations that already distributed competitive gaming content just did it so much better. TV tried to make it too much like traditional sports, but gaming can't be exhibited the same way. There are some fundamentally different philosophies between the restrictions and time slots of television and the freedom and flexibility of online streaming.”

“Are you trying to say you want to do something like this?”

“Sort of. Earlier today I got an email, and the founder of a gaming organization invited me to be a player. I may have to move, I'm not sure where yet but I'm guessing LA, New York, Chicago, Seattle, maybe.”

“Wait, are you serious about all of this?”

“Yeah, look, I can show you the email. I've been looking up information on the sender, and it's definitely the founder. He has a long history in competitive gaming, so he knows how business works.”

“Wow, well this is great! Will all of this happen after you graduate?”

“...that's the thing, ma. I've only got one chance. One opportunity, and that's right now.”

“Are you saying you're going to have to drop out of school?”

“That's one way of doing it. But I'm thinking I can submit a request for a temporary leave. The email says I'll be paid for three months, so until the end of January. If nothing happens, I'll just continue next semester.”

“This is definitely something we have to talk about with your father.”

“Yeah, I know.”

—

“No, absolutely not, this is silly.”

“Dad, I've only got this one chance. Even at nineteen I might be too old. I'm already late. If I were seventeen or eighteen I'd definitely have the natural reaction speed to play my best.”

“I forbid you from doing this. There are always going to be people better than you no matter what. If this is your only chance and you're already past your prime, it's definitely not going to work out.”

“You've told me countless times in the past that in life some opportunities are rare and that I should take them when I can. I can just do this for the three months and if it doesn't work out, I'll just continue with school normally and I won't pursue this anymore. Can we just do it that way?”

“Look, son, you’re not thinking straight. Listen to yourself: you want to drop school for three months to play video games. Video games aren’t going to get you anywhere in life. You’re not going to be doing anything productive, and it’ll probably lead you nowhere. This is extremely high-risk, and it’s a risk you don’t need to take. Just go through with school like everyone else. You can pursue video games when you’re done with school and you’ll have nothing but support from me.”

“C’mon, don’t you at least think you could believe in me just a little? Like, I’m sure you’ve taken risks in your life. Like all the fucking time.”

“Like all the *what* time?”

“Sorry. But I’m sure you’ve had to make hard choices in your life, decisions you probably didn’t want to make. And even then, if I fail at this, I can always just return to school easily. If I don’t try, I’ll never know. Isn’t that how you met mom? You decided to go for it. You told me yourself that even *you* weren’t sure if it would work out. You’ve always wanted me to give one hundred ten percent at everything, but now you’re preventing me from even doing one hundred. I can’t know if I’ll fail if I don’t try. What if you were born in a world where competitive video games were mainstream alongside football? You would have cheered on for your favorite team and I’d be sitting on the couch next to you cheering along. You would have raised me to practice football for an hour and then a video game for an hour. You would be urging me to take this chance—you’d probably be begging me to take it. And you’d be proud as *fuck* if you ever saw your son competing and winning at something he’s good at and something he enjoys doing. You’ve said it over and over again: you’ve followed your heart all your life and it hasn’t failed you. You’ve told me many times to follow mine, and right now, mine is here. In this, I want to be able to pioneer something for the future and actually make a difference. When you ask me what good came out of playing a lot of video games, right now the answer is, I *could* have *almost* been a professional player. I want to be able to say that all those hours led me to playing professionally, and maybe I still can. If I fail and if I make a mistake because of this, at least I’ll know. And there’s nothing worse than not knowing. This is *my* wager to lose, and yours to *win*. If I make a mistake, I will own up to it. I promise.”

“How about you give me a few minutes to think this over again? We’ll talk at dinner, son.”

“Alright.”

“I think you made very good points, Jorge. I’ll talk to him some more.”

“Thanks, ma.”

What if he says no? He seemed pretty adamant in sticking to his no. If he says no . . . then fuck it. It’s not his decision to make. He can’t live my life for me. This is my life. *I* get to choose. Wolves don’t lose sleep over the opinion of sheep.

Bzzt.

(16:45) Michelle: You know what, I think I need some time to rethink this. Let’s go our separate ways a bit. I’ll let you know how I feel in a week.

This isn't his risk to take—this isn't his education and his future and his life on the line. They're *mine*! Even if he'll hate me for it, I'll do it.

Better start studying.

YouTube.

LoL.coL vs Max 2016 NA LCS Summer Week 2 Day 2.

03:10

“—ecause this was a standard start with no aggressive wards placed, it was an optimal decision for Maxim to send two top rath—”

19:42

“—and at the end of the day Collateral just stood back and watched.”

“And not only did they just kind of give up Dragon to Maxim, but MissInk made a run for that top lane. So she's immediately pushing the side of the map furthest from Dragon to punish them. It was a five v five that Maxim were daring Collateral to take, and since Collateral is a really smart team, even though Collateral could have contested Dragon and won that fight, it was a risk, and they *weren't* willing to take it.”

“It does show a clear focus. They're more interested in towers than anything else right now. MissInk is taking a lot of tower hits, but she's facetanking it just to get her team their fifth tower of the game.”

“And with five turrets to zero in favor of Collateral, that is *exactly* where all the gold difference comes from right now. The CS numbers are starting to normalize across the board, but Collateral is still six *thousand* gold ahead and it's stayed at that value for a pretty long time.”

“Sorcerer's Shoes have been picked up by Zoroichi, he's really going to want that additional mobility now that the laning phase is over” bzzt “and do a bit more damage as he roams around the map and participates in teamfigh—”

(16:47) Mammy: Don't let him know i told you but he cried tears of joy. You're in the green. Your father is proud to have a passionate man like yourself for a son. Let us know how we can support you in all of this. :)

God *fucking* yes!

7

A Future

“The wisest men follow their own direction.” Euripides

Reply.

I'll do it. My Skype info uses this same email. Let me know what I need to know.

Thanks,

Pandango

Send.

Log off.

Login.

Compose.

Requesting Temporary Leave from University,

Hello Dr. Norma,

Something has come up recently and I am wondering how I would go about requesting a temporary leave from my studies. I will only be—

Hello Dr. Norma,

I have been offered an interesting opportunity for employment, and I will have to take time off from school. I will be unable to continue my studies for the remainder of this semester. My temporary leave may take anywhere from three months to a year. I would greatly appreciate it if you would guide me through the steps I must take for a temporary absence.

Thanks,

Jorge Reyes

Send.

NeoFrollkyo would like to add you to his contacts.

GeorgeDeusKing would like to add you to his contacts.

Accept.

Accept.

GeorgeDeusKing has invited you to join his group.

Accept.

GeorgeDeusKing	Yo. You know why we added you?	17:04
NeoFrollkyo	PANDA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	17:04
PANDAKAWAII	:DDDDDDDDDDDDDDDD	17:04
NeoFrollkyo	:D	17:04
	So we're planning on doing	17:04
	A team meeting sort of thing	17:04
	Over a Skype call	17:04
	Tomorrow or Thursday if you have time	17:05
PANDAKAWAII	Awesome. Let's do this shit.	17:05

8

WildCat

“Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both.”
Benjamin Franklin

(20:34) DeusRex: yo you streaming?

(20:40) DeusRex: :/

DeusRex: y u gotta be afk on me tho?

(20:45) DeusRex: rea!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(20:48) Cat the Turtle: yo

Cat the Turtle: Getting into Q tell me what's up

(20:50) Cat the Turtle: lol y u gotta be afk on me doe? Rea!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Cat the Turtle: so troll

Match Found!

coL Typhergus: top pls :D

coL Ikarus: jangle

coL Ikarus: trade me j4 wildcat?

Cat the Turtle: Sure get me vayne

DoobyScoo: drex can I mid pls

DoobyScoo: I'll carry you :D

DoobyScoo: pls

DoobyScoo: :c

Thresh amp Militia	Fiora Afterglow	Frosted Ezreal amp Aeaza	Sakura Karma Zoroichi	AstroNautilus BushidoBlazeIt
Vayne	Glacial Malphite	Jarvan IV	Santa Gragas	Iron Solari Leona
Cat the Turtle	coL Typhergus	coL Ikarus	Bls Drex	DoobyScoo

[00:00] DeusRex: should have dodged :p

[00:00] DeusRex: ehh

[00:00] DeusRex: let me know when you're done with that game

[00:00] DeusRex: and don't start another

[00:00] DeusRex: don't even queue

[00:02] Bls Drex (Gragas) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:03] coL Typhergus (Malphite) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:03] DoobyScoo (Leona) purchased Sweeping Lens (Trinket)!

[00:04] DoobyScoo (Leona) purchased Relic Shield!

[00:06] [To] DeusRex: oooh why?

[00:08] Cat the Turtle (Vayne) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:10] DeusRex: gotta show you something

[00:25] [To] DeusRex: no **** pics pls

[00:30] DeusRex: lol
 [00:35] [coL Ikarus \(Jarvan IV\)](#) purchased [Sweeping Lens \(Trinket\)](#)!
 [00:36] [coL Ikarus \(Jarvan IV\)](#) is on the way
 [00:37] [coL Ikarus \(Jarvan IV\)](#) is asking for assistance
 [00:37] [DoobyScoo \(Leona\)](#) is on the way
 [00:57] DeusRex: NSA's coming out with new program
 [01:10] DeusRex: I found this thing
 [01:11] DeusRex: helps protect your data and privacy
 [01:13] [coL Ikarus \(Jarvan IV\)](#): 6 12 tr
 [01:14] DeusRex: its called freedom from government
 [01:15] DeusRex: or ffg for short
 [01:46] [To] DeusRex: o lol
 [01:50] DeusRex: send me your skype info when you're done
 [01:53] [To] DeusRex: K
 [02:12] [Cat the Turtle \(Vayne\)](#): yo leona
 [02:14] [Cat the Turtle \(Vayne\)](#): let's just go full ham lvl 3 and up
 [02:15] [DoobyScoo \(Leona\)](#): sure
 [02:28] [Cat the Turtle \(Vayne\)](#): carry the **** out of this lane

GeorgeDeusKing	move window to your other monitor	21:36
Jason the WildCat	I only have one monitor D:	21:36
GeorgeDeusKing	--	21:36
Jason the WildCat	um	21:36
	how long you thinking this is going to take?	21:36
GeorgeDeusKing	not sure tbh	21:37

“Um...kay, so guys I'm gonna stop streaming for a bit. Give me like ten or so minutes. Maybe more. Or...you know what, I'll start streaming again in an hour. Thanks for watching so far. Sorry for the sudden change, but I'll be back. I promise. BRB.” Stream Offline.

GeorgeDeusKing calling.

“—nyway, we just didn't mesh at all. She was like, super serious all the time and I was just dickin' around playing video games not even giving a damn about my classes.”

“I think I'm on the same boat right now, honestly. I mean, I've fucked up a bunch before I got Shellshock's email, and then skipping out on lunch was like the last straw for her.”

“A'right, a'right, we got WildCat. Let's get super serious now. As far as we're concerned, this is the full team. Panda, Tokyo and I have already accepted Shellshock's invitation. That means you two seem to be the only missin' pieces.”

“Ehh. Hey, so if this is the team, I just want to get something out of the way. From what I know about how you guys play in solo queue, Tokyo and Rex seem to already have good chemistry. Pandango, you really, really know how to manipulate and control

the flow of your opponents. Crescendo, if you're going to be our Support, I'm totally gonna respond to Shellshock as soon as we're done with this meeting. We always win lane that it's not even funny."

SW Crescendo It's like we can read each other's minds. :o 21:41

"No mic?"

SW Crescendo Yeah, something like that. 21:41

"Tokyo and I've been duo queuin' a lot recently and we're startin'a see some pretty serious changes in our playstyle. Maybe if you two put in some serious practice time together maybe you'll start seeing similar results?"

"Yo, Rex."

PANDAKAWAII <http://i.imgur.com/27vVYKU.png> 21:42

"It's not impossible. Dude, we can be like the best bot lane in North America, hands down. I'm calling it."

GeorgeDeusKing Lol racist ass nigga 21:42

PANDAKAWAII lol 21:42

<3 21:42

SW Crescendo Well, I mean, we haven't really run into any professional duo bot lane. But it could be worth a shot to try something out. I'm not sure about being captain, though. I haven't ever really played in any REAL competitive environment. 21:43

GeorgeDeusKing <http://i.imgur.com/iSlbgqv.jpg> 21:43

"Panda, that's for you and Tokyo. Also, there's still Thursday 'n' Friday to decide whetha or not you guys want in on the team. Shelly didn't organize this call so it's not like you *have* to say yes now."

PANDAKAWAII damn rex, so mean 21:45

y u no like faggots? :C 21:45

heartless bastard 21:45

SW Crescendo Lol, Shelly? 21:45

NeoTrollkyo Rex and I also call him Penny. He's a girl both times either way because trololo 21:46

"Rex and I have been thinking that we can also make a ranked fives team to see how we play together and to see what we can improve on. We could even do it right now if we really want to. Rex and I could probably carry us if you three weigh too much. I'm the one who'll be mainly carrying, though."

GeorgeDeusKing fagcts killed muh daddy, killed his lungs 21:46

And I have the best reason for my stance 21:46

Behold!: <http://i.imgur.com/PyogrkJ.jpg> 21:47

PANDAKAWAI	All praise the Lawd! Facts burn in hell!	21:47
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“Ehh, I promised my viewers I’d stream again in an hour. Maybe we could do that tomorrow? So long as it’s before Friday night so we can let Shelly know we’re good to go, I’m assuming, right?”

NeoFrollkyo	http://i.imgur.com/ukJqYgN.png	21:48
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“You guys don’t even know. My link is the best. We could do it tomorrow if we can agree on a time. It may also be better to use smurfs so that people won’t figure something’s up if they see us in ranked fives. You all *do* have smurf accounts, right?”

Jason the WildCat	Am I a filthy casual if I play league?	21:49
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PANDAKAWAI	>, > . . . What if I don’t have a smurf?	21:49
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SW Crescendo	I like this one :p http://i.imgur.com/FsgStnW.jpg	21:49
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NeoFrollkyo	http://i.imgur.com/tyhfre3.jpg	21:50
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GeorgeDeusKing	Trololo poor Geoff	21:51
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NeoFrollkyo	qq	21:51
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“Haha! What even are these links anymore?”

“I dunno, Pandya. I don’t know. But seriously, we doing this smurf ranked team thing? I could probably lend you one of mine, but you may not have the runes or champions you like on it.”

“Sure, I guess. What are their summoner names?”

“One is TrinityJohto and the other is RaitoYagami.”

“Oh shit, those are you? You always shit on me whatever lane we face each other in.”

“Lol, well step up your game, Pandya. We should one v one at the gaming house. Loser has to date Rex the next day. Winner dates his girlfriend.”

“In that case I’ll lose on purpose. Cuz mmm, that bod.”

“Wow. Well, I don’t mind havin’ my meals paid.”

“I never said I’d pay, though. Happy face.”

“Shit outta luck, George.”

SW Crescendo	Okay, so looks like we’re doing this smurf team, then? What time?	21:53
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“Okay. Actually, you know what? I’m down for this. I can see this going places. I’m sending in my email. Crescendo, it’s time someone takes you hostage. We’re doing this bot lane thing. It’s gonna work. Something tells me we’re going a long way with this duo lane.”

SW Crescendo	=w=’	21:55
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	I’d still have to reply to Shelly, though. So I’m not really hostage. \o/	21:55
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“Oh damn, WildCat. And I thought Supports made all the decisions bot lane. And I also thought cats were supposed to be all like...hella calm and chillax. So unkawaii. You could learn a thing or two from my panda skills.”

“I’m sending in my confirmation email, man. Whether or not we become the best bot lane is up to you now.”

Jason the WildCat >:3

21:56

“Top post on Reddit gonna be ‘Team Takes Crescendo Hostage.’ And solo queue will rejoice. But then he’s gonna be our captain anyway.”

“I’m typing it right now. Listen to my keystrokes. They seal your fate with each passing second. Oh shit, how do you spell ‘sign me up?’ It’s like...N, and then O, right?”

SW Crescendo I think it’s spelled like this: I don’t want to play for FFG.
I’m a baddie and Crescendo would carry me every game.
Shelly, pls.

21:58

“Oh, okay. I think I got all that. That last part was P-L-S, right? Oh, but no, I actually have a serious question. Does anyone know if Shellshock can actually be trusted? Like, he won’t manage us until we win a tournament and then disappear like some of those other scum managers that people seem to run into, right?”

“He can be trusted. George and I met him a few years ago at an MLG when we played at a LAN.^D He took our team back then to lunch and stuff. He has a wife and a young daughter. I’m pretty sure he won’t be disappearing without someone noticing. But he’s an overall cool guy anyway. He knows how the eSports scene works, he’s played *Counter-Strike* professionally when he was younger and then did some managing and coaching before starting FFG from the ground up. If anyone knows how to protect players and organizations from corporate exploitation and fine print contracts, it’s Shelly. Trust me on that.”

“He’s a really chill, dude, let me tell you. I think he’d fit right into this convo easily. Like, he prob’ly wouldn’t find anythin’ we say offensive.”

“Which smurf you gonna want, Panda? I’ll make the smurf team with one and use the other. Just let me know which you prefer.”

SW Crescendo What’s the team name going to be?

22:01

“Umm. I’ll see if I can get my old team name. If not, I’ll think of something. Gimmie them smurf names so I can add you to the roster.”

“You can add my TurtleSlayer one. Newly-30 smurf I’m working on.”

SW Crescendo Metronome.

22:01

“Can you get ARoD to work?”

“I think I’ll take the Light Yagami one, Tokyo-kun.”

“Not quite. No variations of it seem to be working either. Oh, wait. I got it. Looks like we’re team MRoD. ‘Murica Runs on Debt, sendin’ out them invites. And you call me, Tokyo-*sama*, Panda-sama-kun-san.”

—
“Hey, ma. So I’ve decided to go ahead with the FFG thing.”

“Really? Wonderful! Have you told your father yet?”

“Nah, I was gonna ask you if you know where abouts in the places he may be.”

“He’s probably around somewhere. So it looks like you’re going to be following in the Yeung family footsteps.”

“Yup. This time around things might be a bit different, though. eSports has gotten big these past few years. Maybe I’ll be able to stick around the scene even after I’m too old to keep playing competitively. I really hope I can make a lasting impact with this chance I’ve got here. I’m pretty sure I’ve got a really good teammate to help me out with bot lane.”

“Have you played with him a lot in ranked?”

“From time to time. We’ve never duo queued, but it looks like the team is going to set up some practice games for tomorrow so we can see what we bring to the table as of now.”

“Sounds like you already know what you’re doing, then.”

“Well, I’ve learned from the best. I hereby fire-quit myself as the guy who handles the cash register and promote myself to pro gamer for FFG. I have a feeling this is going to work out really well.”

“What about the other people on your team? Or the owner, Penn, was it?”

“Yeah, the other guys seem really cool. They know the owner from a few years ago apparently. He has a family, little girl. Everything seems to be pretty legitimate. Two of the other guys on the team are featured streamers for FFG and they haven’t said anything bad about Shellshock.”

“If all of the business seems to be fine, then just keep in mind that you’re a player. Remember that it’s a *team* game. You’re going to always be there for your teammates, and you also have to trust that they’ll always be there for you. Always, always, *always* remember that the enemy team will be thinking the exact same thing you’re thinking. They’re going to be having the same internal issues you and your team are having. Try to find some advantage from that, or at least know you’re not the only ones with those team problems.”

“Damn, ma, you should coach again. I’m getting all jittery and eager to play right now.”

“No, my time for gaming is over. Maybe if things were just a little different I’d still be heavily involved in competitive games, but sometimes things just don’t work out how we want them to.”

“Then I’ll just have to do what you did, but better.”

“So long as you remember that everyone playing is just as human as you. They have the same desires and feelings and emotions as you do. The way you feel when you win, that’s how they feel when they win. The way you feel when you lose, that’s how they feel when they lose. Sportsmanship, Jason. That’s going to take you a long way. Firm handshakes, earnest look in the eye, honest smiles. And how could anyone resist that smile of yours?”

“It’s like Medusa, but people are filled with bliss.”

“How do you come up with all of these obscure references?”

“Internet.”

9

Young Dreams

“One doesn’t discover new lands without losing sight of the shore.” André Gide

His time had come. It was what he was born for. It was what he had dedicated the last few years of his life to. And it would all pay off now. All those sleepless nights, all those other missed opportunities, all those hours spent looking at frames, at statistics, at his predecessors. From the East Coast to the West Coast, from the West to the East, all the players he had aspired to be like, all the players he had admired, and all the players he had wished he could play with, he would be playing against—with just three months’ practice he would be the best.

From the American players to the European players, from the Chinese players to the Korean players, from the German players to the Japanese players, from the Australian players to the Mexican players, from the Swedish players to the Brazilian players—with just three months’ practice he would be up on the stage with the best.

In just a few days’ time he would leave home, leave behind everyone he’d ever known, every face he’d ever seen in person, every friend he’d ever made, every place he’d ever visited—because he was the best.

He thought it’d be easy to leave it all behind. He thought it’d be easy to just pack up and leave. He hadn’t thought this far ahead, he hadn’t thought his heart could weigh his body down, he hadn’t considered how hard it would be to let go. He hadn’t considered how hard it would be to grow up; he hadn’t considered that he may not be ready when his time would come. He thought it would just be easy to be the best.

But he had to endure. He had done it so far, and he could do it again, and again, and again. He had to endure, he had to adapt, he had to grow. He had to nourish his dream, he had to actualize it, he had to make it be, because no one else would do it for him. He had to strive for it, he had to work towards it, he had to find himself a muse, he had to find himself a reason—and it was that he had to be the best.

If he knew it would be this hard to move on, if he knew it would be this hard to grow, if he knew he would be internally torn at the last second, he may have done things differently. He may have stayed nearby, he may have changed his dreams. He may have admired the local heroes, he may have challenged a local issue, he may have been a different person, rather than to be the best.

But this was his dream, and even if he had known this all, he would do it again anyway. He would do it again and endure—he’d have to—to be the best.

10

Crescendo

“If music be the food of love, play on.” William Shakespeare

“Posture: good. Back: good. Hands and arms: good. Legs and feet: good. And you’re all set. Begin.”

The first finger pressed down on the first key, and the harmony of the piano reverberated and resonated across the room. A slow, steady hymn hummed from the heart of piano. An adagio of soft notes, one after the other, played smoothly and calmly, emerging from the fingers that danced on the black and white keys. Arced hands hovered over the keys, they hopped against gravity, glided toward other keys, and the arced hands landed back down with perfection and precision. The blank face turned into a smile—the pace hastened, cheerful notes bloomed from the instrument.

Her hands and arms began to bounce around while her head swayed slowly to the melody. She closed her eyes and played the piece in perfection—her body was one with the music, synchronized. She embodied the aria, commanding her face and her neck and shoulders and arms to dance the piece as it came from her mind to her hands to the keys.

A thunder rang from the piano.

Two.

Three.

Four..

...five roars shook the air, her head banging downward each time. Her eyebrows pulled inward and down, her brows of concentration transfixed on the power of the song. The blend of five notes played: the chord played in tangent, in harmony, in unison. The family of five continued on as the great opus began to settle. Her hands leapt into the air as she tightened her lips, the tip of her tongue escaping. Her sonata came to a gradual close.

Discipline. Posture, back, hands and arms, legs and feet default position. Hold for one, two, three seconds.

The pianist grinned and ecstatically bounced in her seat.

“And you named this piece... ‘Final Frontier.’ You...uh...you’ve never done that before, by the way. The way you moved to your own music. Your hands and body and face matched perfectly what you were feeling. I could feel the raw emotion and power in this piece, it’s quite tremendous. I feel like ‘Final Frontier’ was just itching to come out of you and it just burst out into this. It’s magnificent to say the least, not only did your music speak, but your body spoke with it, too...And I take it you’re going to choose to accept this eSports thing?”

The girl nodded with a smile frozen on her face.

“Then you’re going to have to teach me what I need to know so I can cheer for you when you’re winning, okay?”

The girl stuck her tongue out, rushed off the piano stool and embraced her mother. “You’ll still write and play music, right?”

She nodded.

“Good. Send me what you write so I can have a look at it, okay? And text me or email me or write if you want to talk about something. This is new for both of us, so open communication, right? Good. Okay, I have business to take care of, so I will probably be gone for the rest of the day. Let me know if anything comes up? Okay. Good practice session, by the way. I love you, Sonia.”¹

She walked back to the piano, closed the key lid and picked up the copy of the sheet music she had written. She placed her phone back in her pocket, picked up her tablet, and made her way towards her computer. The original pages of the sheets music were sprawled across desk, around the mouse and keyboard.²

She collected them into a pile, tapped it on the desk twice before setting it aside. She double clicked her journal and began typing:

Octooooooooober 14, 2016

So I played “Final Frontier” for mum today and she seemed to really enjoy it and approve of it. Working on it for five days straight seems to have paid off. I’m not changing the title from “Final Frontier” that’s there to stay now. :3

After having waited a week, and after having thought about Shelly’s proposition (Lol, I still find it funny to call him Shelly (or Penny)), I’m going to say yes. In fact, I’ll respond after writing this entry. :D

I still don’t know how well I could do as a captain of a team. I’m not sure why Shellshock thinks it could work out well. I almost feel as if any failure at all will completely be only my responsibility. :C

Oops, forgot to turn on music. :p HER LIFE WAS SAVED BY ROCK N ROLL! :D

But I’m really having conflicting thoughts here. I think the only reason I can lead a team well over Solo Queue is because the main method of communication there are pings and text. Sure, Kitty and I can sort of “telepathically” communicate for anything we’re doing in lane, but then I’d have trouble communicating with the rest of the team. At least I think so. ^ ^ ;

In a lot of interviews with current and past players, they seem to say there’s a bunch of communication issues from time to time. I really don’t know how I’d be able to improve in that area with my team. D:

If Shelly thinks there’s some way around this, then I’d trust his call on it. With his experience and guidance we should be able to work things out, though. Toky and Rexy seem to trust him enough with anything related to ESports, so maybe I’m just not thinking about what other options and resources I’ll have available once the

1 The girl made a heart with her hands and held it up to her chest before waving bye.

2 notes, question marks, and revisions were scribbled on across the pages with pencil marks smeared in all directions

team gets together in that gaming house Penny told us about in his second email. I hope things really work out well.

Ooh, also I've started reading *The Art of War* seeing as how I'm going to be all captainy and shit. Maybe I'll get a cool captain's hat or something. I'm getting quite a lot of good ideas and ways to formulate strategies from reading Sun-Tzu's stuff. And I'm also learning a bit of Chinese tradition and history in the process. One of the things I found interesting from the early notations was the concept of punishing the commander if his soldiers fuct up. Normally, at least how I think of it, punishment should happen to the person or persons who are acting out of line. But the philosophy of punishing the commander or the teacher or the parent for the faults and flaws and misbehavior of those they are leading or teaching or raising just makes so much more sense. I'm not sure I want to punish myself though. Hopefully no one else on the team has read *Art of War*. ^_^

I'm not sure what I want to be for Halloween yet. D: Maybe I'll just cosplay another champion this year.

Oh shit, I have to let my friends know I may have to move in order to play professionally. Gotta do that after I email Shelly.

AND A REUUUUL HERO, REAL HUMAN BEING! :D

I'm thinking I need a new anime to start watching. I've recently finished *Sword Art Online* and I really enjoyed it. There were some parts that were pretty meh, but overall it was really funny and really good. Maybe I can start looking around for just some new manga series. Or I could also look for some more online comics like that Nuzlocke one. That was a really, really, REALLY funny read. Those faces are just the most hilarious things ever.

OH! Maybe for Halloween I could go as a Pokemon. Maybe like Gardevoir. Or Blaziken would be pretty cool to make. Or maybe I could be the ice cream one. LOL, that'd look so dumb. Maybe something like Bellossom would be nice to craft, too. But then there's also like Zelda or Samus or Chun Li. I wish I could cosplay like Jessica Nigri. I WANNA BE THE JESSICA NIGRI!

Oh and on the topic of Zelda and Samus, I recently found out I suck at *Smash Brothers*. :c I don't know how they play *Melee* like that, it's just fucking insane. I can't believe there's still a lot of people who love *Smash* around. If only Nintendo liked the attention it was getting. Maybe FGC and ESports would have been better for *Melee* in its golden age. Also, Abigail recently sent me a link to *The Smash Brothers* documentary that was made a few years ago. I'm only a few episodes in, but it's really, really good so far. I'm liking the flow of the story and how it unfolds. I should probably finish watching it before heading out to the gaming house. Maybe I'll learn something more about competitive gaming that I hadn't thought of before.

I feel like playing some *Minecraft* again soon. I haven't played in a while and kind of want to just build something new.

SOME DAY THOSE TEARS ARE GONNA SPILL. SO BUILD THAT WALL AND BUILD IT STRONG CUZ WE'LL BE THERE BEFORE TOO LONG!

Bastion was such a good game! I cried at the end. T_T Twice. T_T Even though I knew what was going to happen for the other ending, I still cried. Supergiant such a good developer. And fucking *Transistor*. :X Too many feels. T_T

I wish I had a voice like Ashley Barrett's. So pretty and sexy as fuck. Just listening to her sing makes me want to cry out of an overdose of beauty. ;-; I would marry her just so I could hear her talk and sing all the time. :3 And Darren Korb. That voice and music too good. I'd also marry Wife! And Jessica Nigri! And Notch! I should make them all my waifu! THERE AREN'T ENOUGH PEOPLE IN THE WORLD TO FALL IN LOVE WITH AND MARRY! <3333333333333333

Oh shit! OH SHIT! I just realized I could talk to Shuriken and Tempest and xNietzsche and ask them what communication is like on a team and how it's fixed. We could conspire to join up and make an all-female team. ~ u ~

I wonder what my teammates are like IRL. Everyone knows Remy and Toky are tight bros. I wonder what they're like off stream and out of the game. What about Panda? He sounds like a pretty cool dude, too. I wonder if he has any pet pandas. That'd be so cool. :o If I ever had a pet, it'd probably be like a Poro. :3 :P :PPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP Ugg. Such an overdose of cuteness and kawaii. :3 TuT Or maybe I'd get a Togepi as a pet! Or a Charmander! :D Eeeeeeee, or a Pichu. I should main Pichu in *Melee*.

Maybe I could be Misty for Halloween. Or Cynthia. Or Lyndis. But it'd be difficult as fuck to make my hair like hers. D:

Kitty always seems like a cool kid on stream. He's so young, too. 18 according to his FAQ on Twitch. Among one of the youngest players to compete professionally in the LCS. And he has like a million accounts in Challenger. How in the world does anyone do that? HOW!?!?!?!?!?

We were pretty successful with the smurf team thing that we did. Everyone knows so much about the game, timers, and concepts, and strategies. Maybe I won't have to work as hard as I originally thought to keep the team on the same page. But then again, we haven't really played against any professional teams. I wonder what kind of scrim partners we're going to have. If Shelly knows the ESports scene, I'm sure he's got a list of teams that'll be willing to play with a newly formed one. We'll see.

And LOL, Toky has a smurf named after Light. I wonder if he's only read the manga or watched the anime. Or maybe he's done both. We should talk about the stuff we've watched. If I had to guess who he was by his name, I would have thought he was Japanese. But he doesn't sound like it, nor does he look like it from what I've seen of his stream. He's soooooooooooooo super weeeaboo. And then everyone knows Remy has like a crush on *Elfen Lied*. There's so much to discuss. Not enough time to do it, though. D: And then there's like a million more things I could talk about with them and Panda and Kitty. ! What about Shelly?! What about his wife?! And they apparently have a daughter. I wonder how old she is. I could totally train her to be my Pikachu. :3 She'd follow me around everywhere with Pikachu ears and red cheeks. xD Now I that image will just stay stuck in my head forever.

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD, WHERE YOU ALWAYS GET THE GIRL, YOU MAY LOSE A FIGHT OR TWO BUT YOU'LL WIN IF YOU GET THROUGH! FACE UP AND CHALLENGE ALL YOU EVER KNEW SINCE YOU COULD CRAWL, ALWAYS LOOKING SOMEWHERE ELSE WHEN IT'S ALL INSIDE YOURSELF! I WANNA PLAY UNTIL I DIE, DON'T WANNA LOSE MY REASONS WHYYYYYY! I RACE TOWARDS THE SKY, IN A

WORLD THAT NEVER ENDS!

I should get to work on some stuff. D: Until next time, Word Eater!

Sonia “Crescendo” Wintory

“And I-I like what Espada said there about Royale’s style of play: ‘They accelerate the game.’ And that’s what a lot of other teams don’t do, if they’re in the lead, they *bold* that lead but don’t accelerate anything.”

“And a lot of the best teams that we’ve seen in League of Legends history have been those teams that know how to play fast and just dominate with the smallest of advantages.”

“Alright, everyone, now that we’ve heard from the teams, let’s have a look at today’s starting lineups. On the Blue side: it’s Royale! Shuriken in the Top Lane, Dendra in the Jungle, Phyros at Mid, Covert playing Marksman, and Izbiri at Support.”

“And on the Red side it’s the underdogs in this one: Team Ampersand. We’ve got Toxiform in the Top Lane, Tempest in the Jungle, Espada, happy as always, in the Mid Lane, Aeaza on Marksman, and Militia on Support.”

“And our featured match up for this Semifinal Series is the *melee* in the Mid Lane: Royale’s Phyros versus Ampersand’s Espada.”

“Yeah now this one’s gonna to be interesting to watch. Espada is generally a very explosive player who can find small advantages in lane and just run rampant the rest of the game if the enemy team doesn’t have an answer for him.”

“Right.”

“Phyros, on the other hand is a very calculated player. He knows how much he can handle and how much he can deal. So he can arguably just play safe and farm early game without putting himself in harm’s way until he knows he’s got a trap for Espada.”

“Alright, Masua, we’ll see which champions they’ll use this match, but *first* let’s see who *you* think will win. I think I know who the fans voted for. And according to LoLESports dot com, eighty-two percent of you think Royale will be the team to join Collateral in the World Championship.”

“And that is an expected number, you know, Royale has been quite strong throughout the season, and they usually win against Ampersand. But even the fans here are giving Ampersand a little bit of credit. Royale has only gone through this once before, and maybe they’re still susceptible to the jitters every now and then playing in front of a crowd. But Ampersand is an organization that has stood the test of time for a while now, and they’ve also had to play on these stages before to qualify for prior World Championships. I’m not sure which of the two is more confident here.”

“And we see now that we’ve entered the Pick and Ban phase that Ezreal was banned away from Aeaza, Sona from Militia, and Zac from Dendra. Royale are *really* focusing a lot of bans on that Bottom Lane and for a good reason. Aeaza is extremely good at surviving with little to no peel, and if Royale were to risk having her play Ezreal, things could be rather complicated in mid and late game.”

“To further punish them, they also banned Sona from Militia because Royale likes to play the farm game early and they *don't* want to get poked down. They're a bit pacifist in that regard, like Covert and Izbiri are saying: 'Hi, we see you, please don't hit us, and we won't hit you.' Make no mistake, however, they *can* be extremely aggressive if they see an opening. At the same time, powerful ganking champions like Volibear or Maokai could easily slip into Ampersand's Jungle. Maybe Royale's plan to go for the Ashe-Zyra combo might backfire on them...the other bans are Zed from Phyros, Kassadin from Espada, and Evelynn from Dendra as well. It looks like Ampersand has banned away more champions from Royale's Jungle, and it's really a very smart decision. We've seen in the LCS that a lot of the power plays from Royale start off from very well-coordinated ganks by Dendra. By banning out Zac and Evelynn, they're really taking care of possibility of a surprise initiation either from fog of war or from a path that wasn't secured with True Vision since Evelynn is an invisible unit until she's *just too close*, which is too late at this level of play. We'll also be seeing Kassadin and Zed taken away from the Mid Lane completely. These are both champions that, with just a little bit of a lead and a few seconds of having reaching level six, can decide the pace of the rest of the game. It looks like both teams are in this for the long haul with very few assassins left to pick.”

“So it looks like Royale is comfortable with a first pick Elise. This is a good pick because it doesn't give Ampersand any real information on whether she'll be played by Dendra in the Jungle or by Shuriken in the Top Lane.”

“It looks like the ambiguous pick isn't going to faze Ampersand, they're locking in the Shen and Lee Sin instantly. And you know what, Remington? Royale's also going to just instantly lock in that Ashe-Zyra combo. *I* saw it coming and *Ampersand* saw it coming. Lee Sin and Shen are some pretty good champions to have once everyone on the map reaches level six. A well timed Stand United from Shen can easily turn around a skirmish or teamfight that an Ashe-Zyra lane starts. And for the rest of the game Shen will just splitpush whenever there's nothing going on anywhere else on the map.”

“Yeah, these teams can read each other quite well. But since neither team hesitated to lock in those picks, maybe they actually have something else planned that might make the other team reconsider their team comp.”

“So now Ampersand's just said: 'Aha! Hold on a minute.' They're taking a bit longer to pick this time...and it looks like they're going to hover over Fiddlesticks for a while. That may not be such a bad pick, a well-timed Shen ult with a taunt and a Fiddle ult is a very dangerous combination which they could easily do if they can negate vision from Royale. And Support Fiddle can throw out those crows to harass Ashe-Zyra with fairly decent damage. And then of course the fear is a very strong initiation with a Lee Sin Jungle to back you up. So it looks like they're going for Fiddle-Cait. Caitlyn's long range is a pretty good answer for Ashe-Zyra as well. Ampersand have autoattack range, Piltover Peacemaker, and Dark Wind to counter Royale's passive playstyle early game. But if there's a kill or two for either team, that lane might very well be over.

These picks, however, do look like they're purely reactions to the Ashe-Zyra—other than the poke, Ampersand have a sort of dissonant Bot Lane. Fiddle can be something more of an initiator or a peeler, hardly both. Meanwhile, Caitlyn is a champion who sits in the back of the team chipping away at her enemy's health bars. But that's exactly the playstyle Aeaza is good at, so we'll see whether or not this lane meshes well."

"The last picks for Royale are going to be Fizz...and...Rumble. So it looks like Rumble is going to be heading to the Top Lane with Elise in the Jungle."

"So this opens up the chance for really strong ganks Bottom once everyone's level six. Either Jungle or Bot Lane can start off with crowd control, and there will be at least two more slows or snares or stuns. This Bottom Lane is going to be a really scary lane for this entire game. And if Dendra sees an opening in Mid Lane, he and Phyros can just burst down whoever Ampersand picks in response. The Rumble pick is more of a standard pick for Royale here. Shuriken has played Rumble extremely well all season, and the team seems to be thinking: 'Why would he change that?' Which is a really good mentality to have when the stakes are this high. So the AoE damage and teamfight of Royale is as strong as ever with the Enchanted Crystal Arrow, the Stranglethorns, and The Equalizer. I don't know how Ampersand plans to respond to this."

"Militia here, toying with the crowd, is hovering over Heimerdinger."

"No, he's not toying. Ampersand is *totally* going to send Fiddle Mid and use Heimer as Support, it seems like the kind of thing Ampersand would do just to mess with Royale a bit."

"And they're going for the Diana pick."

"Ooh, now Diana is a pretty good matchup against Fizz. This is going to be amazing since it's our featured matchup and both of these champions can easily burst down anyone. These aren't your typical assassin picks, but again most of the popular ones are off the board and these seem to be acceptable replacements. Diana is a very all-in type of champion which synergizes quite well with Lee Sin, Shen, and Fiddlesticks. So if Ampersand ever gets the drop on Royale they're *going* to lose objectives. What's good about Diana rather than, say Ahri, is that she's a bit of a better duelist and she's got that all-in, surprise attack, 'Oh look your health bar is gone' kind of play style. But while this is a good pick for Espada, I don't think Ampersand have a decent enough composition for teamfights. If they're going to want to win this one, they *have* to pick off one person in Royale's Jungle or they're just going to be racing against time. It's uncharacteristic of Royale to mess up on teamfights, so Ampersand have to play with...*absolute* precision."

The VoD continued playing while she reached for the notebook she had purchased earlier that day. Red, the color complimentary to her cyan hair. With a black marker she wrote the title on the cover: Dal Niente.

She flipped open to the first page and began writing: Final Frontier's Road to Victory. Ampersand's weaknesses...

11

Game of Inches

“Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.” Sun-Tzu

She took off the green arm warmers to let her arms breathe. The lone scar running down her left arm beckoned. It served as memory of her younger and more vulnerable years—the years when her instruments were only tools to play the music of others, and when video games were only buttons to press to pass the time. She’d used music and games as a shield from the kids who’d made fun of her. Kids could be so cruel, even if solely for the sake of being cruel. Adults, she’d found, were no different.

If her mother hadn’t been there, she’d’ve never grown. She’d’ve never spoken through her own music. She’d’ve never spoken through her playstyle, through her tactics. She’d’ve never made the friends she had, she’d’ve never learned from her mistakes. She wasn’t even her biological mother, but had earned the title Mom. If only there were more people like her in the world, who embodied the virtues of love, truth, and honesty.

If anyone in the government were to say the sky was blue, the grass green, all one would have to do is peer toward the window—of course the sky would be gray, the grass brown. But all our screens seem to bring far more comfort. And those who’d said hard work was the only thing someone had to do to get out of poverty did not understand the world where even all the hard work in the world is insufficient. From her window she could only see the rooftops and the tiny cars and buses of New York. From up here, she could not see the faces of those who toiled nonstop.

Of course Wall Street would also say “mistakes were made,” evade responsibility, and play the blame game. Just like solo queue, only with real repercussions that actually hurt people. Of course the working people were those most affected by the mistakes of few. Bankers were not the ones losing homes, bankers were not the ones losing jobs, bankers were not the ones unable to afford gifts for their family, for their children. The working people had endured it all.

Life is but a game of inches. Mistakes were made is an unacceptable excuse for a leader, for a captain, for a team—for anyone. Because when did mediocrity and conformity become admirable?

A self-made promise: no excuses, only hard work, dedication, reflection. No impulsive choices, no miscommunication. My teammates have probably made the riskiest decision of their lives, and they’re probably no older than twenty, twenty-two maybe. This is going to work. It has to work. *I have to make it work*, she thought as he put her arm warmers back on.

Part Two

*... I stand above the world
in my glass enclave
And I cannot be hurt
by the war and the barrowing waves*

*From High above the world
I see the ones depraved
They know to stay away
from our walls and the master slaves*

*I live life without remorse
Out of sight is out of mind
I have no regard for their kind
In spite of everything I have
I owe no debt to those who don't
I played the game and I won...*

– *Rise of a Digital Nation*, “99”

What’s been lacking, Rakoff finds, is the political will and government resources to bring individuals before the bar of justice. Although millions of Americans are still suffering the financial consequences of the crisis, Rakoff suggests that the failure of the justice system may do even more lasting damage to the fabric of American society...

– Michael Hiltzik

I have stood knee deep in mud and bone and filled my lungs with mustard gas. I have seen two brothers fall. I have lain with holy wars and copulated with the autumnal fallout. I have dug trenches for the refugees, I have murdered dissidents where the ground never thaws and starved the masses into faith. A child’s shadow burnt into the brickwork. A house of skulls in the jungle. The innocent, the innocent, Mandus, trod and bled and gassed and starved and beaten and murdered and enslaved. This is your coming century!...

– *Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs*

The party that leans upon the workers but serves the bourgeoisie, in the period of the greatest sharpening of the class struggle, cannot but sense the smells wafted from the waiting grave.

– Leon Trotsky

Farming the World

12

Manifest Destiny

FFG > News > Competitive > LoL > Team

Final Frontier Gaming League of Legends Squad

by Simon "Shellshock" Penn

on October 17, 2016

Hello friends and fans of Final Frontier!

Today I am extremely pleased to announce that we have acquired five League of Legends players to form a competitive League of Legends team. With an additional two teams allowed to compete in the upcoming League Championship season, FFG aims to claim one of those two spots for the 2017 Spring Split. The road to the LCS will most definitely be a difficult and brutal one, but I am absolutely certain that our roster can put up a fight against the top Challenger Teams, Wildcard teams, and the defending LCS teams.

Our roster currently consists of the following players:

Coach/Manager: Simon "Shellshock" Penn

Top: Geoffrey "NeoTokyo" Wagner

Jungle: George "DeusRex" King

Mid: Jorge "Pandango" Reyes

ADC/Marksman: Jason "WildCat" Yeung

Support: Sonia "Crescendo" Wintory

We currently do not have any subs, but may look to openly find subs in the near future. If you are interested in becoming a sub for FFG, keep an eye out for a post in the near future.

Since the Spring Promotion Tournament is just around the corner we intend to spend the remainder of the year practicing and honing our abilities as a team before taking on the Challenger Teams, LCS Teams, and other Wildcard Teams.

Things to look forward to in the coming weeks:

- Our players will be streaming under the FFG team on Twitch
- FFG official sponsors to be announced

I would like to thank everyone who has followed and contributed to FFG as an organization up to this point, and furthermore, I would like to welcome friends and fans to follow and support our players as we make our way into the LCS.

Best,
Shellshock^x

13

Soul Shackle

Morning blue light sluggishly crept through the window and onto the blank walls of the room as he flipped through the green bills again. He set the stack of bills down on the desk that used to carry his computer, monitors, peripherals, books, and served as his bed on some occasions. He pulled up the sheet of paper he had set aside and began writing with one of the many pens that always filled one of his pockets:

“Yo, so I’m leaving since a job opportunity’s opened up. I’m leaving \$300 for you guys to get your shit straight. Don’t expect me to pay for anything else anymore. I won’t be around, and you probably won’t be able to contact me. As a matter of fact, please don’t contact me until you’ve figured your stuff out.”

He read it over, scratched it out, and started again:

“Yo, so I’m leaving for a job you probably wouldn’t understand. I’m leaving half of all my money because I know you’re going to need it. Please don’t contact me until you’ve figured your shit out.”

He scratched it out:

“Yo, I’m leaving. I’m not coming back. Don’t ever contact me.”¹

On his way out he peered back once more at his blue tinted room, with its bare walls and bare furniture, where the last twelve years of his life were spent. Carefully, he tiptoed his way down the stairs, aiming for the nails to avoid the creaking wood.

His bags and suitcases, filled with all the things he ever owned, ever cared about, ever worked for, waited for him at the foot of the staircase. He clogged his ears with music, found some way to carry and pull all his things, and stepped out the door onto the numbing, dormant six-in-the-morning streets.

... I will live forever, I refuse to fade away into the nether, I don't wait for heaven, I will leave my mark right here on earth instead. I will be forever, I refuse to fade away into the nether, I don't wait for heaven, I will live my life right here on earth instead...

As he walked past idle trucks that growled at him and shops that polluted his air with the scent of coffee, he kept readjusting his bags whenever one arm became too sore or tired. At a red light he tapped at his pockets to skip a song, but he hit his carton of cigarettes. The carton was weightless in his hands and he could count more than five sticks sitting next to a balled up sheet of paper,

An exhale came out as a wheeze while he clenched his fist, crushed the carton and tossed it into the empty trashcan at the corner. Upon hearing the thump at the bottom of the trash, itches sprouted up on his arms and legs, but no amount of scratching would make them go away.²

1 He reviewed the page of chicken scratch, crumbled it up, and stuck it into an empty spot in his cigarette carton.

2 As he walked past the train station

As the rest of the city awoke and golden rays of sun shone over distant buildings, he arrived at a small park where leaves were only just turning red and orange and yellow. The colorful trees swayed in a single direction while leaves danced in the air, clinging to their stem, and soft rustling resonated all around.³

At the center of the park rested an old fountain that still functioned and spewed a continuous cascade onto the small body of water. Bronze and silver and gold⁴ coins and lockets and amulets littered the base of the fountain and waved at him with the ripples of the drips of water that had spilled out of the pool.⁵

He plucked a quarter out of his pocket and flung it into the water.

“I’m so fucking stupid,” he scoffed.

On the way back towards the train station, streets and roads were more active—children grasped onto the hands of their parents, buses hummed in ever direction, and clumps of teenagers clotted sidewalks, talking and yelling without a care in the world.

Once underground he navigated the narrow corridors, dodged the inconsiderate,⁶ and finally made it to the platform.

“Whatup.”

“Yo.”

“So I was playin’ *Street Fighter* with fuckin’ Panda.”

“Mhm.”

“He’s gone some fuckin’ hacks, man.”

“If I were to speculate that you just suck, I doubt I’d be wrong.”

“One v one.”

“I don’t even play *Street Fighter*.”

“Don’t pussy out on me. One v one.”

“*Samurai Gunn*.”

“Oh yeah. When’s the nex—”

The screech and rumble of the incoming train echoed throughout the long chamber, putting an immediate end to all conversations in the station. They dragged their baggage on board and dropped them amid the crowded car.

“Why you tappin’ your feet? Gotta take a leak or somethin’? Rash on your arms, too?”

“No, I threw my smokes out. I’m gonna start raging for retarded reasons. Carry me, please.”

“As if you don’t already rage for retarded reasons. Be real.”

“I guess. But yeah, ‘tis the start of a new era.”

³ A aged sign in the park read “Fuente de Sueños”

⁴ Copper and zinc and nickel

⁵ Upon further inspection he noticed that the trail of water on the cobblestone led to kid sitting on a bench who was counting a few coins in his hands.^E

⁶ whose eyes would forever be fixated on their phones

“Good, cuz I don’ want our room smellin’ like Smokey the Bear either.”

“That was partly the reason I ditched the smokes last second. I also can’t imagine trying to play professionally and getting cravings in the middle of a game or in the middle of a best-of set. Poor habit for sure.”

“Tch. Okay, L. I get it. Plannin’ ahead. An’ why in the fuck you got so many bags n’shit? Did you pack everything you fuckin’ own?”

“Umm,” NeoTokyo’s sight darted from bag to bag while he stretched yawned, “yeah, pretty much. Don’t plan on comin’ back. Start of a new era, George. Start of a new era.”

“Y’know, you coulda just made multiple trips, dumbass.”

“Fuck that,” he responded as he looked around the train car “too much work.”⁷

“Yeah, but now I’m gonna have to carry some of your shit and it’s gonna hurt my back and shit. Think of the pain.”

“What’s the matter? Don’t lift?”

“Tss. Just sayin’, Geoff.”

“Fuck,” Tokyo groaned holding a hand to his stomach, “was too busy packing that I forgot to eat.”

“Well you’re in luck,” DeusRex announced while digging his hands into one of his bags, “I have some snacks if you want ‘em. Won’t fill you up, but hey.”

“Oshit, really? Praise Helix,” Tokyo rejoiced weakly. “You’re my god damn Bird Jesus.”

“By the way, you plannin’ on upgrading your computer?” Rex asked handing over a fruit snack package.⁸

“Initially that was the route I was planning on taking. But now I’m just thinking I’ll build a new one from scratch. I was thinking of just getting maybe some better RAM, but honestly if I were to do that, it’d be better to go all the way, because why not? What about you? Upgrading?”

“Tch, thought about it, but I just left my computer at home. I a’ready sent Shelly the parts I want. I hopin’ they get here soon so I can set it up.”

They continued to talk of the parts and tech they were interested in as the train screeched and jolted down its predetermined path. Life pressed on normally with passengers boarding and leaving the train going about their daily lives, working and

7 Looking around the car, he read the advertisements plastered all over “Our focus is education, our mission is careers.” Pixel perfect models with perfect eyes and perfect teeth smiled at him as they hugged their perfectly new books against their perfectly new clothes in the foreground of a lush and perfectly green campus under a perfectly blue sky. To better advertize the university, the posters included just-as-perfect black and latino models to lure in easy victims from whom academic corporations could easily profit from for the rest of their lives so long as no alternatives routes to employment are as mass-advertized or as culturally ingrained as education, which is sure to never run out of customers.

8 He noted one of the Tokyo’s bags was the one he always used to carry his computer to and from previous LAN events.

toiling nine-to-five. An existence boiled down to checking emails every second of every minute of every hour of every day.

And they worked away, without a moment's rest, with eyes locked onto their screens and hands ready to answer phones. They analyzed the numbers and the graphs to anticipate the best times to buy low and sell high.

And they organized meetings to discuss the success of the company, or the troubles of the company, or the future of the company. PowerPoints presentations and Excel documents projected tables and graphs that told a clear story of past, present, future. And the slides and cells of the documents were the life and blood of the company.

They carried their planners with them, a notebook or a phone, and they stuck to the schedule. The agenda was to be followed, one must never stray from the plan, from the schedule, otherwise valuable time would be lost, and it was company time. Company time must never be spent on personal affairs, it must not be spent on trivial things that will not ultimately bring in more profit for the company.

And profit was always the number one priority, more profit, higher profit, better profit than the previous quarter, than the previous year, than our predecessors. We must get more than they did. We must please our shareholders.

Profit, more, whatever the cost.

And they all had fancy titles and fancy business cards that they could pass along so that their peers and competitors and clients would know of their goods and services and existence. And the way the business ran was the most efficient and the most practiced, and all the big companies did it because that was the standard meta of work.

But some people did not have time to analyze or reevaluate the meta, because they just did what they were told. And they did not attempt to improve it, because it was the way things have always been done. It was like that when they showed up, and it's what makes money.

Some feared the computers and the numbers and the stocks and the graphs and the plans and the titles and the meta and the money because they did not understand it or did not know who was in charge of changing them.

Some worshiped the computers, and the stocks, the agenda, the roles, the meta, the money, because they provided shelter from thought and feeling, and they were buffers separating them from the real-world effects of their decisions.

Some were angry at the computers and the figures and the chain of command because they had siphoned their life and drained their time and energy and passion. Yet they had to keep going because they could easily be replaced by young scholars, desperate for income and eager to prove themselves. And God knows the geysers of young scholars were pumping out too, too much.

Some thought little of the machines and the graphs, and the planners, and positions and the meta because they only cared about the end result of getting paid, no matter what they had to do.

And there was always insufficient time to analyze it, or be creative about it, or toy with it because they were exhausted after working those long hours. With only a few hours left in the day before the next business day, they had to juggle dinner and budgets and hobbies.

Most of the food was saved for later because the ever looming loans always lingered in the back of their minds and stole their appetite. A single meal was to be stretched three meals because there was not enough money to pay for the necessities and to repay their education from years ago.

And they had to be cautious, always, because any unplanned medical problems would create further fiscal dents from which they could only recover in fifty years' time. And any presence online was to be done with absolute care, because the companies monitored them at all times wary for any crumb of unprofessional behavior with which they could threaten termination.⁹

The labor had been refined and crafted and perfected. They were proud to be a part of the machine without being the machine. They were identical, uniform cogs,¹⁰ oiled with fear and driven by desperation. For those who refused to be a cog in the machine, the company simply dangled pay before the eyes of the labor, forcing them to produce and to function as intended.¹¹

And so the razor-sharp jaws of the corporation held its firm grasp around the neck of the dependent workers, with souls shackled to the will of the company. The monster, the reaper, the owner, the well-fed company, always held a scythe at the ready. It swung practice swings and flexed whenever it could.

And when things went wrong there was no one to blame. *The company* made mistakes, no *one* person was responsible for the failure, everyone was only a worker; they were not the company itself. The company was its *own* person, its own being, its own sentient self. It's made of men, and acts like men, but it's not a man.

And the company was too big to fail, and too big for trial.

The companies had grown and evolved over the decades, becoming exempt from trial, excused from fault, and immune to criticism.

And it has been so.

And it is so.

And it will be so.

9 And they had to explicitly let the world know that what they said did not express the thoughts of their employers. What they typed was of their own volition and their own opinion and their own voice, and they always had to specify, as if to convince themselves that they truly had a voice.

10 Etched into the cogs were their manufacturers, their alma mater, who guaranteed their supply would bring satisfaction: all the requisite steps were taken to mold and create a functioning product.

11 Branded onto the stock were their providers, their alma mater, who raised and pacified them from young, who trained and tamed them to bring satisfaction to any company.

14

The Box

“Think I should’a gotten something to eat on the way here,” Tokyo groaned, sitting on the steps of the apartment with a sunken head.

“We’ll just drop off our stuff and then look around for what’s good.”

“But...I’m...so hungry,” Tokyo whined monotonously.

“Oh, you big baby.”

The door behind them loudly opened, and Rex’s gaze turned to meet the eyes of an old man. He wore an ironed light-blue dress shirt, buttoned up except for the very top, and untucked from his well fitted jeans. His short, brown hair was neatly kept and favored leaning toward one side. In spite of his age, the old man stood tall and straight without the assistance of a cane.

“*Damn, nigga!*” Rex exclaimed. He leaned in with squinting eyes to further inspect the man. “Think I c’n see the gray hairs comin’ in.”

The old man suppressed a laugh and instead smiled.

“Hey, George. What’s up?” he asked, bumping his fist against Rex’s.

“Those gray hairs are what’s up, Shelly.” The excitement in his face evaporated as he came to a realization. “Tch, damn...I forgot my gift at home. I had a cane for you, but I’m sure you already have a couple.” A permanent smirk sat on the joker’s face. He wore his gray hoodie unzipped, and underneath wore a plain, white shirt. Beneath his hood hid his short, curly hair. A small tuft of hair clung to his chin, and that was all he allowed to grow. He was carrying a heavy bag on his shoulders and had a large suitcase by his feet.

“Ha! Even if I did have canes I’d probably use them to discipline you. You’d be in serious need of a paddlin’, George. Gotta respect your elders. Hey, what’s wrong with Geoff?” he asked with brows of worry.

“Oh he’s jus’ bein’ a man-child. Said he was *apparently* up all night packin’ and forgot’a eat. He looks so orz.”

“...he looks so *what?*”

“Orz. Y’know, like, when in anime the dude falls down on all fours an’ gets like those purple, squiggly lines of stress above his head. Or sometimes he jus’ gets like a spotlight on ‘im.”

“Ah, I see. Hey Geoff,” Shellshock said loudly, “If you’re in the mood to bring your things inside we’ve got some food ready upstairs.”

“Fuck that,” Tokyo mumbled to the ground, “bring the food here. I’ll wait.”

“Great! Let’s go. C’mon, c’mon, c’mon. Gimme these,” he said beckoning at some suitcases.

“Guys...dudes...” with closed eyes Tokyo sluggishly pulled his luggage inside. “I’m not gonna make it. Go on...carrying my things without me.”

“Oh *yeab,*” Rex lit up. “He threw out his smokes, so he’ll be hella cranky.”

“*Really?* I’m proud of you, Geoff.” said Shellshock, turning to Tokyo. “If you wanna buy nicotine patches or whatever let me know and I’ll see if I can help you out.” He pressed the elevator button and the doors immediately opened.

“Frankly...I’m not even sure I’ll be able to quit. Hasn’t even been a day and I already feel like I need to quit quitting.”

“You haven’t even tried yet, Geoff. Besides, sounds like you’ve reached a record. You haven’t smoked in...what, five, ten hours?”

“About ten, yeah. But I mean, like, I’m also at a record for longest time alive...and that just means I’m that much closer to death.” An exhausted Tokyo leaned against a corner in the elevator, his eyes and shoulders seduced by gravity. He blankly stared at the floor with dark, distant eyes. Shellshock knew those eyes, they were eyes that mused some intricate thought to which there was no easy solution, eyes that said his hunger and withdrawals were merely a facade for some deeply troubling facts. His black and green Razer jacket followed his steep shoulders downward, his messy, black hair flattened against the wall.

“So Geoff, how about we get some food in you? You can take a nap afterward if you’re still tired,” Shellshock suggested while twirling and fiddling keys in his hands.

“...yeah...sure,” he replied to the wall.

Rex inhaled the air and sighed in satisfaction as the doors opened. “Oh damn, this elevator doesn’t smell like piss.”

“Why would it?” Shellshock asked, brows burrowed inward.

“Do the *stairs* smell like piss?”

“No. As far as I’m concerned, no,” he responded taking a left off the elevator.

“I should be the first to do it, then. Gotta mark my territory, Shelly.”

“Sure thing, George, knock yourself out. Anyway, we’re off this way. These two apartments here will be us.” He pushed into the door on the left side¹ and held it open.

“So since you two will be sharing a room you’ll get the big room in this apartment. This one’s also where we’ll have all the computers set up.” Tokyo and Rex entered and saw a fabric poster hanging high on the furthest wall. On a pure black background sat the Final Frontier Gaming logo: a thick white circle encompassing two white Fs, the black cloth filling in the negative space of the letters.

“Holy hell, when’d you get *that* thing?” Rex asked walking closer to it.

“We had that custom made. Looks pretty awesome, but I may be just a tad bit biased. This is the room you’ll be practicing in, so I figured I’d hang the banner here.” On either side of the banner a window brought sunlight into the room. Hugging the wall were five identical tables. A neat collection of power strips and extension cords and ethernet cables snaked between the legs of the tables.

“Damn, son. Place looks good.”

1 the apartment number read 63

“This apartment’s lacking furniture...other than the desks and bed frames that is. Anyway your room’s down this way.” They followed him down the corridor left of the entrance, passing a few other rooms on the way. Two mattresses leaned against the wall, two boxes of bed frames in need of assembly sat at their feet.²

“Y’know, I’ve never actually seen the city from this high up.”

“It’s a pretty decent view. I haven’t quite gotten to piecing the beds, been dealing with emails and other things. I’m sure you guys can make the bed frames, right?”

“Impossible, Simon,” Tokyo mumbled. “George is illiterate and I tried putting the square peg in the round hole when I was in kindergarten. We’d never be able to construct these things, much less build computers.”

“Why *I* gotta be the illiterate one?”

“Mmm, seems more believable.”

“Racist.”

“Guess you’ll be sleeping with your mattresses on the ground, then. But yeah, whatever, leave your things here and let’s go eat.”

“We the first ones here?”

“Yeah. Crescendo’s in New York, she just has to move her things here. Pandango will be flying in...tom—” his eyes looked up and to the right as he dug into his brain to recall. “Pandango should be coming soon, two or three days at the latest. Wildcat thinks early next week since he’s waiting for his passport to be mailed.”

“You’re not...gonna lock the apartment?” Rex asked pointing back toward it.

“Oh it’s fine. There’s only four apartments per floor,” Shellshock answered as he leaned to open the door labeled 64. “There’ll probably always be someone in each apartment anyway, no need to worry about locking the doors.”

At the center of an entertainment center rested a large television screen. The shelves on either side of the screen housed various devices. A purple cube, two white, slim rectangular devices, numerous black, sleek machines. Wires and cables ran from the machines to the screen and to the power strips on the ground. A ring of sofas was laid out to face the monitor, and a wide, dark-brown coffee table sat at the center.

“Hey, Simon...” Tokyo whispered, “...is this real life?”

“Dude. No—fuckin’—way.”

“Oh that. Didn’t think you guys would be intere—”

“Fuckin’ Shelly! You plannin’ ta steal Toke’s master troll reputation?”

“Shh, shh,” he gestured to keep a low voice, then peeked cautiously toward one of the rooms. “Daughter’s asleep. I know it’s gonna be hard, but please try not swearing if there’s a chance she’s around.”

“Oh shit, sorry. But dude, you got every console anyone could ever want.”

² Rex walked over to one of the windows and peered out into the busy streets below as everyone went about their daily routine, hailing taxis, crossing red lights, holding phones to their ears. Quick strides swept across the sparkling pavement, across perfectly cemented street tiles without cracks, across perfectly clean streets.

“But does he have any good games, George? I mean, I can see the Steam Machine, so at least we know he doesn’t revel in peasantry.”

“Before you ask, yes, I do have *Smash*.”

“Meh,” Tokyo and Rex dismissed in unison.

“Played plenty of *Smash* on Geoff’s 3DS. But—”

“It just ain’t no *Melee*, Simon. Decent game in its own right, but it’s no masterpiece. Speak no more of this, Shell the Shock,” a melodramatic Tokyo implored “lest you wish to further remind me of my Nintendo-induced broken heart.”

“Oh, that reminds me!” Shellshock sparked up “Did you study drama at all?”

“Nah. I just had to take a couple of courses on Shakespeare, Chaucer, rhetoric, the usual, boring, English Literature stuff. I just happened to pick up some drama.”

“Mhm,” he nodded before heading towards the kitchen, “that explains a lot, actually. Does he go overboard with it sometimes, George?”

“All the time, *Shell the Shock*,” Rex emphasized. “You ever watch him streamin’ when he’s playin’ on a smurf?”

He shook his head, pulling out various ingredients from the refrigerator and placing them beside the sink.

“He hella trolls ragers in chat usin’ words they probably never heard of, and tries teachin’ ‘em philosophy ‘n’ history. It’s so fuckin’ dumb,” Rex chuckled.

Tokyo responded incoherently while chewing on some lettuce.

“Then you might as well tell ‘em Socrates wrote *The Regular Gatsby*. I’m sure they’d never suspect a thing.”

Shellshock failed to suppress a smirk after their banter. “So. How do you guys like your sandwiches?”

—

A swordsman clad in black quickly hopped around the map. He dashed left and right, and left and right again. He swung his sword, parried, and dodged around to avoid the fists and elbows and knees of his opponent. A muscular fighter in a red helmet raced and flew around the swordsman’s blade, they traded blows relentlessly.

“See, Penny, way, way, *way* better. Marth’s animations are just the best. They’re so elegant in *Melee*, even when you’re wave dashing, dash dancing, and holy fuck do I love his Nair animation. Pixar’s got nothing on HAL Laboratory.”

“A’right, a’ready. Sheesh. You ‘n’ Marth’s animations need ta get a room.”

“I’m just sayin’, dude. *Melee*’s top notch. Anyway, thanks for the food, Simon.”

“Same, man.” Rex handed his plate over. “You gonna be the team chef as well or somethin’?”

“*Me?* Chef? *No!* I’m terrible,” Shellshock claimed as he carried three empty plates away. “I can only make a handful of meals. Relying on me for variety or a healthy diet is a mistake.” The dishes clanged as he placed them into the sink. He returned to the living room toying with his phone. He flicked and tapped and read with a pensive face for a moment while the two sparred in the background.

“Alright, so it looks like I’ve gotta get back to emails and phone calls and other business. If you guys need anything else just let me know. I’ll be in this room over here.”

“Ooh, you ‘ave an office?”

“Yeah. Share it with Lily. She mainly handles the website, its design, artwork, and social media, as well.”

“Didn’t you start the website and the forums and stuff?”

“I did. But I hardly have time to keep working on that with all the management and partnerships I have to stay on top of.”

“Gotcha. Makes sense. By the way,” Tokyo inquired, “what’s in the package? Parts? Gifts? A puppy?” A brown box was set next to the coffee table. It was nearly the same height as the table and had normal postal markings.

“*Parts*, yes. Don’t open it. I’m saving that for later.”

“Sounds like something Santa would want to hear about, don’t you think George? I should write a letter to inform the North Pole what a meanie Simon is.”

“He’ll really do it, Shelly.”

“Go for it. But seriously, don’t open it. I’ll let you guys to relax, just don’t break anything. And Geoff, get some rest,” he suggested before fading into the office.

“Pfft. How can I be tired when I’m playing *Smash?*”

The game resumed and the fighters continued the duel. Three platforms hovered on the stage, in the background a fountain gushed out water underneath a stellar night sky.

Their fingers danced with precision as the controllers clicked and clacked and tapped in their hands. The characters danced and lunged and rolled around, occasionally a colored sphere would pop up around them. They continued to communicate through the game, Tokyo argued his set of moves was best. Rex deflected and countered, his contrapuntal play punished Tokyo. But there was a retort: a split second mistake left Rex vulnerable, Tokyo slashed forward one, two, three times, then spiked Rex downward. An artificial crowd cheered and gasped in response to it all.

“Tch. Damn, son, lemme move.”

Tokyo snorted a laugh.

The discourse continued, the fighters kept their distance from his opponent’s sphere of influence. They lured each other into making a misplay, they slowly inched into range to attempt a jab, they slowly chipped away at one another.

“There’s just *too* much to do today,” Shellshock exhaled leaving the office.

“What happened?”

“Crescendo just arrived,” he left the apartment, the door slowly closing behind him.

“Woah, wait, need any help for luggage?” Rex asked loudly.

“I got it!” his response echoed in.

15

Sigil of Silence

His eyes were fixated on the bright screen as the elevator carried him down. His eyes slid across the lines and lines and lines of text and text and text. The lengthy phrases, propositions, and deals with their many clauses, exhausting jargon, and stipulations taxed his mental fortitude, forcing him to reread the lines over and over again to decode them.

“For this partnership to endure,” the emails read, “the following conditions must be met,” “within the boundaries of these guidelines,” “you and your affiliates are required to,” “within the timespan of,” “for no less than,” and so on ran the premises and terms of the fine print philosophy. He hoped to finish reading, sliding the page upward, but the elevator doors opened and once again he was interrupted.

As soon as he opened the door, her bright blue eyes aimed at his. She launched herself from leaning against the wall, turned to face him with a smile and held out her right hand. Slowly he held out his hand in response, uncertain if he should first focus on her bright blue hair or her yellow-tinted glasses.

After the firm handshake, a wide-eyed Shellshock glowed, “Gunnar! Of course!” He hit his head with two fingers and sighed upward in a moment of stupor. He pulled out a small, black notebook from his pocket, flipped to a page with a red bookmark, and scribbled down a note.

He returned to meet her eyes, “Just another possible sponsor,” as if he were responding to a question. “I have to say, though, the blue hair’s kind of a surprise.”¹

While she smirked, the back of her hand brushed some cerulean daggers of hair away from her line of sight. She wore a perfectly fitted, waist-length, gray jacket unbuttoned, its lapels facing skyward.²

“Anyway, let me help you with these,” he pocketed his phone and notebook, lifted a suitcase over the door’s threshold and led her towards the elevator. He tapped the button, the elevator dinged to life and the doors slid open. The small wheels of the suitcases rolled loudly against the marble tiles and as they crossed the gap onto the lift; another tap of a button and the doors slid close before they began to ascend.

“George and—” Shellshock shook his head to recalibrate names, “Rex and Tokyo arrived a few hours ago. You guys didn’t all plan to come on the same day did you?”

She shook her head.

“Oh. Well then, I guess there’s no need to worry about team communication. You three already seem to have some sort of team chemistry going,” he figured.³ “Have you already eaten, by the way?”

1 The tone of his voice fluctuated between young, casual, playful and old, professional, focused, the latter of which he tried to inhibit.

2 Around her neck hung a pair of headphones with wires leading into one of her pockets.

3 A shallow resonance of the humming, whirring machinery made its way into the chamber.

She nodded quickly and showed him a thumbs up.

“Alright, awesome. I didn’t manage to put the bed frames together, so let me know when you want to get that set up so I can help you out.” Again she nodded and the doors slid open.

They walked down the corridor to the apartment as their footsteps tapped against the floor. “That’s where all the computers will be,” he pointed at apartment 63, “and where everyone else’s rooms are. Your room’s here,” he said turning the door knob to the door labeled 64.

An ensemble of strings, coupled with a harmonic vocalization flowed from the opened door. On a giant screen ahead of them two figures were dueling beneath a churning windmill. The fighters let out grunts of battle as they collided, their dissonant styles evident. One fought in elegance, with years of training behind his craft, the other, erratic and explosive, as if influenced by years of street brawling.

A classical rendition of the retro melody played on as the windmill and its surrounding terrain descended into a cloud of smoke. In its place, two platforms rose and a green arena appeared, all the while the two continued trading blows.

“Yo, Shelly,” Rex called out keeping his eyes on the game, “you should make a *Smash* team. It’s too good to pass up.”

“You think so? I’ll be sure to move it to the top of my to-do list,” he replied as he led Crescendo to her room. “Also, your captain’s here.”

“Yo,” Rex greeted as he paused the game.

“Yo!” Rex yelled once he turned to face them. “Are...are we...like...in an anime?” he asked with squinting eyes darting between Shellshock’s and Crescendo’s, his head turning slightly sideways after each pause.⁴

Crescendo tilted her head slightly and forced a half smirk, half pout.

“Oh hi,” Tokyo’s monotonous voice vibrated as he sloppily waved toward her. “I call black hair if we’re doing this anime thing.”⁵

She smiled and returned his wave.

“I dunno if you’re aware, but your hair’s a’ready black.”

“*Ob?* In that case: another job well done. Or do you want me to not have black hair? What are you, some kinda racist?”

Their voices rang clearly and cleanly, they were not the same digitally distorted voices she had heard over their streams and voice calls.

They again began arguing, which Shellshock saw as their opportune moment to escape. He beckoned her to follow and took her to a blank room.

At the corner there was a small desk, on top lay the pieces of bed frames. A mattress leaned against the far wall beside a window.

⁴ His intonation revealed that his voice was one that came from deep behind his throat.

⁵ The timber of his deep, rough voice was one that came from lungs, a voice partially skewed by a pathway of gravel.

“So with Gunnar on the list, I’ll be even busier today trying to see if I can get things moving with them. Umm,” his eyes looked upward to consult his memory, “I think that’s it. Oh! I’ll be in that first room we walked past. And...” he looked up again, “I *think* that’s it. I’m sorry if I’m rushed.”

She mouthed “it’s okay,” with an understanding expression.

“If you need anything just let me know. Text me if you can’t find me, or tweet me, email me, whatever you can think of.”

She nodded and instantly he walked off pulling his phone from his pocket. She breathed in deeply and let out a loud sigh to settle into a new home. An empty closet called to be filled, but far more interesting were her teammates who fought like they were married.

“Then is bald a color?” she overheard Tokyo asking when she was in hearing range.

“Tch. Nigga, bald ain’t a damn color.”

“Dude, games with character customization have bald as a color option. You’ve never made a game, where’s *your* authority?”

“Okay, fine. But can you make bald by mixing paints?”

“I don’t care about your finger painting experiments.”

“How ‘bout the light color spectrum? Can’t find *bald* there either.”

“No, but we know there’s stuff we can’t see. Therefore, infrared equals bald. Q.E.D.”

Crescendo sat on one of the many couches and focused on the screen as Rex and Tokyo continued.

“Oh, what up Cappy?” Rex ask upon spotting her.⁶ “There’s more controllers in the cabinet if you wanna play,” he said pointing to the compartments below the television.

“So let’s do this, Geoff: I’ll get white hair, you *get* black hair, and Cresh stays blue. Then I call you black, you call me white, we call Cresh blue, and all the racists will become enlightened and racism will disappear.”

Tokyo chuckled at the suggestion, “Sounds like a great plan. Get Obama on the phone. Oh wait, he can’t do anything, he’s on his way out.”

She watched as their fingers constantly adjusted to the situation on the screen, their hands gripping the controller, clawing, twitching, and decisive.

Every now and then Rex grimaced in response to the screen, other times he smiled, and yet other times he leaned back and sigh displeased. He talked smack and name called, his tone constantly shifting, sometimes cheerful, other times groaning. He flowed with the pace of the game, tides whose favor was constantly shifting.

Every now and then Tokyo blinked, and his eyes always moved, always active, always figuring. His response to anything on the screen was to blink, every time he blinked he learned something new and stored it in his brain for later use, and rarely did he respond to Rex’s remarks but with a concrete face.

She awoke the tablet she laid next to the seat flicked at the screen a few times and began typing with the attached keyboard. She turned her gaze toward the two with a

6 She quelled the urge to react with a coy smile to the banal name of endearment

pensive expression, holding a finger to her lips. Then she turned to the television and again typed into the tablet. Her lightning fast fingers and the subsequent rapid clacking of the keyboard vibrated in tangent with the controllers.

When she was done she pushed the tablet off to a side and retrieved a controller from the cabinet Rex specified. In the same compartment laid relics of the past, a Nintendo 64, a Sega Genesis, a collection of game cartridges and controllers that were once dominant and in control. Thought they elicited pleasant memories of halcyon days long gone, they were now old, irrelevant, and incapable of fulfilling the needs of their successors.

The match in progress was canceled so that she could instantly join in. They played game after game with jokes and jests, with misplays and accidental kills and accidental deaths. Rex continued reacting as he had before, Tokyo continued blinking. She played as the yellow, tiny, mouse with pink cheeks and black-outlined ears.

Their styles, she surmised, would be similar: Tokyo would know the game well, play every character well, and would only take risks when the chances were in his favor. Rex would get into her head, into Tokyo's head, and would go on the offensive whenever they walked into his trap; but if they got into *his* head...

"Okay, I think I may 'ave lied when I said I wasn't tired. That's my last game," Tokyo put the controller down on the coffee table and stretched his arms high above his head with a yawn.

"And you said *Smash* wouldn't make you tired," Rex jeered. "Where you from anyway, Blue?" he turned to Crescendo. "Shelly said you were a'ready in the city, so...I assume you live nearby?"

She confirmed with a nod.

"Y'know, y'don't have to be shy around us. We might be tall and scary 'n' shit but we're just dumb kids. But Geoff's more dumb."

She grinned at his joke, hesitating a moment before reaching for her tablet. Before typing she swept hair away from her eyes and adjusted her glasses.

"Fuck, now I'm hungry again," Tokyo moaned, holding a hand to his stomach.

"Geoff, you're fat."

"Okay."

She flipped the screen toward them, the large text read ":p It's not that I'm shy," she scrolled the page down, "I'm mute."

They sat silently, Rex's face froze puzzled, Tokyo's face was blank as always, still holding his stomach. She bowed her head slightly and brushed some hair away from her eyes.

"Really? You mean, like, by choi—"

She began shaking her head furiously before Tokyo could finish asking.

"Hm. That's...kind of cool, actually," he continued in his deep, monotone voice.

"And Shelly knows about this?"

She lay her tablet on the coffee table so they could read as she typed again with lighting fast fingers, “we exchanged a lot of emails about this when he first sent out the team invitation. I told him and he said it was fine. I let him know I would probably be a shitty captian but he said we would work something out together.”

She returned to her seat wary for any response. Tokyo, standing, held a hand to his chin, eyes looking upward. He was making calculations, musing in his mental library, finding a way to make things work, to develop malnourished ideas.

Rex, sitting, held the side of his finger to his lips. Facing Tokyo, he sat silently and waited for his response.

“It’s definitely not something that’s been done before,” his deep voice said, “but that doesn’t mean it won’t work. Furthermore, if Simon thinks this could work I’m certain he’s got something in mind.” He paused, then smiled. “This...this could easily grow to be another team’s Kryptonite. Oh, dude...*dude*, this shit’s gonna be hella fun.”

Crescendo and Rex eased up.

“And just like that I’m not even tired anymore,” Tokyo said quickly and upbeat. “And just something I noticed: you’re off to a good start as a captain. You took notes on us while we were playing, you probably noticed things we don’t anymore since it’s just muscle memory for us. Do more of that, and do that for Panda and Wildcat when they’re here, and everything should fall into place over time. But anyway, I’m sure Simon’s gonna talk to us as a team when we’re all here to see how this thing’s going down.”

“You *really* think Shelly’s got a plan, Geoff?”

“Yes. Twenty bucks.”

“You’re on.”

Crescendo typed into her tablet again, this time aiming it towards Rex, “It’s not blue btw, it’s cyan.”

“Psh. *Blue, cyan*. Same thing.”

“Hardly. In full color spectrum, paint pigmentation, etymology, they’re different.”

“Ugh, just...” he scoffed, “just say it, Geoff.”

“Why I haven’t the faintest idea what you blabber about.”

“Yup. You’re fucking bald, Geoff.”

16

Zap!

[32:10] NeoTokyo has slain Ikshi for a triple kill!
 [32:10] Your team has scored an ace!
 [32:10] Xte4 (Jax) has targeted the Inhibitor
 [32:11] Xte4 (Jax): can we take inhib?
 [32:12] Crescendo (Braum) has targeted the Nexus Turret
 [32:13] Xte4 (Jax): o
 [32:14] Xte4 (Jax): didnt see lol
 [32:17] Crescendo (Braum): :p
 [32:20] [All] Ikshi (Brand): yo wildcat y u playing on tokyo's account?
 [32:22] [All] NeoTokyo (Lucian): lol
 [32:24] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): wtf
 [32:24] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): im still in canada lol
 [32:28] [All] amp Espada (Kha'Zix): nice try tokyo
 [32:30] [All] amp Espada (Kha'Zix): we know that ur on cats account
 [32:35] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): shit
 [32:36] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): there onto us
 [32:37] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): gg
 [32:40] [All] amp Espada (Kha'Zix): gg
 [32:42] [All] NeoTokyo (Lucian): gg tokyo
 [32:42] [All] NeoTokyo (Lucian): was fun :3
 [32:44] [All] FFG WildCat (Caitlyn): gg wildcat
 [32:45] [All] Crescendo (Braum): G_G

Victory!

“I haven’t played Lucian in forever.”

(11:29) Crescendo: We won because I carried you, Wildcat.

“For sure. Can I go back top lane now?”

Yup. Just one game was all I wanted.

Where’s Rex?

The front door opened loudly followed by a growling rumble that scrapped against the wooden floor.

“Yo, yo, To-kee-jo!”

They turned simultaneously and saw the fresh face of a kid with red cheeks. While rolling up the sleeves of his plain, purple sweater he held out his lower lip and blew air upwards. Shellshock closed the door and took some of the luggage to an empty room.

“Oh hi, Panda,” Tokyo waved as usual, taking off his headset. “You’ll never guess who that is in the blue over there.”

“Aw damn, is that the yung Crescendo? At first I thought it was, like, Miku Hatsune,” he said holding his glasses closer to his eyes.

She held up a peace sign, smirking at his response.

“Where’s the dudebro Rex?”

“Idunno. Was about to call him.”

“Holy shit,” he exclaimed, “that logo looks fucking awesome up there,” his eyes marveling at the large banner upon the wall. “Hella dope.”

“Hella dope,” Tokyo repeated, nodding slightly.

“Oh, yo, did my parts come in? I need you to build my computer, Tokerino.”

“Um...I think they did. Ask Simon.”

“Coolio. Where uh...where Shelly?” he asked looking around aimlessly. Tokyo pointed to where the old man went before putting his headset back on and returning to his phone.

“T-y, t-y,” Panda responded heading down hall. He pulled his luggage and walked past an empty room. At the end of the hall were two doors, Shellshock stood in the room to the right, and to the left was a room with cardboard boxes.¹

“Harold and Kumar decided they’d set up the beds, so you’re in luck.”

“Wait, the fuck? Rex is Indian?” Panda set his burden against a wall.

“Well no, but Geoff isn’t Asian, either.”

“Mhm,” Panda realized, “yeah, yeah, I get it. Smart-man-Shelly coming up with them nicknames. Is it just me or is it, like, really hot?” he asked, again blowing air out of his mouth.²

“No, your body’s just getting used to the warmth again. I asked you if you wanted to borrow my jacket. You’d better not get sick, I’m paying you to play League, not Let’s-eat-all-of-Shellshock’s-chicken-soup.”

“Shelly, please. I wasn’t even cold.”

“If you say so. But if you *do* start coming down with something you let me know immediately.”

“Cool beans. Oh yeah, and did my parts show up?”

“I think everything except your RAM. It might show up later today or tomorrow.”

“Aww, dude. Fucking sorrows.”

“I’ve got some old computers lying around if you need one for the day.”

“Nah it’s cool. I got my own craptop. Played some old games on the plane.”

1 There were large, brown cardboard boxes with mailing stickers still stuck on them. There were tall boxes, short boxes, tiny boxes, and brown cubes of all sizes. Some were empty and flattened and laid upon the floor, others were off to a corner, still sealed or opened with their contents still inside.

2 his cheeks returning to their light-brown complexion.

“A craptop is at least better than nothing. And before I get back to my endless emails,” he started toward the door, “let me show you where you’ll be sitting.”

“Oh, and your stuff’s in this room,” he paused between both doors, “just look for the packages under your name.”

A fusillade of keystrokes filled the room as Crescendo’s lightning fast fingers tapped against her keys. On the far side Tokyo scrolled down the page on one of his monitors, his chin resting in his palm and elbow balanced on his armrest.

“So I’m pretty much having you guys seated according to the lineup. Tokyo’s on the far left,” he pointed, “then Rex, then you,” he pointed to the empty desk at the center, “then WildCat, and lastly Crescendo. There’s an ethernet cable under the desk, and you should have all the outlets you need. And that about covers it. Any questions?”

“Mmm. Nah, everything looks p-good.”

“Alright. If you need anything let me know. I’ll be in the other apartment in...I guess the equivalent of your room. If you don’t find me there, call me, text me, email, whatever you can think of.”

“Got ‘em, coach.”

He retrieved his backpack from his room and brought it out to his desk which lay beneath the Final Frontier banner.

“Yo, Panda,” Tokyo yawned lifting the headset off his right ear and turning around to face him, “Crescendo wants to duo with you. You have a computer you can play on or you wanna use mine? Cuz even if you have all your parts it’ll take forever to do updates.”

“Egh. I might have to use yours,” he chuckled, pulling out his old computer from his bag. It was covered in colorful stickers and written on with black markers. “Wanna trade?”

“No, I’ve got some extra laptops in my room.”

“Ooh, okay. Is this the PC you put together?” he pulled out a wired mouse.

“Yeah, in high school. It’s pretty old now.”

“Your parts aren’t in yet, Harold?” he pulled out a black and white plushie from his bag and placed it to the left of his laptop’s screen.

“I didn’t really know if I wanted to build a new PC until a few days ago, so I’ll probably have to use this old thing for about a week. Is the panda’s name Harold?”

“Nah it’s your name. Didn’t Shelly tell you?”

“No.”

“Oh. Welp. Oops,” Panda laughed softly.

“Wait, what? Why’s my name Harold?”

“Spoilers. I can’t say. Ask Shelly.”

“I don’t think I wanna know, now,” he yawned again. “Anyway, don’t change my settings, pleaserino, Pandarino,” Tokyo stood up and hung the headset on the chair’s armrest, “I always dread having to reconfigure them.”

“Yo, man, how *tall* are you?” Panda got up placing his bag on the chair, walked towards the titan and raised his hand above his head to measure the difference.

“I don’t know, like six-something.”

“I could probably put the panda on my head and still not be tall enough.”

“Maybe. By the way d’you guys want anything to eat? George was at 7-11 and didn’t invite me because I was apparently ‘asleep.’ The bastard.”

“Ooh yeah. You know those gummy fruit things? One of those would be boss.”

“Blue?” She shook her head and continued on with her rapid typing.

“Alright, so expect your gummies in a bit.”

“T-y, t-y. So, yo, the hair *is* inspired by Miku Hatsune, right? Or is it, like, a blue version of super saiyan?”

(11:58) Crescendo: If it DID come from Miku would it make a difference? :p

“Eh, maybe.”³

Mmmmmmmmmmm.

I’ll keep it a secret for now then.

“Real. Am I going mid or we going bot?”

Duo bot.

(11:59) Crescendo: I want everyone to see how I’ll be peeling for Wildcat

and how I initiate/retreat/whatever else

So you can see how I manage my skills, mana

CC, activatables and everything else

Maybe you can use my timings with yours

“I can dig that. Also, why you don’t talkerino? I see you have a mic,” he turned around to confirm. “Yeah, I *seen’t* it.”

lol

I don’t talkerino because I’m mute.

No talkerino foreverino.

Is that how you do it?

“Wait, seriously? You trolling me?”

(12:00) Crescendo: Noperino.

“Hmm. Oh shit. He’s still logged onto Twitter...what would NeoTrollkyo do?”

He’s going to kick your ass :x

When he finds out

Is what he’s going to do

3 Over Teamspeak his voice was accompanied by the barely audible low chirping, hissing, and static sounds picked up by the mic, and drowned by the cables, and distorted by the internet.

[00:05] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:05] Ikshi (Zed) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

[00:10] Crescendo (Braum) purchased Warding Totem (Trinket)!

“Oh jeez, what is this music Tokerino listens to? It’s *soooooo* serious. He needs some Nujabes in his life.” Panda clicked and scrolled around before continuing, “Oh. He *does* have Nujabes in his life. He really needs more Metaphorical Musics.”

[00:20] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin) is asking for assistance

[00:22] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin): pandaaaaaaaaaaaaa

[00:25] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin): come

[00:25] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin): we invade zingy

[00:27] Pandango (Jinx): omw

“Oh shit, almost forgot my panda,” he lay the headset on the table, rolled the chair toward his desk and retrieved the plushie. He gently placed it to the left of the monitor before putting the headset back on.

[00:36] FFG WildCat (Lee Sin): leggo

[00:42] Meznir has drawn first blood!

[00:44] Howpro (Rumble): fck

“Oh shit, it’s the moment of truth.”

[00:50] Pandango has slain Meznir for a double kill!

[00:51] Pandango has slain coL Ikarus for a triple kill!

[00:51] Pandango is on a killing spree!

[00:53] [All] amp Espada (Veigar): gg

[00:55] [All] Pandango (Jinx): did you

[00:56] [All] coL Ikarus (Varus): yes

[00:56] [All] coL Ikarus (Varus): lol

[00:57] [All] Pandango (Jinx): flash into my w?

[00:57] [All] Pandango (Jinx): lol

[00:59] [All] Pandango (Jinx): want to do that again in 5 mins?

[01:02] [All] Pandango (Jinx): consider it a date :3

[01:08] [All] coL Ikarus (Varus): ff

[01:12] [All] coL Ikarus (Varus): no mas pour favpr

17

Static Field

“C’mon, man, I know you’re trolling me,” Panda squinted, looking for some inkling of truth in her eyes.

Nope, she mouthed, quickly shaking her head before typing into her tablet: no trollerino.

“So you went through all of school without ever talking?”

She nodded.

“That’s so bullshit,” Panda clicked his tongue. “You never had to do any presentations or stuff like that?”

Teachers just made me write papers instead. I hated doing them. :(I would have loved to do presentations if I could.

“Hmm. How’d the teachers know you couldn’t talk? Doctor’s note or something?”

Kinda. Physical exams revealed I had no vibration from larynx. Therefore I no talkerino.

“Mmm,” Panda nodded. “You ever wonder what it’d be like to talk?”¹

She inhaled deeply, her eyes looking downward, and slowly sighed out through her nose before typing: All the time, Panda.

“So Penny’s downstairs with WildCat,” Tokyo announced, removing his headset and launching himself up from his chair, “and he apparently forgot his keys,” his tone dipping. “What a dummy.”

He tapped at his pockets as he walked toward the door. Turning the doorknob he faced back, “And I’m in queue. If it pops, someone try to get me Renekton.”

“Got ‘em, coach” Panda gave him a thumbs up and spun his chair to watch Tokyo’s monitor at the other end of the room.

Walking down the hallway toward the elevator, his gaze remained on his phone. He scrolled down the page to picked up where he was reading on his computer: rumors that a player was retiring, rumors that another North American team would import a foreigner, rumors that a beloved player has been benched from his team, and he read a continuous, ever-growing list of rumored roster changes as teams learned to adapt to their ever-changing ecosystem.²

Tokyo entered the elevator after the doors opened. He tapped the button for the ground floor as he continued reading the rumors and the tweets and the discussion.^F

1 Across the room Tokyo’s phone rang. He answered with short, quick replies.

2 And those who failed to adapt, who clung to antiquated philosophies, who followed the ideas of their predecessors without challenge or critique, who were satisfied with the structures and systems in place, faded away. Died out. And rightfully so. And deservedly so.

Once at the apartment vestibule he opened the entrance door. Instantly, Shellshock held a bag towards Tokyo.³

He sighed in his throat, his eyelids slightly lowered “You...you didn’t forget your keys *did* you?”

“I did. But since you’re here,” Shellshock inched the bag close to Tokyo.

“I hate you, dude.”

A long-jawed kid in a black sweater stood beside Shellshock, his eyes bouncing back and forth with the interaction. If he were to stand on his toes he would almost be as tall as Shellshock, and he would almost be tall enough to reach Tokyo’s shoulders.

“Hey, Tokyo,” the kid chirped, his hands tightly gripping the handle of his luggage.

“Oh, hi,” Tokyo droned his usual introduction, “don’t trust this guy,” he gestured to the old man with the bag, “he’s a scumbag. Worst boss ever.”

Shellshock snickered, “A bad boss lets you play games at work?”

“No. The kind that adds new things to my job description without telling me in advance,” Tokyo mumbled. “Also I’m in queue, le’s go,” as he began walking back toward the elevator.

“So finally,” Shellshock paused to adjust his grip on some bags, “the team’s all here. Guess that means we’ll start scrim soon. Once we set up your PC, that is,” he turned to address WildCat. “And now that everyone’s here,” they boarded the elevator, “it’s time you see what was in that box.”

“The puppies are probably dead by now. You didn’t put air holes for them.”

“These don’t require air to live.”

On the way up Tokyo noticed WildCat kept stretching his fingers, the skin on his hand tightly hugging and copying the shape of his bones. His fingers would twitch and toy with the air, he would pull them and make them crack, and he would make them jolt like spider legs reaching for some prey.

He would clench his fists and squeeze his fingers tightly, and then he would relax his fist and spray and shake the stiffness away.

“So—we’re floor six,” said Shellshock stepping off, “and we’re six-three and six-four,” as he started off in the direction of the apartments.

They walked the brightly lit hallways, painted a clean, milky white, and again Shellshock explained what was housed in each apartment, stopping outside door 63.

Tokyo turned the doorknob and in a heartbeat Panda’s voice rang loudly, “Kitty!”

When he opened the door they saw Panda and Crescendo sitting in their chairs, wiggling their fingers, arms extended way above their heads with silly grins stuck on their faces.

“Ehh, hi,” WildCat whispered.

Rex turned his head just enough to lay eyes on the latest arrival, “Aww yeah, the legendary WildCat in the house.” He then quickly turned his focus back to his game.

3 The streetlights across the road lit up in unison, followed by the streetlights outside the building, and finally the lights attached to the outside of the apartment.

“Wook at the wittle kitty,” Panda cooed as he dashed across the room.

“Heh, hiya,” he said again softly.

“Oh shit, we have the same glasses?!” Panda exclaimed, pecking his face far forward to take a closer look.⁴

Their lenses were wide and high enough to mask their eyes, and the frames were thin, black, rectangular with curved corners.

“Umm...maybe...these glasses are OP?” WildCat asked, his shoulders shrugging. Tokyo and Shellshock began moving the newcomer’s belongings into the vacant room.

“Then we gotta duo, Kitty. Gotta mess up some kids.” Panda petted WildCat’s head but quickly retracted and yelped, “Okay! Damn, Pikachu, calm down.”

He giggled with a wide grin “Dude, that’s so troll. This sweater’s been giving me static shocks since I got off the plane, too.”

Panda again reached for WildCat’s hair, ready to pull his arm back as if the shock would lunge out and bite like some feral beast. Just before touching his hair Panda heard a crackle, and again retreated his hand.

“Ow,” he giggled. “Yo guys,” Panda yelled, “bring the Pokédex. I think I found me a new breed.”

A smiling Crescendo joined Panda in attempting to dodge the electric bites, and they found his sweater also gave off shocks. WildCat tried to block their hands, and in doing so he felt the shocks in his own hands.

“Stop, guys! Stawp!” he hissed. In a brief moment of peace he rushed to take off his sweater,⁵ and he flung it onto the kitchen counter.

“No! Dude!” Panda groaned. “Now Professor Oak’s never gonna believe me,” his lower lip hung out and drooped downward.

Crescendo’s furtive hands sneakily reached for the electric hair again, she quickly jabbed at it only to receive a tiny volt. In defeat her shoulders sunk and she mimicked Panda’s face.

“Wha happened?” Tokyo’s voice vibrated as he returned.

“Kitty was Pikachu for a while. He took off his magic sweater, though,” Panda pointed at the sprawled clothing on the counter.

“Isn’t Pikachu a mouse?” Tokyo asked, reaching for WildCat’s hair. His hand landed without incident, and he rustled the hair before turning to look Panda in the eyes.

“Well duh,” Panda scoffed. “But we’re not gonna call him Electabuzz. It ain’t cute.” He walked over to the counter and touched the fabric, again pouting in defeat.

“Yo!” Tokyo directed to a hidden Shellshock. “Wherefore art thou not bringing the box?”

“Box? What box?” Panda raised his eyebrows and held his lips out.

“If you show WildCat his room I’ll go get it,” he declared, his head poking out from the door.

⁴ WildCat leaned back to leave space between his face and Panda’s.

⁵ the static ripping off sounding like quiet velcro to Crescendo

“Ooh, I got it,” Panda volunteered and he bolted into the room, WildCat walking normally after him.

“Awesome, now go get th—” Tokyo noticed the big, red Play button at the top of his game’s client. “Panda, what the fuck, man? Did you miss my queue?”

“Oops! Sorry, Tokerino!” he yelled before continuing to talk to WildCat.

“Welp. He’s messed with my mouse sensitivity and now he didn’t accept my match. Remind me never to trust Pandarino agai—” his eyes fell on the panda plushie. He peeked warily in the direction of WildCat’s room, then quickly grabbed the panda from the desk⁶ and disappeared into his own room.

“So you’re gonna sit right over here,” Panda pointed to the empty desk between his and Crescendo’s.

“Tch, one bad play,” Rex told his monitor, taking his hands off his mouse and keyboard, “all it takes is one mistake and then everyone’s too afraid to fight them. Aw well,” he took off his headset and stood up, “that’s just the nature of solo queue.”

“Hey, Rex,” WildCat said, placing his laptop on his desk. He picked up the set of keys, and Panda instantly answered, “Yeah, those are yours.”

“Sup, Kitty,” Rex held out his fist as always, WildCat quick to respond. “I gotta see you play, lil dude. I don’t—” he paused and dropped his sloppiness to mimic Tokyo, “I haven’t a clue how you have managed to claim three slots in Challenger.”

“You could just watch VoDs of my stream,” WildCat chuckled.

“I could,” Rex responded, “but I can’t see how your hands work on the mouse and keyboard.”

“Ehm. Well that new account I was working on a few weeks ago is Diamond II right now. I...guess maybe I could play a game?” he asked them while he hooked up some cables to his computer.

“Do it, do it,” Panda chanted. He dropped onto his chair, still next to Crescendo’s desk, rolled it right next to him and reclined all the way back. Crescendo grabbed her tablet and rolled her chair between theirs, her feet on the chair with knees level to hold her tablet in place while she typed.

“F’only we had some popcorn.”

“Then let’s buy some next time,” Tokyo suggested emerging from his room. “What’s going on?” he asked noticing the team huddled around WildCat’s desk.

“Gonna watch Kittychu play. Get your chair, Tokerino,” Panda beckoned.

Shellshock reentered the apartment with one arm hugging the parcel, “Alright, Christmas came early. And twice since you all needed computers.”

One hand dug into the box as he approached the crowd, “I’m sure you’re all wondering why I’ve gathered you here today.” He pulled out an orange book and placed it flat on WildCat’s desk.

“*The Art of Learning*,” he announced.

“Course material?” Tokyo asked.

6 it always sat to the left of Panda’s monitors

“Yup.” He dug into the box again and pulled out a red book and placed it on top of the other, “*Playing to Win*.”

“I can’t read, ‘member?” Rex asked.

“Have Geoff read it to you.”

“*Really?*” WildCat directed at Rex.

“Poor George. He managed to graduate high school but still couldn’t read. Luckily they accepted him for that eSports scholarship.”

“*Ob!*” WildCat chuckled. “So troll, Tokyo.”

“And lastly, but *most* importantly,” Shellshock emphasized, “by that I mean I want all of you to read this one first,” he pulled out a thin, white volume, “*The Art of War*.”

A snap echoed through the room. They turned to Crescendo, who was carefully inspecting her tablet’s screen and combing it over with the tip of her nails. She looked up smiling weakly, her forehead glowing bright red, the rest of her face following. She showed them a thumbs up and quickly looked down to attend to the tablet’s care.

“So make sure you cover *Art of War* first and foremost,” he repeated, again digging into the box to distribute copies.⁷ “And now that you’re all here: we’ll start scrim next week, either Tuesday or Wednesday. Two matches against Collateral. Best start practicing,” he advised before he took the empty box to the box room.

“Quick, Kitty, get in game so we can do the ‘learnings.’”

They sat and waited until a game was found. The five of them cluttered around the the young legend to watch him play. And each of them paid attention to something different. Some watched his hands, those dormant fingers that hovered over the keys and then suddenly sparked to life, prancing and performing on the mouse and keyboard.

Some observed his eyes, trying to track and understand what he valued most and how he used vision and the team’s information to move around the map. Somehow, somehow, he was always able to keep maximum distance from his foes, max distance down to the pixel. The savant was untouchable, on another level, as if he were surrounded by an electrifying aura.

He made it all look easy, down to the way he farmed. As if he and the game were one. If ever he missed some gold it was because he had dodged a skillshot or because he had helped his support kill a freshly placed ward. He understood and controlled the rhythm of the game, smoothly moving left, right, left, right, striking at precisely the right moment. And some were convinced he could play perfectly if blindfolded.

He made it look easy, and now it was his job: a job that hadn’t existed a decade ago. A newly created job that existed only because few were willing to take the risks.

He made it look easy, and professionals were paid to make it look easy.

⁷ When Tokyo received his books he opened to a random page and breathed in the new book smell.

18

Focused Resolve

“*Gab!*” Panda’s loud, shrill shriek pierced through the apartment walls, “*help* me, Rex! *Help!*”

- [31:30] [All] Gadot (Vel’Koz): LMAP
 [31:32] [All] 5prax (Miss Fortune): olololololol
 [31:33] [All] Tails92 (Thresh): XD waht the fuck
 [31:34] EgoPot (Syndra): woooooooooooooow
 [31:36] [All] Gadot (Vel’Koz): wtf was that panda?

Rex chuckled while responding, “Why’d you even Flash in?”
 “I din’t think there’d be *four* in there!”

- [31:53] [All] Pandango (Zed): who put four pelpe there? go bot you fucks
 [31:56] [All] Pandango (Zed): baron control isn’t imrpotant
 [31:59] coL Typhergus (Malphite) signals that enemies are missing
 [32:00] coL Typhergus (Malphite) signals that enemies are missing
 [32:03] [All] DeusRex (Elise): Dis guy
 [32:05] [All] DeusRex (Elise): Tactical genius. You huys should listen to him
 [32:08] [All] Gadot (Vel’Koz): we have cheat codes
 [32:11] [All] Gadot (Vel’Koz): 100% vision on panda
 [32:15] [All] Pandango (Zed): omg
 [32:25] [All] Pandango (Zed): 9x repot for hax pls

“Game almost done, guys?” Shellshock asked as he watched over their shoulders.
 “Tch...maybe another ten or so minutes?” Rex guessed. “When’d you even get here?”
 “Just now. WildCat’s up so we can get this meeting done once you’re out of game.”
 “Sure thing, bosserino,” Panda replied, his eyes and attention still on the game.

The clicking of mouse clicks and clacking of mechanical keyboards continued while the game went on.

Tokyo scrolled through various pages on his computer, pages filled with news articles, forum discussions, Wikipedia entries, and academic essays.¹ A handful of books were stacked on his desk, including the books he had received the day before. He sat and read in silence as music played through his headset. His left elbow stood on his chair’s armrest and he pressed his thumb against his teeth while in deep thought.

Having just brushed his teeth, WildCat made his way to the small kitchen and poured himself some milk and cereal. He brought it over to his desk and turned his attention to Panda’s screen as his laptop slowly turned on. Panda’s loud shrieks of

1 He had numerous tabs opened on his browser. Some were opened some days ago, others were opened weeks ago, but he intended to read through all of them. Eventually.

excitement and terror pierced through even the loud internal crunching of cereal. When his computer came to life he opened up a browser and navigated to a stats website. But rather than viewing the stats of North American players on North American servers, he switched to the stats for Korean servers and Korean players. He found the highest ranked player who was currently in a game and he spectated the game.

About half the globe away some player much like himself was also sitting behind a computer. And this player clicked and tapped on his mouse and keyboard and played the very same game. But his stats were far superior, his technique more advanced, and he was a player respected and praised all around the world. Even as the highest ranked player in North America he still had much to learn, much to do, and much to improve on.

And he knew that.

And he accepted that.

In spite of all his accomplishments up to this point, there was still much more he had to do in order to be the best. And he knew he could never grow complacent or rest satisfied with the way things were, not if he wanted to be the best.

“Welp, GG,” Panda announced.

Rex exhaled a chuckle, “That fuckin’ Flash at Baron, man, I don’t even.”

“Bah!,” Panda brayed, “Woulda worked if there weren’t three guys there.”

“Shoulda just warded,” Rex stood up, stretching his limbs in all directions “could’ve won that one so easily,” his voice a higher pitch as he stretched and sighed of relief. “Anyway, meeting time,” he picked up his phone from the desk and slid it into his pockets before making his way to the door.

“Oh yeah,” wide-eyed Panda jumped from his seat, “almost forgot.” On his way out he yelled out to the rest of the team, “Le’s go, duderinos!”

Crescendo sat on a sofa silently reading one of the books Shellshock had assigned. She held the book in her left hand and she kept her right hand near her tablet ready to jot down ideas and notes.

One by one the rest of the team entered the apartment and they took a seat on the comfortable, cloud-soft sofas. While waiting they played with their phones, sliding their fingers up and down and tapping at their screens.

Shellshock entered the room glancing at his watch, then took one peek at the team and declared, “Alright, guys, phones away. So first off,” he began, “I just wanna reiterate some ground rules. So far this hasn’t been a problem and I don’t want it to *become* a problem either: take care of your own dishes.” He opened his laptop, quickly peering at the screen, and tapped at the touch pad before looking back at the players. “It sucks when five peoples’ worth of dirty dishes pile up and someone has to do all of them. Let’s avoid passively hating each other over simple chores.”

“Along those lines,” he continued, “please keep your desks clean and don’t leave garbage lying around. I’ve seen my fair share of gaming houses and some are just

absolutely atrocious. So in short, clean up after yourself. Let's try to value our civilization."²

Shellshock tiptoed closer to the television mounted upon the wall and pressed a button at the bottom. "Now, I think it goes without saying, time's *not* on our side. We've got *very* limited time and I'd like us to make as much use of it as possible. So I kind of want us to skip through the awkward phase of you guys being too shy to give constructive criticism to each other. That said, I don't want you guys be dicks to one another but please, please, *please* talk things out as much as possible." He paused a bit to look everyone in the eye with a solemn, solid face. His voice was deeper than usual, and he spoke far slower than when he was joking around.³

He continued, "A good team articulates their thoughts well and works through their problems to fix them." He paused again before continuing in his stern, slow voice, "If we *don't* talk these things out we're not gonna get any better and we're just gonna be wasting our time."⁴

"So let's try to value our time as well. Also talk to me about *any* problems you have. Communication is key both in the game and out of the game. If you don't want to bring something up but still want to work on it, *talk to me*. I know you guys are going to get frustrated, I know you guys are going to get nervous and the pressure might get to you...I've been there before. Don't just let these problems go unattended because chances are they're not gonna go away on their own. I'll be here if you need me for anything, alright?"⁵

They attended to his every word, and every now and then their eyes gravitated downward as they thought further on his words.

"So," his voice lightened up, "moving on." He pressed a combination of buttons on the laptop and the television displayed his screen. "Here's a clip from Collateral against Ampersand this past split," he played the video, "tell me what you see."

Two groups of five characters danced in the river. They twitched and shifted, moving left, right, left, right, clumped together, slowly inching their way forwards or backwards. The blue marksman inched forward and fired projectiles at the mass of characters with red health bars, and the red marksman inched forward and fired in turn at the characters with blue health bars.

2 Panda kept putting his hands deep in his pockets, pulling them out and rubbing his fingers together, dropping tiny pieces of garbage onto the floor.

3 WildCat fidgeted with his fingers, stretched them out in all directions and cracked his knuckles which broke the silence in the room.

4 Crescendo flung her head to one side to keep hair from her eyes. When it failed she gently moved the blades of hair to one side with her hand.

5 Rex nodded in agreement to everything Shellshock said, the rhythm and pace of his nods increasing the more he agreed.

The red characters slowly, slowly, slowly pushed their way forward, and the five moved forward in unison. The blue characters slowly, slowly, slowly pulled back, and the five moved backward in unison.

Shellshock paused the video and asked, "So...what d'you see?"

Without any thought into the matter Tokyo instantly replied, "Collateral pressured Amp away from Baron just by using their higher range as an advantage and as a threat. Sun Tzu would say Collateral fought without actually engaging in a fight. Typical zoning and indirect combat."

WildCat was quick to jump in, "It also kinda looks like everyone's too afraid to fight in this scenario. Like, in this clip alone there are, like...maybe six instances where either team could've initiated. But no one pulled the trigger."

Shellshock nodded. "Now, let's look at another clip," he tapped a few buttons and a different video began playing on the large screen, "This is Samsung versus KTF. Tell me what you see here."

Two groups of five characters danced in the river. They twitched and shifted, moving left, right, left, right, clumped together, slowly inching their way forwards or backwards. The blue marksman inched forward and fired projectiles at the mass of characters with red health bars, and the red marksman inched forward, instantly the blue team attacked in unison and deleted that player from the map. The four remaining teammates fell one by one, and a few moments later their base crumbled.

"Ab!" Panda exclaimed at no one in particular, "In this play they just went right in."

Shellshock's eyes marked Panda, and waited a while, as if expecting further explanation. When Panda didn't offer one, he pushed further, "...yes, but *why*?" He paused again before continuing, "These two clips are practically the *exact same* scenario," he motioned at the screen with the back of his hand, "yet they play out *completely* differently. What *is* that difference?" He replayed the video.

Crescendo quickly typed into her tablet and showed it to the person sitting nearest. Rex read aloud, "They were confident and moved as one the second they saw the ADC just a tiny bit out of position." She pulled her tablet back into her hands and Rex continued with the idea, "I don't know what happened, but from what I can see, either a call was made or everyone just followed up on the initial catch really well."

Crescendo's rapid fingers again typed something, and this time she typed a bit longer before handing her tablet to Rex, "I could probably compare it to an orchestra. Different instruments provide a unique sound, in this case each role and each player brings something different to the table. I would think the shot-caller of the team would act like a conductor who keeps track of tempo and beat. When the conductor signals a movement the music flows together in perfect harmony."

"Harmony is actually a perfect word here," Shellshock nodded. "After a while music becomes so intuitive to our ears because we learn what notes blend well together. Teamplay is pretty much the same thing, you guys just need to play together so much that you'll orient yourselves to one another's play-style. Once we hit that point where

you five move and fight seamlessly, all that'll be left is a deeper understanding of tactical and strategic play. So there's *a lot* of grinding ahead of us, but again, our time is *very* limited."

WildCat mused some further idea, "I think we can also, like, see each team positioning themselves...systematically...or something. Like, if we look at any professional team when they're grouped there's, like, an invisible line they, like...avoid...or...I don't know if avoid is the best word, but it's almost like if they always try to keep some, like, precise distance from the other team." Shellshock played the video again trying to see what WildCat saw.

"If anything," Tokyo's slow voice vibrated in the air, "we can just relate that to formations. We tend to forget this shit when we play Solo Queue, but generally we can see similarities to actual combat strategies. If we think back at, say, the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and other warfare from that time period, generals..." Tokyo pondered a second for the perfect word, "...generals *squeezed* out as much...*efficiency*...as they could. The reason for linear formations, the reason for squares of infantry was to make up for the inaccuracy of muskets."

"So back to League," Tokyo's hands jumped back from history, "a good team makes very efficient use of distance and range. What Kitty said about 'systematic' positioning just comes from practicing together, knowing how we'll move as a team, and making very efficient use of our 'formations,' depending on what champions we're playing."

"Yeah, like that," WildCat excitedly agreed with a wide smile on his face.

"The problem with that, however," Tokyo continued, "is a good flank could allow their assassins to take our damage out of the fight. And I guess this just goes back to what Simon was saying; we need to play with each other enough so that we'll be as coordinated as we possibly can, which will in turn allow us to easily and quickly adapt to problematic situations like that."

"So then we gotta do lots'a Duoing, right?" Panda figured.

"Yeah, *a lot* of Duoing," Shellshock emphasized. "I want all of you to Duo with everyone else at least five games per week, so even one game per day is fine. And if we can find the time I'd also like you guys to play in online stuff like Go4LoL since it'll be more suitable grounds for practicing against other dedicated teams. But of course that's..." he waved the idea away, "that's secondary to getting you guys on the same page. Once our micro-strategy reaches this...state of nirvana, where you're all thinking and acting as one, the next step's gotta be polishing macro-strategy. So again, there's a lot to work on."

He pulled out his phone, tapped at the screen a few times and slid his finger upward. "Last couple of things," he resumed, "I'll try to do as much coaching as I can without being too intrusive to you guys. I'll be around during scrimms for some real-time team coaching. Umm...I'm usually also swamped with emails and paperwork a lot of times, so I won't be able to coach twenty-four-seven, but I'll definitely try to stick to some kind of schedule so you're not just practicing on your own. And...and since I'm

just a mid-Diamond scrub I'm sure you guys won't need any individual or mechanical or lane coaching, but if you do just let me know."

"And the last thing was...uh..." his eyes gravitated upward to recall, "...Oh! Last thing was discussing a shotcaller. This is a role that's probably best bundled in with the team captain, but unfortunately Crescendo won't be able to do shotcalling for us. I'm thinking that after some scrimms we'll probably have a better taste for who'd be suitable for the role, so Crescendo, we'll talk more about this in the future, alright?"

With a little smile on her face she threw him a quick thumbs up.

"Wait, why can't Crescendo do the shotcalling?" a baffled WildCat asked.

"Blue's muterino" Panda quickly quipped, "and can't talkerino,"

"Wait...really?" WildCat asked leaning forward to see her response.

She held air in her mouth and puffed up her cheeks, coyly nodding to confirm.

"Ob," WildCat exhorted, "that actually, like, explains your stream and everything."

In jest she held out her tongue at him.

"And," Shellshock sang as he peeked down at his watch, "last, last thing. Gym's downstairs in the basement. I don't just want you guys sitting in front of the computer all day. *At least* an hour a day go run on the treadmill or play some basketball or soccer or something. I need your bodies fit so your minds are fit, alright?"

"Tch, then you gotta play with us, Shelly," Rex suggested. "Can't expect us to play evenly with five."

"Yeah, sure. Just let me know in advance and I'll crush you kids one v five," Shellshock replied with a cocksure smile.

"Ob!" Panda hollered with raised hands, "Shelly comin' out with hella trash talk. You gonna take that shit, Rex?"

"Aight, Shelly, I see how it is. You goin' down, old man," Rex replied leaning far back into the sofa.⁶

"We'll see, George," Shellshock snickered. "But back to serious mode, any questions or anything you guys wanna talk about before we head back to practicing?"

They shook their heads and sat in silence, and Shellshock softly proceeded, "Alright then, head on back and get to work."

"Sure thing, bossierino!" Panda exclaimed. He leapt from his seat and eagerly yelled out, "Yo, Rex, le's duo. Been wanting to test out some different rune and mastery set ups."

They all began for the door before Shellshock groaned, "Ugh, last, *last* thing. I wanna treat you guys to dinner tonight. It's the least I could do before I start pushing you really hard."

"Ooh, okay," an amused Panda cooed, "Gonna eat *all* the foods!"

"Be ready at around..." Shellshock looked at his watch, "eight or so."

"Alright, be ready at nine, got it, Shelly!" Panda yelled as the door closed.^G

⁶ Amid the exchange WildCat giggled, and Crescendo giggled silently.

19

Entitlement Generation

From within the offices of the highest skyscrapers the well dressed, well paid, well fed could overlook the city, still dormant and frozen in the blue light of early morning. In the comfort of their offices they reflected on the good memories and on the good things that came to them as a result of their hard work. They were given promotions and higher pay and private offices, no longer having to live the inferior cubicle life, and they were deserving because they had followed instructions.

But not only did they follow instructions, they were far better at doing so than their coworkers. The office walls were dressed in myriad awards and medals to demonstrate the fact. These were the men and women who deserved to be successful because they had worked for it. They worked for it all on their own, without anyone's assistance, without anyone's help. They were successful only through hard work and dedication, not because they accepted handouts from others.

During downtime they gathered around the coffee machine or the water cooler and discussed their lives as professionally as possible. They spoke of their past, of their younger days spent cramming material for an exam, of the smell of coffee and alcohol that their peers emitted during finals.

They spoke of the present, of how they aimed to work, work, work in order to climb up the company ranks, to make their family proud, to begin saving up little by little, because they were finally in the real world.

They spoke of the future, their eyes gazed toward their boss with admiration and they clung to the idea that one day that would be them. All it took was hard work and they would reach the top.

And they spoke of dreams, now that they were done with school they could do whatever they wanted. They could follow their dreams, dreams of working a nine to five at a desk in a cubicle. The American Dream. Because it was what everyone was supposed to do.

The sun rose golden and shone above the east coast, the radiant dawn cast out long rays of blazing zenith blades, and the behemoth buildings cast long shadows out onto the streets, like fingers eager to grasp and take anything and everything in reach. An endless river of cars flowed up and down the streets like rushing, rolling, splashing streams of currents too strong and dominant to resist.

An equally endless river of employees emerged out from beneath the ground. They traversed the close-quarter mazes from memory. And every day they walked the grime infested tunnels and the crowded halls underground, entering the city like rats and roaches.

And they *were* rats and roaches. They were born of a broken age. They were born in the entitlement generation. They were much too lazy themselves to work but they were so, so, *so* willing to leech off of those who *had* put in the work.

These parasites had found a way to make it their life goal to have everything for free. They wanted free schools and free medical care, free books, free homes, free entertainment, free everything. And if they knew how to do it, they would pirate it all because that way it would be free.

The moochers were much too obsessed and dependent on the technology their enabling parents had purchased. The young these days believed everything should be free, they believed they could live a life without ever making sacrifices, without ever working a fair day in their life. All they ever wanted were handouts and a free pass to an easy life.

Things were different in earlier years. We were successful today because we worked day in and day out, we worked that job we didn't want to work, we passed our classes without complaint because we knew deep down in our heart that a degree would be worth it. The degree would land us a well paying job and would provide us a better future and a better grip while climbing the company ladder.

Those who were too lazy to work did not deserve any compensation, because hard work is *always* rewarded. Those who claimed they worked hard and have not been rewarded have simply not worked hard enough.

The young today, they have it easy. And yet they complained about jobs and tuition nonstop. These young brats have always felt so entitled to everything, and yet they always, always, *always* wanted more. They were helpless, worthless, useless, and they were undeserving of any help, undeserving of any sympathy.

If *we* were able to make it through college while working a job and if we were able to eventually succeed as we have today, the young should have no problems. But all they ever did was complain. These slobs were so unwilling to work, but they were so willing to cry. *We* succeeded without any help from anyone. *You* have no right to complain.

And the youth today are the cancer causing everyone's problems.

20 Golden Age

In the swirling maelstrom of honking horns and rapid paced sidewalks, the well dressed, well combed, well behaved pedestrians made their way to work. They wore their suits and ties and slacks and blouses and were made to look professional, because that was the only way to get to the top. It was proven, it had worked in the past, and it was the final step to becoming a functioning person.

They walked the streets, shaded by the giant buildings of their employers, and they wandered into a forbidden world exclusive only to those who were intelligent. And they were no doubt intelligent, they were deemed intelligent by that degree they had earned. Their professors ensured they were ready for the real world. All that remained was that they should pay their dues.

They wandered the streets masqueraded in expensive clothing, driving expensive cars, always trying to impress their bosses and their colleagues. And they lived always in the shadow of the colossus. They went to school and they did what they were told to do, they did what everyone else would do. They did what they were supposed to do.

But they did not do what they wanted to do.

It was a golden age of entitlement.

It was a golden age of corporate entitlement. They felt entitled to cheap labor, free labor if they could get away with it. Everywhere you looked you could see it, cheap, free, abundant labor. It was simple business: explore, expand, exploit, exterminate.

Explore what will sell, mine their data, sell their data, sell products designed around their search results, around their search bubbles. Explore and harvest every resource possible.

Expand to more territories, go overseas if necessary, breach their phones and computers and find anything and everything we can use to monetize from them. Create better advertisements, let them know we have what they need: just buy some of these and everything will be alright.

Exploit them from birth, encourage them to become loyal customers to earn points, to earn exclusive offers. Look to maximize output while always aiming for the minimum possible pay.

Exterminate the competition and tell the world our products are better, they will be unable to tell for sure. Should we need to squash any internal dissent simply contact Human Resources, there are plenty of potential employees, that is why they are a resource, an endless supply, hire someone, anyone, it makes no difference.

The gushing, overflowing pool of unemployed is a dream come true: if one applicant refused to work cheaply, immediately a willing candidate would appear. All it took was for one person to cave and everyone else would lose leverage and they would have to settle for low pay.

It was an age of corporate entitlement to free art, free music, free articles, free photographs, because major companies were allowing artists to work on their passion. And they enjoyed their work, and that would be pay enough. It was a labor of love and the companies were oh so generous that they paid in exposure and business cards. But they were also paid in experience, everyone wants that. And it is required.

And yet when the economy took a hit, they did not know how to respond because the school had not taught that. To mask their fear they took it out on the young: told them to suck it up, to stop complaining. The degrees had taught them how to follow instructions, and fill out the paperwork. The degrees had not taught them how to adapt. And now they did not know what they were supposed to do.

They were taught to memorize and to pick one of four possible answers. All they cared for was earning a good grade rather than learning and loving to learn. Their knowledge was not stored in their minds, but written on their index cards, because grades were praised and that was the sole expression of one's intelligence.

Out of grief, not greed, jobs were shipped overseas to save money. But American jobs were not destroyed, they were simply relocated. Employees were let go due to budget cuts and a single person remained to do the job of two, three, four people, but would still be paid for the job of one person.

How conveniently they forgot who had helped them on the road to success. Every day they would drive to work on the roads built by workers and paid for by the working people all across the country. They had built a successful company and they were not afraid because they were protected by a police force and a fire department that had been paid for by the working people across the country. Ever since they were young there were people who wanted to teach and encourage them, and their contemporaries sought the said and yet were paid ill. How easily they had forgotten they were bailed out of bankruptcy because of the people's money.

And yet they claimed no one helped them be successful and that they did not take handouts and that only the young were entitled.

And the corporations were the cancer that caused the problem in the first place.

The young were pummeled into the ground with advice and with words of wisdom, they were told to get a degree, to get a job, as if minimum pay had inflated with time, as if the only solution for dealing with tuition costs were to go into debt, as if diminishing returns were a non-factor. The world was built by old money and old philosophy and old frameworks that were rusting and decaying and crumbling under its own weight in the face of rapidly changing times.

But the young lacked the resources, lacked the experience, lacked the options, lacked the representation, lacked the voice, lacked the power to do anything about it.

21

Ebb and Flow

From time to time, when business was no pressing matter, Shellshock would walk over to the apartment and spectate as the team practiced. When he would open the door, a shower of clicking and typing would reach his ears. The team would make the sound of rain, every input a separate drop of water tapping against his eardrum.

Though he would mostly see their backs he would still attend to their conversations. They always talked and joked and laughed together. They spoke of tactics and numbers and statistics. They traded advice, hints, tips, and pointers. Each of them wanted the other four to improve, and they did what they could to ensure they would be better players the following day.

Other than Harold and Kumar, the team had never met one another face to face, yet they already spoke warmly to one another as if they had been friends for years. They grew up to the same books, the same television programs, the same games, the same music, and now they shared the same goal.

He would stand behind them and watch them play, taking notes, jotting down each player's strength and each player's weaknesses. He would be there for them if they needed him, he would be willing to buy food for them or pick it up so that they would only ever think about and focus on the game.

When watching their streams he would see their eyes darting back and forth, he could see their reactions, he could see how they responded to everything. From their streams he could see their bright, glowing faces and he knew they were putting their all into the game and into the team. They were a mirror image of his younger and more competitive days. And in each of them he found remnants and pieces of himself.

And he understood full well that the curse of success was believing that what had worked the year prior, or five, or ten years ago would work in a newer age, and would bring success to a newer generation.

Only few people could ever nurture and raise and guide them as he was doing. And only few people could ever understand their motives and their work and their determination. And only few people could ever help them reach their potential as a team. And only he had provided them with the fertile playground they so desperately needed to achieve paramount success in a field that made mockery of all that had come before.

If Crescendo didn't type out her smilies, they would instead appear on her nimble face that seemed able to express every possible reaction possible with a keyboard. She would type out calls, type timers, and use all the pings whenever they were necessary. When viewers asked questions she would pull up Notepad, quickly type in her response, leave it on the screen a few seconds, and then drag it away. Her wandering fingers would constantly play with her hair; she would sweep at the blue daggers and

brush them to one side with the back of her hand. Whenever disappointed in her own play she would sink her head so that her hair covered her eyes.

At the top of her screen a sliding marquee of white text displayed the music she was listening to: "Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466: II. Romance" - Mozart. And she listened to everything under the sun, music in every genre, music in every language. If the beat invoked the need she would bob her head; different parts of her face, neck, and shoulders played different instruments and she would embody the music. Only when in a tense situation did she sit still and focus fully on the game while the tip of her tongue found refuge on her upper lip.

When WildCat streamed he would often duo with Crescendo. They would change their practice methods from day to day. Some days they would play champions with excellent synergy, other days they would play champions that were counter productive on the same team. Some days they played aggressively, other days they played defensively. Some days they would attempt to stay in lane as long as possible before they were killed, other days they threatened their opponents so strongly and so recklessly as if wanting to end the game the very next minute. His mouse movement was perfect. Every game. All the time. He somehow played the game perfectly.

He encouraged the rest of his team, and his duo partner, to intentionally play poorly, to intentionally place themselves into bad situations, into trying circumstances. This way they knew what to do and how to react to unforeseen problems. Having placed themselves in unfavorable positions hundreds of times in the past would better serve them in a real match with far higher stakes. He continuously apologized for not setting up a section on his stream to display music but he always told his viewers when they asked: "To the Top by Scattle, from the *Hotline Miami* soundtrack."

Panda would constantly switch windows between the game and his stream's chat. He was, by a wide margin, the loudest member of the team when reacting to the game. When he chased for an easy kill, or fled from near death, he cried out and yelled, his screams spilling into his teammates' mics and broadcasted on their streams. In-game he always fought down to his final hit point even if it meant risking the game. His mouse was also the fastest of anyone else's. In spite of the rapid movement he was as precise and accurate at WildCat.

Above his minimap he set a region from his other monitor to display the music he was listening to: "In the Waiting Line" - Zero 7. He would hum to the music "...Do you believe in what you see? Motionless wheel, nothing is real..." then he would attend to a difficult situation in the game and resume humming "...Nine to five, living lies, everyday, stealing time..."

Rex would rarely stream, but when he did he would thoroughly explain his movement. He had very specific reasons: he knew where the enemy was going, he knew why they were going there. He knew timers for all objectives, as if he had them warded all the time. He spoke of hypotheticals whenever he could, if the enemy mid

laner reached level six before his mid laner, the game was likely lost. If top lane kept up the pressure the rest of the team would be able to win the game 4v4.

Between games he would read manga, always up to date with the most recent translated releases before sending the link to the rest of the team. His music, like Panda's and Tokyo's, was displayed above the minimap: "Pokemon GSC Route 27" - Junichi Masuda. They all listened to game music, but the viewers were convinced that Rex's selection of game music was best.

It had become a common joke that no one would be able to tell if Tokyo's player cam were replaced with a picture. His face hardly ever reacted to the game, he hardly ever repositioned himself in his chair, and hardly ever told his viewers why he did what he did. Unless duo queued with someone else it was unlikely he would ever say a word. His face was frozen steel but every now and then a pixel would twitch and his chat would explode and begin forming conspiracy theories involving kappas.

Above his minimap the text read "Know Your Enemy" - Rage Against the Machine. In silence and with nothing other than blinks he played and listened "...Compromise, conformity, assimilation, submission, ignorance, hypocrisy, brutality, the elite, all of which are American dreams..."

And they practiced, practiced, practiced, from sunrise to sunset, working to hone their skills, to improve as individuals, to improve as a unit, to improve as a team.

22

Collateral Damage
(Working Draft)

Tokyo's phone rang for the second time.

"Can you steal?"

"Gonna try."

"Panda you got Flash?"

"Twenty seconds."

"Baron's at three thousand."

"Ready?"

"Goin'."

[42:14] **coL Ikarus (Kha'Zix) has slain Baron Nashor!**

"Fuck!"

"M'going on Sinik."

"Fuck, I positioned like shit."

[42:18] Crescendo (Lulu) signals to be careful

[42:20] **Sinik has slain DeusRex for a double kill!**

"That went well."

[42:25] **Sinik has slain NeoTokyo for a triple kill!**

"F'you die, that's game."

"D'you've Flash?"

"Nope."

[42:32] **coL Ikarus has slain WildCat for a double kill!**

[42:32] **Enemy team has scored an ace!**

[42:37] **[All] Miss Ink (Lux): gg**

[42:38] **[All] Crescendo (Lulu): gg**

[42:40] **[All] WildCat (Vayne): :(**

Defeat.

"Don't beat yourselves up, guys," Shellshock suggested. He stood behind the ring of desks, his eyes peering down at his phone. "Remember, they've been playing together for about two years. Just keep your heads up and learn from the loss. Also, Hoplite says they're still down for a third game if you guys are up to it."

Tokyo's phone rang once again. He groaned and exhaled loudly, "Let me just answer this before the next game." He began walking for the door, tapped a button on his phone's screen and pulled it up to his ear: "What?" he asked sternly as he left the apartment, quietly closing the door behind himself.

"Shelly, my butt's already sore," Panda whined, "I don't wanna get wrecked anymore." He began reaching out toward the left of his monitors, then suspended his hand in the air, "Wh...where'd my panda go?" He spun his chair, quickly shifting his

gaze around the room. He jumped off his chair and crawled on all fours under his desk. The cables underneath were too entangled so he lifted them, careful not to disconnect them.

To no avail, he sat back in his chair scratching his head. “Hmm,” he mused, hiding his upper lip in his mouth.

Crescendo spun around and waved her hand in the air to get his attention. When he finally looked over she pointed to his screen.

(17:39) Crescendo: You didn't hear it from me :p
Saw Tokyo taking it into his room

WildCat, leaning in on his armrest to read, commented “That’s so troll. Maybe you can, like, take something from his desk,” he quickly suggested, “and then, like, trade it for the panda.”

“Hey, s’actually a good idea, Kitty.” Panda leapt out of his chair, walked over to Tokyo’s desk and began scanning everything for something valuable.

“*That’s the point!*” a loud bang against a wall accompanied Tokyo’s roar, Panda jumped in his place, his shoulders jolting up.

All heads turned toward the door, all eyes turned toward Shellshock. Rex walked to the door and was ready to turn the doorknob before Tokyo’s voice again thundered through the walls.

“I did *everything* you said, everything every *teacher* said, and shit’s *still* fucked up!”

Rex’s fingers slowly retreated from the doorknob and into his palms.

“Your wisdom doesn’t mean *shit* if you’re *fucking wrong!*”

Rex sighed quietly and slowly walked back to his station.

“Wanna know what your wisdom and advice is worth? *Thousands* of fucking dollars in debt with *no* fucking job!”

He sat and began brushing a hand through his curly hair.

“Honestly? You *really* think *I* care what *you* think is a good idea anymore?”

They sat in silence, fidgeting with whatever they found nearest to their hands.

“You need to stop *glorifying* education as if there’s nothing wrong with it!”

In a low voice Shellshock spoke to the rest of the team, “Maybe we’ll end the scrim for today.”

“You don’t *get* to be disappointed. It’s time I become disappointed in *you!*”

They sat in silence, eyes staring at the floor.

“Just watch me!” Tokyo growled.

He reentered the apartment letting the door swing close on its own, while his hands finished removing the battery from his phone.

The team sat in their seats, Shellshock sat on the kitchen counter, and they were quiet. Their eyes followed Tokyo as he sat down and loudly dropped the phone on his desk, and they all sat still. He put his headset back on and the team’s faces were expressionless and they said nothing.

Tokyo let out a long, hard breath of air, and his voice returned to the normal monotony, “Let’s play.”

“Geoff, let’s just postpone the scrim,” Shellshock said in a low, calm voice. “How about we just chill for the rest of the day?”

With eyes still locked to his screen Tokyo took a long sip of water from his bottle. “I’m being paid to practice. Let’s practice,” his back still turned to the team. Everyone else continued sitting in silence.

Shellshock scratched the back of his head, “How about we talk in private about it?”

Tokyo scrolled through his Twitter feed, every now and then clicking the favorite button. He exhaled loudly, and hesitantly responded “Later...after this game.” He placed the back end of a pen into his mouth and began softly gnawing on it.

“You sure?” Shellshock urged.

“Yes,” Tokyo replied in heartbeat. “Now let’s play.”

The rest of the team sat still and sat in silence. Some of them kept their eyes on Shellshock, some stared at their monitors, but all of them sat in silence. After a while Shellshock hesitantly pulled his eyes away from Tokyo, turned and half-nodded at the rest of the team.

As with the previous games they ran down the draft phase openly discussing their bans and openly discussing their picks. The timers ticked down and champions were locked in. Tokyo continued chewing on the pen during the quick loading screen and the match began.

Bloodfury Renekton NeoTokyo	Nasus DeusRex	Xerath Pandango	Urfrider Corki WildCat	Pool Party Leona Crescendo
Ice Drake Shyvana coL Typhergus	Brolaf coL Ikarus	Bladecraft Orianna Miss Ink	Mafia Graves Sinik	Taric coL Theosis

They spawned and emerged from the Blue side fountain. From the bottom left corner of the map they moved as a unit into the dark jungle.

“Let’s go to their red,” Tokyo commanded in his lazy voice, “through top tri bush.”

[00:22] Crescendo (Leona) is on the way

Tokyo commanded they go toward the enemy Red, and as one they went.

They dropped the necessary wards and they sat, waited, patiently. WildCat and Crescendo backed. They would come, Tokyo assured.

And they did. They buff spawned and they fought with a one-man advantage.

- coL gets rekt
- SS: Been pushing you hard, take a break from League tomorrow, day in the city
- Optional chapter 22x at the end of chapter
- ^ Just notes for you guys so you’re not lost reading Ch. 23 :p

23

Patience and Fortitude

Although plenty of yellow-morning rays spewed in through the windows, the rough-white apartments lights illuminated the glimmering wooden floor and bounced back from the milky white walls. Some of them were accustomed to playing in the dark, but Shellshock, careful to monitor and upkeep the quality of the team, made it policy to have lights on and prevent eye strain. It was a strange thing he had encountered, that few people in this line of work took suitable measures to keep their eyes healthy.

Panda strolled into the room letting out a contagious wide-mouthed yawn.¹ Three desks and seats were vacant, and other than the team banner and a new poster on Tokyo's wall, the walls remained a blinding bare white.

"Oh snap, what's this thing?" Panda's cool, minty breath radiated the area.

On the poster's forefront was a fist held straight up to the air, a black tattoo of three chain links at the wrist. Above the image the text read "A man chooses" and below "A slave obeys." A signature in silver ink ran over the poster's glossy finish.

"Yo," Rex peered over toward Panda just enough to meet his eyes, his right hand still moving his mouse around, "you never played Bioshock?"

"Ehh. *Nu*. Who signed it?"

Tokyo froze a second, hung his headset around his neck and at snail's pace spun his seat to face Panda. Staring Panda in the eyes with his usual unwavering, blank stare, he slowly droned out "You really don't know who Ken Levine is?"

"Sh...should I?" Panda asked with wide eyes.

"Do you know who Neil Druckmann is?" Tokyo continued.

"Was he, like, a singer for a band or something like that?"

After a few seconds Rex chuckled at Panda's guess. "Geoff, you're last man standing. Bomb's near A Long."

Tokyo rolled his chair away from his desk. "Play for me," he told Rex. Turning back to Panda he continued, "Who's Shigeru Miyamoto?"

"Gimme your headset, you fuck!" Rex extended his hand as he rolled to Tokyo's desk.

"Real men don't need sound to win," Tokyo said dryly. He quickly turned back to Panda and "Who's Miyamoto?" he insisted.

"He made Zelda and Pokemon, right?" Panda asked with shifty eyes.

"Okay. So who's Neil Druckmann?"

Rex rolled back to his own desk, put on his headset and spoke into the mic. "Scumbag Geoff's testin' Panda on game developers."

"Wha!?" Panda yelled, "I don't know any people who make games."

1 He would have infected the others if their eyes and ears were at all aware he had yawned.

“Why not?” Tokyo asked sliding back to his computer. “Don’t you think you should know the people who create the art you enjoy?”

Panda squealed out loudly, “Video games aren’t *art*. They’re just people running around killing each other.”

“Panda,” Rex lamented, “may Geoff have mercy on your soul.”

“What’d I do?”

“What makes you say games aren’t art?” Tokyo asked, his attention still on his computer, and with intention behind every word.

“I mean, isn’t art supposed to be...uh...something...of expression? Something that starts with the letter M?” Panda mused.

“Medium of expression, yes,” Tokyo quickly spat out.

“Yeah, that. But no one’s expressing anything through games, right?”

Rex let out a delayed snicker, “Now he’ll never shut up.”

“You’d call—throwing Smoke Nade—you’d call music art, right?”

“Well yeah.”

“And you’d also call theater art, wouldn’t you?”

“Umm, I guess so,” Panda half-asked.

“You’d call damn near anything Shakespeare wrote art, wouldn’t you?”

“I hate Shakespeare!” Panda blurted out, “But yeah, my teachers said it was art, so I guess it is.”

“Really, Panda? You’re shitting me right now, right? You’ve gotta be.”

“*What?* What’d I say this time?” Panda cried, his arms flailing around wildly.

“Shelly, I dropped the bomb at B, time to go super tryhard,” Rex told his headset, “And I don’t think you can rely on Geoff.”

“*I’m here,*” Tokyo croaked into his mic, “Take the bomb and I’ll cover your ass, Simon. And throw a nade at fence.”

As Tokyo and Shellshock crouched around the map, Panda slowly and silently tiptoed away toward his own desk.

Tokyo noticed from the corner of his eye and called “Dude, I’m done with you yet. Get back here.”

Panda jumped the rest of the way onto his chair and protested, “Nope! Floor’s lava!”

“Ugh, fine. We’ll continue later,” Tokyo promised as he returned to the game. From his seat, the victorious Panda snickered through his teeth, hissing at short intervals.

Rex, Tokyo, and Shellshock moved around the brown and gray and dusty map carefully and coordinated. They called out areas and players and weapons whenever necessary, and changed up their strategy at a moment’s notice. They won shortly after,² Rex expressing “I don’t even know how we won that shit. You’re too heavy, Geoff.”

And Tokyo fired back “I haven’t played in forever, dude.”

2 The text on their screens reading “Terrorists Win”

“No johns, man.”

Tokyo stammered on a response, then waved it away with a “Whatever.”

Shellshock entered, immediately asking “WildCat up yet?”

“Nope. Prob'ly still sleeping like a baby,” Panda muttered. On his monitor a yellow crest with blue banners read “Your Turn” while a card was being drawn from a deck.

“Anyone know what time he went to bed?” the old man asked walking down the hallway. He knocked on the door twice, “Jason, wake up. We’re waiting on you.”

“Damn, man, I fucking suck at this game,” Panda groaned.

Rex, leaning over to get a better view suggested he “Should prob'ly clear the board first. Oh, and Priest is pretty annoying to be honest. Heals for days.”

“Soraka sucks.”

“Not this one.”

“By the way, Rex,” Shellshock began, “I didn’t realize it until we played just now, but you sound kind of like the guy from that ‘door stuck’ video. That’s not you, is it?”

“Oh shit, he kinda does,” Tokyo affirmed turning to face them.

“What video is this?” the perplexed Rex asked.

“Dude, it sounds just like you,” Tokyo said rolling over to Rex’s desk. “Search for ‘Door Stuck.’ Should be the first one if the years’ve treated it well.”

Grumbling quietly, Rex turned to look up the aforementioned video, if only to quell the commotion in the room. By now Panda had also joined the group of spectators around Rex.³

“*Ob* snap!” Panda hollered, his arms waving in the air, “That *is* you, Rex!”

“I mean, I guess it kinda sounds like me, but trust me, that ain’t me.”

“No need to be so modest, George,” Shellshock added. “It’s fine if you don’t know how doors work.”

“Q, q,” Rex said dryly.

“Y’know, looking at this video again,” Tokyo thought, “I never realized how well the animations fit in with the player’s voice. This could easily pass for a machinima if you take out the HUD and shit.”

“*Again* with animations, Geoff?” Rex wept with his voice.

“I know, I know, but still, the running and jumping and prancing around all really sell the video. Just goes to show good animations make a game look visually good regardless of art direction.”

“You plannin’ on making a game or something, Tokerino?”⁴

“No, I’ve just read a lot about game design. And speaking of, someone at Volvo worked on that character model and those animations, just like someone at Rito worked on Karthus and his animations. That’s hours of work. And someone spent the time working on game assets and music and then pieced it all together.”

3 With wild hair flattened in all directions WildCat slowly walked into the bathroom, wondering why a crowd had formed at the desks.

4 Shellshock slipped away toward the refrigerator to check how supplies were doing.

“Fshwa,” Panda waved his hand, “they’re not expressing themselves, though.”

“Sure they are. The kinds of characters they make and the style with which they make characters are definitely art.”

“I dunno, Tokerino, sounds like you’re hella reaching. Sounds hella sketch.”

“When we get back I’ll link you to Double Fine’s development documentaries. If that’s not enough to convince you games are art, then I’ll know for sure you’re trolling the shit outta me.”

Panda snickered silently with a wide smile on his face, “Okay, sounds fair to me.”

When the team was finally ready they departed, leaving behind the game, the gaming house, and all worries of work. They walked up and down the rank and file of the grid-like streets of the city and explored its many regions, and they talked to its many people of many cultures and of many languages. And the people were always open to talk, and they were always so readily friendly, and they all spoke a common language because their commas were profanities.

And away from home they forgot the troubles of the game as they ate food from all across the world that had somehow found its way to a tiny family-run restaurant in the middle of the city. They took pictures of their adventures and sent them to their parents and their friends, many of whom would most likely never see the city with their own eyes.

They posted some of their adventures on social media as well, and they were instantly flooded with responses from their fans and from other aspiring pro players, and from salaried pro players. While parts of the community were quick to respond negatively and harshly and critically, they also saw and enjoyed the parts of the community that made the struggle worthwhile.

When among the floods and tides and streams of pedestrians, they seamlessly blended into the fast-paced crowd that always sped in every direction accompanied with the tapping and clacking of old, worn soles. The team members native to the city taught the visitors the art of crossing at the red light, and the art of dodging the citizens that always sped through the streets. And all it took was awareness and timing and rapid calculation, all things that were necessary in their line of work.

While traversing the many places of the city few people recognized them, much to their surprise. The life and joy and smiles and excitement of their fans further encouraged the players. When they returned, they would put in even more effort than they had been if such a thing were even possible. They took photos together and signed any piece of paper they could find, and even in the middle of their busy day they were willing to support their favorite players.

The fans lamented the fact that they weren’t carrying their mousepads and their keyboards for the players to sign, but Shellshock promised he would set up a meet and greet in the future for an opportunity to do so. And everyone’s excitement grew again.

They visited one of the few surviving arcades in the city, and in a massive floor large cabinets were cared for and put on display like the antiques and treasures they were. The motley collection of games drew them in, and like the children they were they played and competed for hours. And try as they might, no one managed to break any of the high scores. Players initialed HAL and SEB and ASS had already claimed the top spots across multiple games.

But one of them managed to claim tenth place on the top ten scores, and the initials were aptly writ FFG. Some of them vowed to return some day to practice those games again and again and again to reach the top, for it was in their blood.

As daylight sunk, consumed and absorbed by the night sky that loomed overhead, streetlamps shone over the always-busy streets. Even as darkness covered the streets, the city did not relent and cower and return to their homes.

The zest and zeal of the city, and the business and work hours of some, persisted well into the night hours. Some forgot of their troubles in the loud and packed bars all around the city, while others sought refuge and comfort from their own troubles alone or with another in enclaves of art and entertainment. And some forgot of their troubles in their offices and forgot who they were because they worked and worked and worked, because one day they would be at the top, even if it meant killing themselves and who they were in the process.

And across miles of skyline, sporadic city lights from the highest skyscrapers danced and dazzled and sparkled, replacing the stars that ought to shine brightly in the dark sky.

"Anyway, before we head back I felt it'd be nice to visit these guys," Shellshock pointed at two lion sculptures resting atop a set of steps.

Panda, Crescendo, and WildCat ran up, skipping over a few steps, toward one of the lions. Tapping its head Panda confidently asked "This is, like, one of those things people rub to get good luck or something, right?"

"Mmm, not quite," Shellshock peered in Rex direction as he started up the steps, "You know, though, don't you, George?"

"Yeah," he replied lightly following behind him, "I forget their names but it was to inspire people during the Great Depression. It was LaGuardia, right, Geoff?"

"Yeah. Patience and Fortitude," Tokyo droned, walking ever so slowly behind Shellshock and Rex. "LaGuardia named them after the qualities he thought we'd need to survive, endure, and overcome the depression."

"Like the name of the airport Shelly picked me up!" Panda yelled excitedly, now sitting atop the lion with WildCat and Crescendo.⁵

"The very same LaGuardia," Shellshock confirmed.

"Honestly, despite how corny it may sound," Tokyo spoke softly, "we probably need patience and fortitude again ever since the 2008 financial crisis."

5 They took photos of themselves atop the lion, sticking out their tongues, making silly grimaces, and holding bunny ears behind one another's heads.

“I think I’d agree with that,” Shellshock echoed the sentiment. “Shit’s rough for some people. And I know our own plight isn’t as grave or dire as some other people’s situations, but even so, I think we could make use of a little patience and fortitude ourselves. There are a rough set of weeks ahead of us.”

When they grew bored of the lions they began for home, back to their training grounds, to once again engulf themselves in nothing but practice, practice, practice.

Practice, practice, practice with patience and fortitude.

24

???

:3

Part Three

Oh Mother...and here I figured you'd had enough of me by now. You could'a *undone* the Calamity itself...but instead you wanna stay? In a world like this? I've gotta admit, Kid...I ain't yet put much thought in that idea...of carrying on...with you here. We can't go back no more. But I suppose we could go...wherever we please. And if anyone's left out there...I sure would like to see the look on their faces...when we dock this thing right on their doorstep. Getting ahead of myself, though. I'm gonna need a first mate. What do you say?

– *Bastion*

Stat sua cuique dies

Stat sua cuique dies

Mæl is me to feran

Aleto men moi nostos

Aleto men moi nostos

C'est pour cela que je suis née

Kono michi ya

Yuku hito nishi ni

Kono michi ya

Aki no kure

C'est pour cela que je suis née

Ne me plaignez pas

C'est pour cela que je suis née

– *Journey*, [“I Was Born For This” - Translation](#)

...against this framework of competitive game design, we can understand why the marginal advantage gives a game flavor and excitement for both the player and observer. The marginal advantage not only provides the player with the joy of overcoming obstacles, of finding new and more effective methods of winning, but also allows a player to express himself, to have his own unique style. By exploiting the marginal advantage, the expert player is both a problem solver and an artist...

– Sean “Day[9]” Plott

Humankind cannot gain anything without first giving something in return. To obtain, something of equal value must be lost. That is alchemy's first law of Equivalent Exchange. In those days, we really believed that to be the world's one, and only, truth...

– *Full Metal Alchemist*

Years of Work

Extras

Matthew: Hello, Guy. That bump on your head getting any better?

Guy: Grr . . .

Matthew: You should know better than to try to sneak in when I'm sleeping. You're really easy to read, you know that?

Guy: I-I won't lose next time!

Matthew: Hey . . . Guy. Back in Sacae you were saying you wanted to become the strongest knight of all. Is that your dream . . . or your goal?

Guy: Huh?

Matthew: If it's a dream, then be done with it. There are plenty of dreamers with swords. Plenty stronger than you, plenty with more talent . . . To be the strongest, you have to beat them all.

Guy: I-I know that!

Matthew: What will you do when you hit your wall? That one opponent you'll never be able to beat?

Guy: . . .

Matthew: When you hit that wall that you just can't get over . . . That's when you'll realize. You're not special. You're a bit player, one of the masses.

Guy: . . .

Matthew: Most people give up then. They realize they're not young anymore, they don't have talent. They think up some excuse why they don't have to try. That's how they go on with their lives.

Guy: B-But I'm different! I won't end up like them! As long as I live, I'll keep fighting!

Matthew: I see . . . Then, best of luck, Guy. I'm rooting for you.

Guy: Eh . . . ?

Matthew: You're to become the best knight in Sacae, right? Then you'd best beat me one of these days. And you'll have to get stronger to do that.

Guy: Of course! I will!

— *Fire Emblem (Rekka no Ken)*

Logbook

A

From page 17

FFG > Articles > Competitive > LoL

A Global View of the State of eSports

on August 19, 2016

by NeoTōkyo

eSports is still an ever-growing industry that has gained traction at a global level, and has yet to show any signs of slowing down. Competitive gaming events around the world continue to draw in higher audiences both at physical venues and via online streams. Our competitive Dreamhacks and IEMs have confirmed that attendance has steadily increased about 170% per year since the rise of the streaming revolution brought about by organizations like Twitch and the long-gone Own3d. Even the non-competitive segments of Dreamhacks, Assemblys, Gamescoms, PAXs, and Comic Cons reveal increasing numbers over the years.

And while most people are now playing games on a daily basis, be it a few minutes of a simple mobile game on the commute to work, or heavily competitive games that require larger investments of time like your League of Legends, your DOTAs, your Starcrafts, and your Counter-Strikes, most of the best competitors still seem to root from Asian and European countries. With this information in mind, one has to wonder why American players are so far behind the best competitors from other parts of the world.

To find answers to some of these questions, regarding why North American organizations aren't quite up to par with Korean or German or French gaming organizations, we need to delve into the social constructs of these regions.

In eSports (and traditional sports to a far lesser extent) travel is notorious for jetlag, less practice time, and sometimes higher expenses. All of this is far more detrimental to gaming organizations that are still growing and lack the funds that Manchester United has access to. Perhaps the most brutal example of travel hurting a team (outside of American eSports) was in the Support player of the Russian powerhouse Gambull Gaming: before moving to their new "gaming house" their Support player could very easily have devoted an entire day to fly to the event. But their newly acquired office/gaming house hybrid in Saint Petersburg will no doubt make their lineup far stronger and perhaps even a worthy competitor against Korean teams.

For players in most other countries this is far from problematic due to population density and the gaming cafes of Europe/PC Bangs of Korea (even the arcades of Japan). These establishments are rare in America, especially when compared to Europe and Asia (for instance arcades hardly exist on their own, but are housed in malls or barcades or in other entertainment centers). Gaming cafes don't seem to be able to find a home anywhere in the states. Even in high density cities like my own

New York, a gaming cafe or arcade alone is unlikely to survive long, but in Seoul or Osaka, it could very well be a profitable business.

One of the reasons for this is the fact that in the American economic system, more time is spent outside of work compared to most Asian countries. A PC Bang in Seoul, or a LAN cafe in Shanghai, or a gaming cafe in Kilgis (or an entire building with four floors of arcade machines in Tokyo) that resides anywhere near a high school or university would likely see more profit and repeat business than in New York, Chicago, Phoenix, Austin, or even other cities that are home to game development companies like Double Fine or Valve, or content and machinima creators like RoosterTeeth.

While cyber cafes *do* exist in the states, they were not started up nor do they thrive off of the need to play multiplayer games in a social environment. This stems from the fact that individuals in America have access to purchase and build high-end computers for personal use, and access to high-speed internet at home. Income for a gaming PC or even worthwhile internet isn't necessarily as easy to come by in other parts of the gaming world (especially if you're a high school student). At the end of the day, there is no real demand for these places to exist in America, and therefore no one is supplying it or catering specifically for gamers like the rest of the world is: but it's for the very solid reason that it just wouldn't make sense in the US.

This intimacy and openness to social gaming (*real* social gaming, none of that Facebook crap) for a younger demographic sort of feeds into the professional gaming scene in perhaps two major ways. First, the more competitive and aspiring players have a place where they can hone their craft and practice and spar with others who have that same drive in them. Second, this close-quarters environment easily translates to the close-quarters living of Korean gaming houses.

Korean players are far more open to and more easily accepting of the idea of living and gaming, and essentially becoming a family since they are not as concerned with privacy or having boyfriends or girlfriends like more western players are. For most professional Chinese and Korean teams, the game is all that matters, and it's their job to win and show results against opponents who are also training with the same "all or nothing" mentality.

Korean players are fine with sleeping in one room dedicated to bunkbeds. They are fine with waking up at a designated time, working out at a specific time, practicing at the same time, dining, and making team strategies at the same time, because Korean culture tends to lend itself to that behavior, but in America everything is bigger because we just have way more space with bigger homes and bigger everything.

In a recent interview, OGN caster and Arcadia eSports coach Duncan "Odysseus" Mykles said of Korean culture that "...it's a culture that values what you've won and accomplished rather than compliments of your skills. I think most American and European players suffer from being told they're great and amazing players and they possess a certain skill, but then fail to win in a high-pressure environment. This may

lead to players subconsciously coming to terms with the fact that all that praise means nothing if you don't win anything. As a coach for Arcadia, I'm trying to bring the Korean infrastructure and training policies, while still being flexible with their American habits. But as I've seen in the Arcadia gaming house and as our LCS games have demonstrated, old habits do indeed die hard."

If Odysseus' theory is correct, and bringing the Korean training to an American team will improve it, we have yet to see this come to fruition. ARC have yet to play with the furor and precision that SK Digicom have for the past few years and I don't think the excuse "old habits die hard" will hold up if Arcadia doesn't completely demolish the North American LCS like Royale did last season. But perhaps I'm simply unaware that the other North American teams have stepped up their game and have also been applying Korean training methods. This may very well be the reason Arcadia, with Odysseus' Korean-inspired guidance, have yet to take North America by storm. But perhaps Arcadia will show vast improvement over the remainder of the 2016 season. Whatever the case, America has got a lot of catching up to do.

B

From page 19

Confidential – Team Final Frontier Gaming

Simon Penn NeoTokyo, It is with great pleasure that I write 14:00 (7 hours ago)

Hello Shellshock,

How soon would the team get together? Will this be soon enough that I can leave my current job and deal with other obligations?

Also, is there a gaming house, or are we just doing this online for the time being? Would I have to bring my own machine if there's a gaming house or will computers be provided for us? If you're going to be ordering computers, consider having George and I build them rather than having them sent directly from manufacturers. It'd save a considerable amount of money.

Also, are there any existing sponsorships or partnerships between FFG and other companies? If FFG doesn't have any sponsors, is there anything we can do right now or as soon as the team gets together to bring in sponsors?

When would we first be paid? How are you going to try to get Marwolf from Arcadia? Is there a particular sponsor you already have or have in mind that might sway his decision?

Are you sure it's a good idea to have Crescendo on the team, let alone be captain? He's never played at any venues with any teams and he doesn't even talk to people when he duo queues. Or do you have some interesting plan in mind?

How are we getting a spot for qualify for LCS? Did Hoplite tip you off on a way to get a team going? Are you going to be doing all the coaching and managing and stuff?

Let me know when you get the chance.

WITH QUESTIONABLE LOVE AND AFFECTION,
NeoTokyo <3

C

From page 28

Confidential – Team Final Frontier Gaming
Sat, Oct 8, 2016, 15:23 (0 minutes ago)

Simon Penn NeoTokyo, It is with great pleasure that I write Oct 7 (Yesterday)
NeoTokyo Hello Shellshock, How soon would the team g 21:14 (13 hours ago)
Simon Penn <penn@ffgaming.tk>
to me

Hey Geoff,

Once I have a full roster, which I would hope is next Friday at best, I'll start paying out funds for all travel expenses. If you're worried about any employment stuff, I'll get you settled in with funds anyway on Friday even in the event we don't have a full roster.

As for the gaming house, I actually forgot to mention it in my first email lol. I'm a bad. I will be renting the apartment across from mine and that'll pretty much be our gaming house. There's a gym on the first floors so we can stay in shape and everything. But I'll send out another email specifying this since I forgot the first time. And of course I'll give you further information if you'll accept my proposal.

If you want to bring your own computer that's fine. We can even upgrade it if you need some newer components, make it fast and shiny and give it some higher storage SSDs if you want. And thanks for the offer, we will be needing you and George to build PCs, or help the rest of the team if they don't know how to. I'll be giving everyone funds to build their own machine or purchase one off the market, whichever they want.

I'm not going to be talking about sponsorships and partnerships until we get the full team together in person because I think it's something that we should discuss openly and honestly. While I may be making the business decisions, I'm going to want you guys to be well aware of what's expected of you and whatnot. So there's that. Same for payment. The only payment that won't require being here is travel, but I'm sure you and George will just take the subway down here, so you'll keep the travel funds for yourselves. As for Marlwolf, if we get him, we get him. Otherwise, I have other players in mind.

I believe Crescendo can be an excellent component to the team. Just because Crescendo doesn't have any LAN experience or any team experience, doesn't mean I'm going to give up or reject a player. Having watched streams, I know there's something more there. I've already exchanged emails with Crescendo addressing some of these concerns, but I'm sure it'll work out just fine. I will indeed be doing all the coaching and management. I'll go over this when the team is together. Let me know if you have any further questions.

A TOKYO BY ANY OTHER NAME STILL HEARTS,
Simon

D

From page 46

Rows of monitors and desktops were set up all across the massive arena. Huge crowds and clumps and groups of people walked across the floor to get to booths for particular games or particular shows or to attempt to get in the mile-long lines for the restrooms.

They faintly heard the timbre of the crowds behind the firewall of their earphones and headphones. Among long desks, five people sat behind their computer monitors tapping and clicking at their devices and shouting commands into their microphones with focused, energized eyes darting across all directions of the monitors before them. On the other side of their monitors sat the opposition, which clicked and tapped and shouted and focused with the same fervor and precision.

“Nonono, come hide here. I pinked it. They don’t know.”

“I’m comin’, I’m comin’.”

“Do they still have Oracles?”

“I think they do. Either way, we should just jump on the squishiest person that comes in. Get ready. All ults up. Leona ult on Cait if possible. Otherwise Vlad. Flash out of Malph ult if you can.”

“Ready, ready.”

“Go, go!”

“Vlad! Vlad! Vlad!”

“Where’s my peel? My fucking peel?!”

“Exhausting Zed!”

“Zed no ult, ignite.”

“CD on Lux snare?”

“Four...three...”

“Zed GA popped!”

“Cait! Cait! Cait!”

“Forget Malph, Thornmail!”

“Zed up. I have stun.”

“Keep kiting, keep kiting.”

“We’ll come back for you after Cait. Keep kiting.”

“I don’t ‘ave Flash.”

“One more E on Cait, Rex?”

“Few seconds.”

“CC Zed and Malph.”

“Fuck! That god damn Q!”

“We’re fine, we’re fine. Enigma, push down mid.”

“Going.”

“Alright, we won that, three for one. Push mid and bot.”

“Zed forty seconds.”

“Back off mid in ten seconds.”
“Defend top after.”
“We keep going bot. Another wave.”
“Starting to B.”
“Baron timer?”
“Uhh...fifty-three forty-three.”
“Go as five after mid and top.”
“Leave bot?”
“If they show, B for bot. Otherwise we go through with Dragon—Baron.”
“Got Last Whisper.”
“My ult’s back up.”
“Should fight before Zed’s GA is off cooldown again.”
“Force Baron for it, though?”
“...Tokyo?”
“Uhh...”
“Baron twenty seconds.”
“Ult ten.”
“Yeah. Force it. Bait if we can. Smite up?”
“Yeah, it’s up.”
“They have Oracles.”
“Anyone gets hooked, we lose.”
“Start it?”
“Hang on, hang on.”
“Shurelya’s up if we need it. No Flash, no Exhaust.”
“Come ‘ere, come ‘ere.”
“Shurelya’s! Go!”
“Zed! Zed! Zed!”
“Yes!”
“Malph! No ults on him!”
“Few more autos.”
“Three...two...fuck!”
“Rex!”
“Baron!”
“Blitz! Blitz!”
“Mid, mid, mid!”
“Game! That’s game! I’ll tank, I’ll tank!”
“Fuckin’ GG!”

They removed their equipment, passed fist bumps and high fives and hugs around the team. They shook the hands of their opponents over the monitors, arms crossed in every which direction while plain faces rested on the members of the losing team.

“Good shit, Geoff.”

“Your last ult on Malphite probably saved us another ten minutes.”

“That was way closer than I expected it’d be.”

“We’ll work on it. Little by little.”

“You know what, dinner’s on me tonight. You guys deserve it.”

They unplugged their equipment, their headsets, mice, keyboards, desktops, packed it in their bags still discussing the game they had won. Team spirit flowed from one player to the other, ecstatic voices and large grins passed from one player to the next.

“Alright, so that places us in . . . third place?”

“For now, yeah. If we beat Oasis tomorrow, then we secure third for sure. That’ll also place us in a decent spot to get second, and in a far more favorable position to finish top three.”

Bzzt.

“More girlfriend troubles, Tokyo?”

“Umm, not really. ‘GG. Congrats on the victory. Bring the team outside for a bit before you guys leave.’”

“Ooh, fangirls?”

“Sure thing, Cristiano Ronaldo.”

“ . . . well don’t leave me flaccid. Who is it?”

“Damn, nigga, we gonna see if a bit. If he won’t say, just wait a few minutes.”

“But Rex, what if it’s the FBI. Maybe . . . they’ve found them *fields* of reefer.”

“*Reefer*? Is this nineteen seventy?”

“Quit dodging the question.”

“So what if it *is* the FBI? I know some guy in the FBI who owes me a few favors. Besides, I know how to deal. Those guys don’t know how we New Yorkers be.”

“Oh, *really*? So if you call this FBI guy right now, he’d do you a favor?”

“I’d have ta force the favor outta him, but yeah.”

“And what’s this guy’s name? Special Agent Handsome? Special Agent King? Or maybe Special Agent Mulder?”

“Nah. The dude’s name is O’Malley.”

“One of these days I’m going to expect to see this O’Malley guy.”

They bantered on and on, firing shots among one another, joking and poking and prodding and entertaining and flirting ideas. They walked past booths for games in development, booths for animes and comics and mangas with artists and voice actors signing posters and taking pictures with fans. They walked past large, packed halls filled with people wanting to hear first-hand the upcoming projects of film and television producers. Once they passed through the many streams of people and worked their way up the escalators with all their bags and luggage, they made their way out of the venue.

“Hey, there! Congrats on the victory against Cognition. That was a helluva game.”

“Thanks, dude. It was actually pretty intense towards the end.”

“Oh, this is my girlfriend, Lillian. We were wondering if you guys wanted to head down to dinner someplace. On me!”

“Yo.”

“Well, not quite the fangirls Moltzart was expecting, but maybe he’s down for this.”

“Don’t mind if I pick at your wallet for a bit, Shell.”

“Anyplace you guys have in mind?”

“There was a Denny’s down over somewhere a few ways. That’d be my choice.”

“Ooh, yeah. Craving that Denny’s myself, now.”

—

“So where exactly did you guys come up with your team name? I’m assuming Dunkin’ Donuts? Or was there also some Alex Rodriguez in there?”

“Pretty much just the doughnuts. It was Tokyo’s idea and it just kind of stuck.”

“I read an article on the ridiculously stupid rising costs of tuition for higher education and it kind of pissed me off. Like, the numbers just shouldn’t be what they are, but they are. So now it feels like everyone’s getting into massive debt for no real reason. And it’s something I’m stuck with, myself. I have no idea how I’m gonna pay off four years of undergrad while working a soulless, stupid desk job where the most exciting thing in my day will be the scent of coffee. That’s just not what I want to do. It’s definitely not what I expected as I was growing up.”

“And what are you majoring in again?”

“English. Literature is something I’m extremely fond of. I know most people can’t stand reading stuff so passively, especially people my age because we grew up with more interactive and easily pleasing technology. But I just find so much good stuff from literature that I want to know all there is I can know about books and authors and stuff like that. And I guess that’s also why I read more news and try to keep up with what’s going on, even if all the news organizations in the US are owned by some lobbyist.”

“Sponsors, Tokyo. They prefer to be called lobbyists, but they’re sponsors. That’s how they get the Senate in the back pocket and the House in an eternal headlock.”

“Hmm, never thought of it that way. I guess you’d know more about that seeing as you’re a retired gamer, you old man, you.”

“Wisdom with age.”

“But yeah, I always think of the Joad family whenever it comes to political decisions. It’s funny, because it’s even influenced how I play *Civilization*. I always try to leave some gold available for the people when they need it, which is something that only really came about with the *Beyond the Sword* expansion pack. Dustbowls and plagues and fires are resolved in a single turn rather than a slow, eventual process. Fuck, now I just made myself want to read *Grapes of Wrath* again.”

12x Bytes

From page 59

SoliderSweet Posted 1 hour ago

And on this day the internet detectives deduced at long last that Crescendo is indeed female due to heavy investigations of an official press release.

SilentCrescendo Posted 1 hour ago

:P

Forte Posted 40 minutes ago

I KNEW IT! Your style is kind of like Neecha's but still relaly different and aggressive. Good luck on the road to LCS! :)

GoldenPikachu Posted 3 hours ago

I honestly don't think this is a very good team. I looks good on paper but if they're going to be up against teams like coL and MAX that have way more experience, there's little chance for this squad with only two or three months of practice.

Tokyo has experience w/ LANs and knows a lot about the scene, but he hardly strikes me as the kind of player who could put up a fight, much less win against players like Toxiform or Shuriken. He's an overall decent player in Solo Q, but Solo Q and the LCS are completely different. He's pretty good at writing about and analyzing eSports and matches and he should stick to that rather than play professionally. I honestly think him and Rex are on the team since he jus kisses Shellshock's ass and vice versa.

Rex is kind of lack luster as a jungler. His champion pool as of right now seems to consiste of mainly tanks, and his performances on damage junglers isn't the best. Some people might point to his time with Tokyo on AroD, but he played mid on that team and was more often than not a second support. I think in the jungle he'll just be that second support again and be outclassed by players like Dendra who has a history of amazing plays from the jungle.

Pandango is really unpredictable and I don't think it'll benefit a team to have a player who goes 10/1/0 in ranked on game, but then 1/10/0 the next. If he can't at least be consistent I think he'll just drag the team down. I think the other teams trying to get into LCS who have good mid/jungle synergy are going to have a field day with him.

Wildcat is actually a good player tbh. I don't see much that I can say against him other than he should have joined some other team a long ass time ago. I think he's the only player on this lineup that's actually LCS material or had the potential to be LCS material.

And for Crescendo, I'm sure she can lead in Solo Q and take the game hostage, but I doubt she'll be like that IRL when the team is right there especially if they're losing. A lot of teams get quiet when they're losing and I doubt she'll have the balls to risk throwing games that could get FFG into the LCS. Plus, she seems way too fucking shy and insecure. Everyone who watches her stream knows she doesn't talk and doesn't use a webcam and just types her insight and commentary on the screen in a Notepad document. And she also never talks when she duo Qs with anyone. Sounds like a real team player this one.

RedAznGuy Posted 2 hours ago

Interesting that you guys would pick crescendo and pandango when they have no lan experience. I don't mean to be sound like an asshole or anything but I just don't think that's a smart move.

Emberwolf Posted 1 hour ago

But over the past two years solo q has improved a bit when it comes to players taking it seriously. Maybe it's not like Korea where managers and scouts could find gods like Imposter but honestly Crescendo seems like the kind of player who can manage and lead a team to victory the way she talks the teams through objectives

FlameDudeX Posted 49 minutes ago

it sounds like you're giving a lot of credit to just shot calling, but I honestly think WildCat deserves a lot of attention as well. Like he has three accounts in Challneger, has played on amateur teams before and practically carried at small LANs in the past. The bot lane combo for this team looks super fucking strong and might even be strong enough to be one of the best duos in NA and the world. I don't think the rest of the team will contribute much other than being the tank or assassins or initiation that the team needs.

Skylord Posted 27 minutes ago

lol what the fuck do you mean only bot lane matters? Maybe you haven't payed attention to panda when he shows up in high elo

games, but he'll do the most insane shit like flash into unwarded territory if he has a hunch that he can get a kill or two. It's like he always tries to mix things up and never be predictable. If he does that consistently AND comes out on top, I think he'll be a sort of wildcard element that can neither be banned out or countered

Kennis Posted 12 minutes ago

Dude you have to count the chemistry that tokyo and rex have. That combination alone can easily result in crazy ass plays, ganks, and turn arounds in team fights.

E

From page 61

“Ey, yo!”

“Huh?”

“Did you really take those coins from the fountain?”

“*Man*, ain’t nobody gonna miss these fuckin’ coins.”

“What makes you think they won’t come back for their coins?”

“People throw their coins in and neva’ come back. Don’t you know how these things work? What kinda stupid are you?”

“...hang on, aren’t you Sebastian’s brother?”

“...”

“And aren’t you a little too young to use the word ‘fuck?’”

“Y—you’re not gonna tell my brother are you?”

“How ‘bout this: toss those coins back into the fountain and I’ll give you a ten. *And* I won’t tell him.”

“...”

“I used to take coins from this fountain for lunch money, too. Just take the ten, leave other people’s wishes alone, and I’ll forget this ever happened.”

A plop and a ripple followed each coin that slid off his hand as he tilted an open palm over the water.

“And here, dry your arms off. Otherwise you’ll get sick in this cold.”

“...so do you know him from school?”

“Yeah. Almost ten years ago now, but we still play games online every now and then. Anyway, here’s the ten. Try...try not to use it all at once.”

F

From page 81

“Hello,” a soft, introductory voice rang into his ears.

He pulled his face up away from his phone, turned to the direction of the voice to see a girl leaning against the elevator wall, her long, brown hair swaying in the air.

“Oh, hi,” he said in his usual, monotone voice and did his usual, sloppy wave. His eyes again returned to the screen in his hands.

“You moved in just the other day, right?”

“Mhm,” eyes still on his phone.

“I saw you moving in with Simon and...your, uh...part...ner?” she raised an eyebrow.

He jerked his head up to meet her eyes, “Wait, what the hell?”

“The guy who wanted to pee in the elevator.”

“What gives you the impression we’re gay?” He put his phone to sleep before slipping it into his pocket.

“Oh you’re not? Sorry,” she giggled and tilted her face down, “it’s just you two didn’t act like other guys around each other. Thought you were either brothers or gay.”

“Nah, we’ve just known each other since we were tiny. I guess you could say we’re brothers in that regard.”

The elevator stopped at ground level and the doors opened.

“Guess I’ll see you around?” she asked as they walked over the elevator gap.

“Yeah, probably,” he mumbled and peered in the direction of the front door with squinting eyes.

“I’m Anna, by the way,” she said after a pause.

“Oh. Um, Geoff,” he lifted his arm and held out his fist toward her.

She was hesitant a second, eventually recognizing and responding to the invitation.

“So yeah, see you ‘round.” He parted for the main entrance while she went toward one of the apartments.

G

From page 85

October 26, 2016

Kitty finally arrived at the gaming house late last night and now everyone's here. \o/

The non-digital versions of their voices are much clearer. I never realized how much VoIP and VoDs and mics compressed audio into bytes and stuff. :p . It's a nice change of pace to actually hear the clarity of their voices :3

Although I've spent very little time with everyone I think I've learned quite a bit about them already. I guess this will be my initial analysis of each player's style and personality. :p

Since Kitty and I will be laning together, I'll start off with him. From what I've seen from his past streams (and a game he played here) all I have to say is holy shit. He's REALLY fucking good.

And I mean *REALLY* fucking good. It's a completely different experience when I can only see his champ moving and when I can see his champ, his cursor, his mouse and keyboard and so many other things. I can't quite describe exactly what it is he does since I've only seen one game in-person, so I'll have to take more notes on him to learn what skills he brings to team, and where his weaknesses lie, or if he even has any weaknesses to begin with. >, >

Outside of the game he's pretty much an average eighteen year old kid. And that includes him kinda really lacking in social skills. :P But maybe he just needs to get comfortable and get to know everyone before he breaks out of his shell.

Rexy would be the next player to have influence and sway the flow of on bot lane. He's definitely got an interesting personality and he's a really cool guy to talk to. He also has a lot of game knowledge and does little things to gain the advantage over opponents. I know that Rexy, Toky, and Kitty have experience in competitive play, and it definitely shows. I can say with complete certainty and with complete confidence that they're the three best players on the team.

There's something in Rexy that we can harness, there's something he's really, really amazing at that no other player in the world can do for their team. Unfortunately I don't know what it is yet, so I need to keep my eye on him and learn from him some more.

Panda would be the player next likely to contribute to bot lane. There are at least two things I need to get him to work on: consistency and champion pool. Thinking back to the team's first Skype thingy I remember Kitty saying Panda manipulates his lanes really well, and it's absolutely true. He does little tricks to limit his opponent's options and then goes in for blood. I definitely wouldn't want to lane against him if we end up on opposite teams in solo queue. ~_~

Personality-wise he's almost the exact opposite of Kitty. Not only is he willing to talk to anyone about anything, but he gets easily excited. It's almost like he's a child. In a good way. C:

Lastly, Toky would have the least impact on bot lane unless he has TP. He has a very vast champion pool and can play pretty much every role really well. He also has

really strong chemistry with Rexy and I don't think I really need to focus on them since they're already good players on their own. He hardly commits to any flashy or risky plays like Panda does and he's generally really consistent. Even if he loses lane or loses the game he tends to do well on an individual basis. There's nothing particularly outstanding or amazing about his play, but he also doesn't play things out badly. If things go wrong I think I can trust Toky, Rexy, and Kitty to play well no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

For the most part he keeps to himself. And he reads a lot. A whole lot. A scary amount of a lot. lol But he's an English major so I guess that's to be expected. :p He's always scrolling through pages and pages of text and news articles and he's always got a bunch of books on his desk. I don't know what he does with all that knowledge, though. I feel like he could debate anyone on any topic and he would be able to win the debate. Unless he and I were to debate on music, then I would win. C: < Maybe. I don't know if he reads a lot about music. > <

And of course all that's left is Shelly. He's been dealing a lot with management and stuff so he hasn't had too big an impact on how training and practice goes. But he *does* want us to have a great deal of autonomy. He says he'll have a more active role in coaching and helping us think through strategies and map movement and map control when things calm down on his end, which I hope is soon. I don't know anything about how to get a team to work together on things or how to practice to improve on little or big things. :X

Unfortunately there aren't many surviving videos and interviews of his time on coL, so I can't find much about his playstyle in *Counter Strike* or how he and the team functioned. If eSports and technology were more advanced back then I'm sure I'd have a lot of information, but I guess I'll have to make use of the rare articles and highlights that exist scattered around the internet.

I still don't even know if I'm capable of playing at the level everyone else is playing. I think I might even be a burden to the team, and I might not even be bringing anything to the table. :c I don't know if I belong here, honestly. But I'm going to have to work at this captain thing. I have people relying on me now and I can't let them down.

THIS SHIT'S GONNA WORK! >:D

Blue

22x

Firestorm Eyes

From page ??

November 1, 2016

He looks out onto the world with firestorm eyes.

Earlier today we scrimmed for the first time against a professional team. And we got messed up. In both of our first games against col. we lost everywhere. Every lane lost, we lost jungle control, vision control, we lost pretty much every dragon, and we couldn't really do anything.

Then Tokyo finally answered his phone, yelled at whoever it was, and then we moved on and played the third game. And ven though it was a best of three and col already won, they were willing to give us more practice time.

And col didn't stand a fucking chance in that last game. Tokyo went full tryhard and became shotcaller for a game. He and Rexy *dictated* that game. They made the right calls and we won by a landslide. It wasn't even a fair game.

Something about Tokyo tells me he's been through a lot of pain, and not only is he hiding it, but he's damn good at hiding it. I'd ask him about this but I imagine he would just brush it off and say whatever boring thing he can think of to prevent me from asking further questions.

Of everyone on the team he's the most serious. He may be joking around with everyone all the time but no matter how laid back he acts he's still always thinking about the game, he's still always thinking about ways to improve and ways to win.

And though he usually wears that stoic, apathetic look on his face, and although he always acts bored and lousy, he was pissed after that phone call. And he NEVER gets pissed. He never even LOOKS pissed. But something about that call triggered some fire in him.

I think I've gotten a better understanding of who he is as a person and why he plays the way he does and why he does the things he does. He just sort of wants to be able to do everything, and he also wants to know everything. Of everything I know about him he doesn't seem to "specialize" in any one thing. He plays a lot of different kinds of games, listens to a lot of different kind of music, reads a lot of different things, and so on.

Hell, even thinking back to when I first got here, he was very good at damn near every character in *Smash Bros*. And that's no different in *League*. He can play every champion really well. Maybe he wouldn't be able to play every champion at a professional level, but I'm certain he could hold his own against top players in every position. He's always able to play whatever the team needs in Solo Queue, and he generally does well. I think he might even be a far better Support player than I could ever be. Although I haven't seen him play Support much, I know for a fact that he's better than I am at Jungle and Mid.

I'm thinking he's a natural born leader. He's a leader and he looks out onto the world with firestorm eyes. There's something inside him that gives him this insatiable hunger for LCS that runs deep in his blood. I think that although he may not show his enthusiasm or excitement for many things, he's sure as fucking hell

going to work his ass off and make the necessary sacrifices and do everything in his power to achieve his goal.

Something about how he plays till the end and how he's always looking for solutions tells me he wants to keep playing. When I watch him play I see someone who doesn't want to go back to where he came from, and I see someone who wants so hard to go somewhere new with League. I don't even think I have anything like that to push ME, and to drive ME, and to keep me from falling behind on practice and everything.

I need to see what makes his fire burn, what it is that makes him a competitor, and I need to make sure we can use it to get to LCS.

He looks out onto the world with firestorm eyes.

Crescendo

Library Cultura

Credit where credit is due. Always.

Following is a list of all the cultural artifacts and parts of cultural works (characters, locations, lyrics, quotations, et cetera) that are mentioned or used in *Mistakes Were Made*. All works are listed in order of use, mention, reference, allusion, or appearance. All years AD. Website URLs provided if available.

Arachniography – Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) of online content formatted as Content Creator (if any). Title (if any) <Direct URL>. Website Name <Website URL>. Website Owner. Year (if any).

Bibliography – Books formatted as Last Name, First Name. *Title*. <Website URL>.

Discography – Music formatted as Composer or Musician or Band or Performer. “Title.” *Album*. Label, Year. <Website URL>.

Filmography – Film, Cinema, Animation, other Broadcast or Televised program, et cetera. Online Film, Animation, et cetera also listed under Arachniography. Formatted as “Episode Title (if any).” *Title*. Credited Names. Name of Network and Associated Organizations. Year Released or Years Broadcasted. <Website URL>.

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