

"There is nothing cooler than being passionate about the things you love."

-Sean Plott

The StarCraft Bible
The History of StarCraft, The Game of Awe
by Patrick Howell O'Neill

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This book is dedicated to my parents.

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Photo and words by Cedric Cook

StarCraft is a revolution in gaming. Not video games themselves, but the culture. With no other game or "nerdy" hobby have I seen such an emphasis on healthy living: physically, mentally and socially. It not only feels like a viable sport both practically and aesthetically, but boasts the importance of community -- a community that has pushed the "replayability" of a game into cultural entity. On a personal level, I can say my life has been markedly changed by the people involved with Starcraft; both socially and professionally, I've made decisions because of this community. This is how an industry was -- is -- possible.



- Introduction

- **The Gravity of The Situation**

"Show me your children's games, and I will show you the next hundred years."

Smartbomb by Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby

A High Templar hits full energy, a Lurker burrows and a Marine stims. You take a quick breath as your heart starts to race. You were tired - it's 6 am, after all, and you almost didn't make it to this point - but now your eyes are wide open with the thought of the battle.

Then, in the space of a millisecond, the Scourge split perfectly, the Marine dodges the spines and the Dragoons, against their terrible pathing instinct, form the most perfect arc anyone has ever seen.

The screen is flaring with explosions and deaths and you're having a hard time not yelling and waking your neighbors. The live crowd in Korea doesn't have to worry about that and they're screaming as loudly as they can. The commentators are having a fit. You don't understand Korean but you're sure that they're not actually speaking any language - only yelling in excitement, technically inarticulate but getting their point of awe across beautifully with their volume.

That was fast and everyone knows it.

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StarCraft is a game of awe. When you watch players perform superhuman tasks of speed and creativity, your jaw drops. Your blood flows a little faster when you witness a key-stroke of genius. Who knew that explosions of pixels could inspire?

There is beauty in this game, like the beauty in all high-level competition. Whenever two competitors dedicate their entire selves to winning, a corner of the universe grinds to a stop and focuses on the contest, hoping to catch a flair of brilliance.

When you watched Muhammed Ali, he seemed to float. Michael Jordan flew. In StarCraft, Lim Yo Hwan constantly created something out of nothing, inserting a little religion into each match.

In StarCraft, the brilliance has burned bright for ten years.

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First came the spoken word. From there, art came from humanity into the world like water from a fountain. The forms are infinite: film, literature, music and on and on. As our development and lifestyle has sped up in modern times, so too

has our conception of art forms. The newest kid on the block is a giant, already shaping mightily the culture from which it came: Video games.

The video game industry itself is a titan, one whose reach scales the entire globe and whose net-worth is skyrocketing from tens of billions into hundreds of billions before our eyes.

The birth-pangs of the giant industry are past. A major crash hit in the mid 1980's and threatened to wipe out the entire medium. The 90's saw the industry recover in a big way. Now, our culture has shifted, paradigms have irrevocably changed - major video game releases are noteworthy cultural events rivaling a Hollywood blockbuster.

Today, the video game industry is a maturing though still volatile entity whose rate of expansion feels as though it may rival that of the entire universe.

Inside the titan-industry, somewhere near the heart and the guts, stands Activision Blizzard. The company, the result of a 2007-2008 merger, is worth a monstrous \$10 billion itself. In its possession are some of the most recognizable game franchises this side of Mario: Guitar Hero and Call of Duty rank high amongst the pride of Activision. Even alone, the Activision house is one of the most storied and successful in all of gaming and in all of entertainment.

But you'll have to forgive me for shrugging my shoulders at the Activision side of it. Call it subjectivity, personal preference, the truth or call it whatever you like. When it comes to storied publishing houses, Activision's other half, Blizzard, is second to none. When it comes to consistently inspiring devotion and passion, the list is short and Blizzard looms large. Habitually, Blizzard's games don't just sell well, they become phenomena, inspiring lives as much as industries that may have seemed laughable just a short time ago.

Blizzard's universe is not merely populated by a few pixelated villains and heroes. It is filled to the brim with millions upon millions of flesh and blood people, fans who loudly spread the gospel, asking gamers enamored of rival franchises, "Have you heard the good news? StarCraft just sold out another arena. The Warcraft universe just shot past 10 million players. Diablo is about to hit 20 millions sales."

Among those beloved franchises, StarCraft is unique. It is not the oldest of Blizzard's legendary trio of bread-winners, that distinction is Warcraft's. StarCraft and its expansion, Brood War, have sold almost 10 million copies worldwide. The Diablo series has sold nearly twice that number and the Warcraft series has ascended to even greater heights.

But it is StarCraft alone which has flourished as a competitive game, uninterrupted for over a decade, unwilling to simply die off. It is StarCraft which

fills arenas, launches celebrities and serves as a major catalyst for the entire idea of professional gaming. It is StarCraft off which players make more than a living, they make a life. This is the game which has been called the national sport of South Korea (an exaggeration, but it tells you something about the intensity of esport) and it is this sci-fi wonder which may finally lift pro gaming in the Western world into its brightest spotlight yet.

That is the phenomenon which I will examine in this book from the ground up: the people, the ideas, the passion and the gravity which have given life to the StarCraft franchise, the singularly successful and impossibly stubborn universe which Blizzard created over a decade ago.

- The Book of Blizzard

"Video games are bad for you? That's what they said about rock and roll."

Shigeru Miyamoto

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Nineteen ninety-one was the year in which the Soviet Union finally dissolved. The United States entered the first installment of what would later turn out to be a national past-time: war in the Middle East. A recession stemming from a then-unparalleled stock market crash gripped the American and global economy. Nonetheless, flags were waved, anthems were sung and, for a moment there, the world did not seem to hang on the precipice of mutually assured destruction.

It was under these circumstances in February 1991 that a group of recent University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) graduates founded Silicon & Synapse, a video game development company. Michael Morhaime, Frank Pearce and Allen Adham (now respectively President, Vice President and Lead Designer on various projects) were the originators of the studio which would eventually become Blizzard.

As you may imagine, this studio was not the behemoth we know today. In the beginning, Silicon & Synapse was, in large part, funded off of the personal credit cards of the founders and, IGN reported, "the team struggled to rush out a game before the money ran out."

That first game was the impeccably named Radical Psycho Machine Racing - RPM Racing.



RPM Racing

RPM Racing was a plodding, "high resolution" racer in which the player competed for money to buy better cars, better parts and entry to better races. A remake of the 1985 *Racing Destruction Set* for the Commodore 64, Blizzard asserts that RPM Racing was the first American-developed game for the Super Nintendo. Less than four months after the founding of Silicon & Synapse, the game was deemed ready.

Today, Blizzard Entertainment is infamous for its tedious development of games and painfully high expectation of quality. StarCraft 2 was *announced* three years before its release, the total development has taken at least over half a decade (Dustin Browder, the senior designer on SC2, joined the company March 9, 2005 according to MobyGames).

RPM Racing, on the other hand, took a few months. The result is game which makes me want to take out my *Super Mario Kart* cartridge from 1992 for a far superior experience. Consider this game the next time a wave of complaints about Blizzard's tortoise-like pace hits.

What immediately followed were a series of equally forgettable ports quickly churned out by Silicon & Synapse in order to climb out of the red:

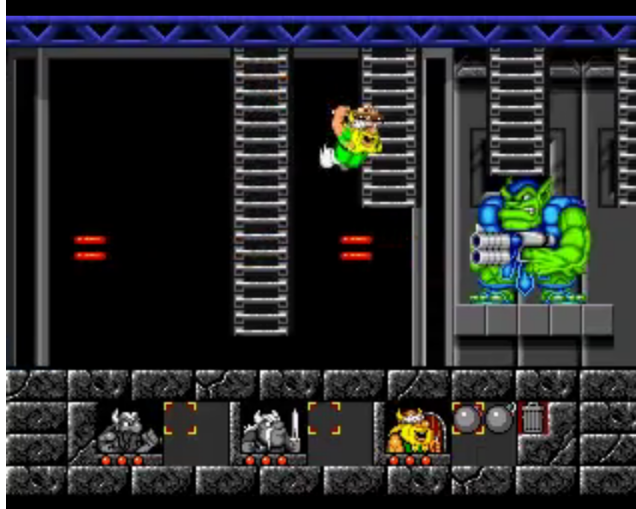
Battle Chess, a game of human chess complete with dance fights and magic, and its utterly bizarre sequel appeared in 1992 on Windows, Commodore 64 and Amiga. The surprisingly cool but terrifically unoriginal Lord of the Rings RPG was ported to Amiga by the small company. Amiga Castles, Amiga MicroLeague Baseball, Macintosh Lexi-Cross and Macintosh Dvorak on Typing were all ports completed by the fledgling operation in 1992 and mostly forgotten soon thereafter.



Battle Chess

The queen dance fights the rook a.k.a. Marvel Comic's Thing.

By late 1992, the company had attained a level of stability that allowed it to release its first original and, not coincidentally, awesome game: The Lost Vikings, in which a group of doofy but physically capable vikings solve puzzles in order to make their way through time and space and escape their kidnapper, the terrible Tomator.



The Lost Vikings

Rock n' Roll Racing for Super NES and Sega Genesis followed. Although it was similar in premise to RPM Racing, it benefited from being a more loud and flamboyant game than its dull older brother. A little electric guitar, alien goo, vivid art and sped up game-play added up to a much better experience over all.

The studio's output for the year of 1993 earned them the Best Software Developer award from VideoGames Magazine, an award still touted by Blizzard today.

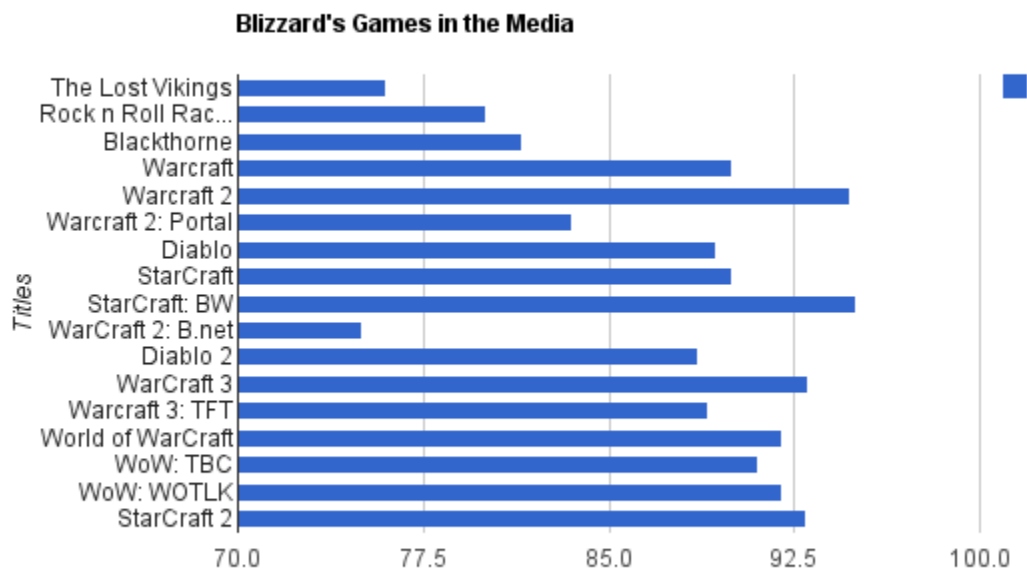


Rock n' Roll Racing

The next important original from the company was Blackthorne. Categorized as a "cinematic platformer", the game was justifiably called "Prince of Persia with guns". Although the game never stepped out of the shadow of its Persian grand-

daddy, it garnered a significant fan-base and a much-needed chunk of change for the still young studio.

A combination of original and contract games followed. The Death and Return of Superman, The Lost Vikings 2 and Justice League Task Force were all released and developed while, simultaneously, the company's first blockbuster had its inception in 1994. Warcraft: Orcs & Humans, the first major hit of the Real Time Strategy genre, released an exciting demo in the summer of '94 before the first retail versions were sold in November of that year. Blizzard and the genre would never be the same again.



Sources: GameRankings.com, MetaCritic.com

- The Book of Real Time Strategy

"I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed."

Daniel Plainview, *There Will Be Blood*

There has been a competition inside men and women since well before the first user-controlled pixel lit up and took off across the screen. Still, that pixel has done nothing if not throw a little gasoline on that competitive fire, providing an immense number of new ways and places to square off. From Pong to the big arcades and into the present day, the urge to compete persists. One genre of video games which has always worn a particular affinity for this aspect of gaming on its sleeve is the RTS.

Real Time Strategy (RTS) is a genre of video games in which a player is at war with an opponent and, through the accumulation of resources as well as construction and management of an army and infrastructure, the player must destroy that opponent. Because of the distinct lack of turns (present in the cousin-genre, Turn-Based Strategy or TBS), the games are all, to varying degrees, influenced by the speed at which the players operate. At least, this is the malleable definition that we can all start with.

But you knew that, right? What is it that makes RTS special?

Since the dawn of the modern RTS age in the mid to late 90's, this is one of only two genres (the other being First Person Shooters, FPS) which has consistently produced games played at a high competitive level for long periods of time. While modern FPS titles are far and away higher earners for developers, the RTS genre is at the very least neck and neck with FPS as far as competitive chops. Professional leagues have existed continuously for the top RTS games for over a decade - with a few notable exceptions, FPS titles have tended to fade in and out frequently, though they do tend to have very strong showings in that short lifespan. This has led to the perception that where RTS games possess depth, FPS games are generally much more shallow.

In my mind, the pinnacle of the RTS genre (and possibly of gaming itself) is *StarCraft: Brood War*. It has supported competition at the highest levels since its release and has inspired a worldwide following rivaling that of some sports. In many ways, it is the archetype of 'e-sport'.

It is always an interesting exercise to try and figure out the genesis of the idea which would eventually blossom into modern RTS games. This is a contentious issue, with various titles being crowned the originator of the form and with various definitions being given to the genre in the first place. While I do have a distinct title in mind as the 'first' (*Utopia*), know that there are several legitimate opinions

one can hold about this question and that, in the end, no one game truly originated the genre - it grew out of a series of similar games released throughout the 1980's.

In the beginning - 1982, that is - God created heaven and earth on the Intellivision, a little black console released in '79. Heaven was a pixelated blue void with technologically-limited musical abilities and earth was two islands with severe hurricane problems. God said, let there be real-time competition and there was *Utopia* and it was good.



Utopia, 1982

Utopia, widely considered the first 'god game' ("Civilization .5" is its posthumous nickname), was a 1982 title developed by American Don Daglow in which players owned an island full of people and competed to please their citizens the most by planting crops, building houses, going fishing and, in an awesomely nefarious turn, funding rebel activity on their opponent's island. It was 1982, remember, and the cold war was white hot, raging by proxy with rebellions all over the world - this mechanic was a profoundly zeitgeist-conscious move by Utopia's designer Daglow.

The game is played out over a series of 30 to 120 second turns (one match was your 'Term of Office') during which all decisions must be made as quickly and intelligently as possible, an idea which will ring familiar to modern RTS veterans.

Even now this is a fun game and, at its best, Utopia brings a smooth and comprehensive low-tech competition to your screen. It's certainly worth playing once or twice to get a feel for the genre's roots. Despite reportedly lackluster marketing, great press and numerous awards pushed sales of this game to over 250,000 copies.

A decade later, Daglow would lead the design team on 1991's *Neverwinter Nights*, a graphical multiplayer roleplaying game which helped set the stage for titles such as *EverQuest* and *World of Warcraft*. He is regarded as a ground breaker and rightfully so.



Stonkers, 1983

Stonkers, a 1983 British title developed by Imagine Software for the ZX Spectrum platform (an 8-bit competitor to the Commodore 64), is also a contender for the title of 'the original'.

In the game, you, the player, control cannons and tanks and must use resources in order to move and conquer the map. Though the game has an understandably and, frankly, charmingly antique set of visuals, the agonizingly slow pace - barely qualifying as 'real time' at all - dooms it to be more tedious than fun. Perhaps I am spoiled by the more modern and speedy output of the genre but, more likely, I am right in my impatience. This game is torture to even watch.

The Ancient Art of War, 1984



A year later, in 1984, *The Ancient Art of War* was released by American developers Evryware. Despite the short amount of time between it and *Stonkers*, *Art of War* is one of the prettiest video games of that bygone era when played on its highest setting, 16 colors. Other graphical settings included a, put politely, more drab 4 color look. The game featured two layers of strategy: Unit composition played a large roll as three main units interacted with a rock-paper-scissors dynamic. Micromangement also played a roll as players could adjust army formations before entering stick-figure battles to conquer the earth.

Herzog Zwei, 1989



From 1984, various games came and went meeting a few but never all of the bars of a modern RTS game. The first game universally acknowledged to meet the tenets of the RTS genre was the Sega Genesis game *Herzog Zwei* (Duke 2 in German) by Japanese developer TechnoSoft in 1989. In the game, you only truly control one unit - your fighter jet - but through it, you can purchase units and issue very basic commands to them in order to wage truly real time war against your opponent. The game has the duel-characteristic of being slow paced and high on micro-management requirement. Due to the purchased unit's knack to run out of fuel and become little more than rocks in the desert, the commander's fighter jet must work tirelessly in order to slowly creep their army toward victory.

It wasn't perfect, folks, and it didn't sell exceptionally well but this is Real Time Strategy without a doubt.

Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty, 1992



Even though the elements were there, the words 'real time strategy' were not uttered until the grand daddy of all RTS games came onto the scene in 1992 - *Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty*, a ridiculously prescient title for a genre-defining game to have.

Developed by Westwood Studios, who would later become famous for RTS giant *Command & Conquer*, designer Brett Sperry was the first to coin the now ubiquitous terminology: RTS.

Sperry told GameSpot that although he played and enjoyed titles like Herzog Zwei, he took inspiration for the new Dune game from role-playing games such as *Eye of the Beholder*, in which combat took place in real time.

Modern RTS gamers will immediately recognize Dune 2's visual set-up - the minimap, the command box and the playing screen are all implemented in ways that would be mimicked for years. Units built by gathered resources - spices, in Dune's case - were pioneered here. This is the first title which adheres to the now genre-defining model: "Harvest, build, destroy". In fact, a myriad of now taken-for-granted features first saw the light of day in the sands of Dune: Tech trees, army asymmetry, mouse-operated game play and total war 'till elimination originated here to name a few.

Two fateful omissions to the game would help leave room for a superior product to gain the limelight instead of Dune.

First, a stylistic choice: the game is slow. Although not agonizingly slow by any means, the game failed to take advantage of the many avenues of creativity that the genre offered by keeping the pace to a minimum rather than ramping the adrenaline up. And this is no mere hindsight - the games in the genre that immediately followed Dune were markedly faster. Rival developers, namely Blizzard, saw wasted potential and took advantage.

The second omitted feature can now be looked at as the defining gaffe, though at the time it must have seemed like a minor feature-choice: The lack of a multiplayer mode.

Although Warcraft was faster and a bit more colorful, the central advantage it had over its competitor was its multiplayer aspect. If speed increases the required level of creativity, talent and skill of an RTS by one measurement, multiplayer's influence on those fields amounts to an immeasurable boost. Just like today, computer opponents were easily tricked and meant that the game had a small, finite life-span. With human opponents entering the fray in a big way with subsequent titles, RTS games inch toward a true match of wits, chess-like, one which can go back and forth for years if not decades.

Thus, the stage was set for Blizzard's entrance onto the Real Time Strategy stage.

- The Book of Warcraft

"Good artists copy. Great artists steal."

~~Pablo Picasso~~ Me.

Warcraft has been called Blizzard's crown jewel franchise, their alpha and omega. It has also been called a lame theft of gameplay and lore. It is the game which finally brought the company to profitability and, although I look to the StarCraft franchise as Blizzard's tallest peak, the Warcraft franchise is undoubtedly their strong foundation.

The first brick in that foundation was laid in the summer of 1994 when a demo version of *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* was released to much excitement. It was in the minimal but warm wake of Dune 2 that Warcraft's gameplay was styled, heavily mimicking its predecessor. In Warcraft, the gameplay was noticeably faster, the world was more colorful and intimate and, of course, the creative possibilities were immeasurably greater with the introduction of the multiplayer aspect. It was the first shot Blizzard fired in what would become a war for the genre.



Warcraft: Orcs & Humans, 1994

After the original Warcraft, the next milestone RTS release was in 1995: Command & Conquer by Westwood Studios, the creators of Dune 2. Brett Sperry, a game designer and founder of Westwood, described C&C to Gamespot as a clean start on the idea of Real Time Strategy.

"Command & Conquer was the net result of the Dune 2 wish list," said Sperry. "It was time to build the ultimate RTS."

Following Warcraft, C&C was the next important multiplayer RTS title. Where Warcraft 1's gameplay was in many ways a (slightly) glorified clone of Dune 2, Westwood went in a much different direction with fundamental points such as the user interface, build mechanics and control of the army. For instance, the game did not have the attack-move command which we take for granted today. Players had to choose to attack each target individually.



Command &
Conquer, 1995

C&C's online multiplayer games were scattered on various networks such as Kali, a name which will ring familiar to those with knowledge of Warcraft 2 and other mid-90's online games. Kali was the site where the first great games on a Blizzard title were played. Important players such as Guillaume "Grrrr..." Patry and other StarCraft and multi-RTS titans got their start on the multi-game network. C&C also saw gaming elevated on these networks as internet competition brought the best out of their game.

C&C's most distinguishing feature is that it sported the greatest distinction between opposing factions of its era. Blizzard wouldn't match the level of asymmetry until early 1998 with StarCraft.

However, without trying to malign the franchise, the first C&C's biggest contribution was attracting more fans to the genre. This is no small feat. One cannot overlook it as the game which produced some of the first large online tournaments with significant cash prizes for winners. However, on the level of gameplay and visuals, games such as Warcraft 2 and StarCraft drew much more

from other forefathers of the genre than from C&C. Still, this game and franchise is one of the most beloved and best selling in all of gaming.

Although Warcraft was not the first multiplayer title of its kind (Herzog Zwei, the first proto-RTS, gets that honor), it was the most important. If the transition from Dune 2 to Warcraft opened eyes to the possibilities of human opponents, if Command & Conquer opened the flow of money and adrenaline, Warcraft 2 is what opened minds and began to truly resemble what we know today as the competitive Real Time Strategy scene.

The Warcraft 1 demo and even the entire first game can fairly be called simply an appetite-whetting prelude to the blockbuster that was Warcraft 2. It took eight months for the sequel to be released, cutting the first game's lifespan short while ensuring that the franchise would become one of the most recognized in the world. It would go on to sell millions of copies.

"It was popular in school," said Blid, the 28 year old administrator for War2.ru, the largest surviving Warcraft 2 community in the world. "Not only did I have friends who I'd play over modem late at night, but I'd even hear about people I didn't know well but who played the game. And we'd arrange a time for one person to set his game to 'receive call' and the other to dial him up on the modem.

"The biggest difference between Warcraft 1 and 2 was the multiplayer," Blid continued. "Compared to the sequel, not many people played Warcraft multiplayer and it didn't have the same capabilities online. I think with Warcraft 2, a lot of people first started playing with modem-play. I was able to beat up on pretty much everyone, except one good friend. It was fun hearing of someone who was supposedly good and dialing up and taking him out.

"My one buddy though, Howard, I imitated his game a lot and still couldn't beat him. Once you bring in other people, even if it's only over modem, you start picking up on what you need to do to be more efficient and get the edge. Common strategies started getting passed around and aped. The two Barracks, low Peon rush was very common in my modem scene. Now, in the modern days, that strategy is basically just a gimmick, but at the time it was simple and people weren't sophisticated enough to repel it the ways they do now."

The signature of a great RTS game - or any great competitive game - is that of evolution. When StarCraft players are preaching the gospel and attempting to convert others into believers, the game's constant growth is one aspect which must be touched upon.

The game of StarCraft has continued to evolve for over a decade from the inside and out: that is, the base-game and the meta-game. The base-game meaning any strategy, action or method used in a game which remains within the limits of the

prescribed ruleset and meta-game meaning any strategy which transcends the limits. This perpetual motion, the constant evolution has provided fans and players with endless fascination as a seemingly infinite stream of strategic discoveries are made. Warcraft 2 is where that sort of evolution began to pick up steam.



Warcraft 2, 1995

"Let me tell you, with Warcraft 2, the strategies have evolved incredibly," said Blid. "Things like making two Town Halls off the bat and protecting it against rushes was probably unbelievable to people in the early days. Now people all know the builds.

"On Kali, [the multiplayer predecessor to Battle.net], there was no shared vision and there were no replays so strategies might be proprietary information. If the guy you played wouldn't tell you, you'd have to fire up single player and try it out against people a few times. You figured it out through trial and error.

"If I brought the modern strategies back in time, no one would have any idea what to do with it. I'd be the greatest player alive. Now though, people also know the counters really well."

The game was a living, breathing entity and *that* is the mark of something great.

"Some of the biggest things, there's no way Blizzard factored in. The wall-ins and repairing unreachable from inside with a catapult or a tower for protection. The 2D grid gives you great walling and choking abilities and if you and your opponent start side by side, you'll start the fight with your first peon, trapping their peons and towering their town. And that is one of the most interesting components of the game. Those little wars almost never turn out the same."

"Pylons in StarCraft were designed with proxy-attacks partly in mind," said Dakine, a 24 year old Warcraft 2 player. "Flying Terran buildings, too. In Warcraft 2, this stuff was never a consideration." And yet, it all came into being with the creativity, ingenuity and experimentation of the players.

Compared to modern RTS games such as StarCraft, the Warcraft 2 community was and is a tight knit one. At the height of Warcraft 2's popularity, depending on your choice of locale (Kali, MSN Gaming Zone, AOL Gaming or Sega Heat gaming networks preceded Battle.net), you tended to play with a smaller group of opponents with whom you had an extended and familiar history. The Warcraft 2 community generally credits themselves with inventions of shorthand politenesses such as "GG GL HF" and "pwn". Remind me to thank them later.



Warcraft 2: Battle.Net Edition, 1999

The social aspect cannot be discounted. Today, we take for granted the social nature of video games and the internet as a whole. It is a huge part of what helps keep gamers sticking to a single title.

"Another thing that I think was unique about the Warcraft 2 experience is that since we all knew each other - the good players - we all sort of grew up together," said Dakine. "Before *everything* was a multiplayer game - like your phone is a gaming platform now, everything is - Warcraft 2 was one of the first human interactions that most of us had. It was awesome and we got hooked. Many of us are still a part of the community even though we haven't touched the game in a decade."

Warcraft 2's list of innovations was long:

The old concept of 'fog of war' (the blacking out of unexplored terrain) was tweaked. In previous games of the genre, once an area was explored, it became permanently visible. In Warcraft 2, the familiar and modern mechanic is implemented: A player must have a living unit within a short range of sight in order to see under the fog of war. Exploration revealed terrain but to stay current with the situation, you needed a pair of eyes there at all times.

The graphics were a huge upgrade from previous games and notably superior to its contemporaries. It was one of the only games with a 640x480 resolution at the time.

The ideas of a navy and a third resource (oil) were explored in Warcraft 2: Tides of Darkness. With a few exceptions (Red Alert, for instance), that branch of the military has not had a successful run in the genre. Numerous resources have been attempted in various games with some degree of success (for instance, Rise of

Nations had six distinct resources), but the blockbusters of the genre have stuck nearer two ever since.

Easy to use map editors became a great source of fun and contributed enormously to the replayability of the game. Although the custom map editors were initially freeware built by fans, Blizzard saw their utility, designed their own and thus set the standard for packaged map editors to this day.

Finally, Warcraft took the very minimal factional asymmetry (having different units and abilities in different armies) of Dune 2 and continued down that path, though not nearly to the degree of the Command & Conquer series. Although Orcs and Humans are *almost* the same, the differences that are present - namely spells such as Bloodlust - are enough to make Orcs the far superior race, used exclusively at almost every level of play. This unsuccessfully balanced asymmetry and to a greater extent the asymmetry of C&C, was enough to set the tone and lead the way to StarCraft, where asymmetry was perfected to a degree not since matched in any game.

By the time the Warcraft versus C&C rivalry was going full speed, it was obvious to everyone paying attention that Real Time Strategy games could mean big money. Big studios and small studios alike contributed to a torrent of RTS games hitting the market in the wake of the Big Two's success. Most were panned by critics and fans and contributed nothing to the genre.

However, C&C continued to build its much-loved franchise with Red Alert in 1996. Innovation was not the key word with this installment, refinement was. The user interface was improved and features from competing RTS titles such as control groups (directing a group of units with a single key) were added for easier command. Army asymmetry was increased and, for its time, Red Alert boasted the most diverse unit roster in the genre. Last but certainly not least, competitive online play came to the forefront with this title, continuing the tradition of the genre to inspire a great competition in all who touch it.



Total Annihilation, 1997

1997 saw the release of Total Annihilation designed by American Chris Taylor. The 3D units and terrain and the ability to issue complex orders to individual units (such as multiple sequenced orders in a queue or recurring ones like patrol) were major selling points. The game did extremely well with critics and fans alike.

It developed a particularly vocal community in the late 90's with an especially pronounced inferiority complex concerning StarCraft's astronomical commercial success. In writing a brief history of the RTS genre, Gamespot's Bruce Geryk goes as far as to say that Total Annihilation was "superior on many technical levels" to StarCraft and continues on to assert that it is only Blizzard's style and panache as opposed to substance, gameplay or community that led to their game's larger success. In the early years of StarCraft's existence, the TA versus SC rivalry was a more hostile and widespread version of the Warcraft versus C&C rivalry of five years prior.

Age of Empires, 1997



Another 1997 title was Age of Empires by the Americans at Ensemble Studios. This was the patriarch of a franchise which would eventually go on to sell over 20 million copies over the course of ten titles and 11 years.

Commercially, this is one of the most successful strategy franchises of all time. It took the idea of technological advancement (tech trees) and stretched it out over eons with the 'ages' dynamic. The game started in the Stone Age and progressed through the Iron Age, a period of time which covers approximately 2.5 million years on earth. The game itself managed to progress through the periods slightly faster. Additionally, the game was one of the first in the genre to bring match replays to the forefront after the FPS franchise Quake had proven their immense worth.

Age of Empires brought a considerably randomly generated maps and unique resource dynamic to the genre.

"For example," writes ilnp, a competitive RTS veteran, "food gathering in the early game required scouting to find it, micromanagement to hunt it with no casualties and constant management for finding new animals to hunt when your supply ran out. This provided a large skill difference between different levels of play as the harder ways to get good were the most lucrative. Village harassment played a huge role as resources and buildings were much more spread out than in StarCraft. Overall, Age of Empires is a very underrated game with the StarCraft crowd."

The game brought a great deal of polish and historical drama. I know I am not alone in having read through guidebooks of the Civilization and the Age of Empire series - two franchises who shared designer Bruce Shelley. These video games sparked a love of history in tens of thousands of children at least. The next time a man on a soapbox calls video games useless and harmful to children, hit them the

face with this book (or your hand if you are reading the e-book, no need to break your expensive reader) and explain their ability to inspire.

On the video game tree of life, real time tactical strategy games split off around this time. The advent of series such as 1997's *Myth*, developed by American studio Bungie of Halo fame, would set the stage for an entire sub-genre or subspecies which would come to flourish in the new millenium. This evolutionary tree of life concept will be explored in my next book, *The Origin of Species*. Just kidding, I hope.

As 1997 came to a close, the RTS genre was becoming more and more saturated. Fans became more discerning and it became increasingly difficult to get an original franchise off the ground, though not to the extent of difficulty that exists today.

In that state, the world spun into 1998.

- The Book of StarCraft

"Successful innovation has consistently proved to be fluid and flexible, fast and furious - that is, passionate."

Robert Heller

There was life Before StarCraft (BS) and life after. Its 1998 release was obviously a milestone and an evolutionary leap for not only the genre, but for video games as a whole. The culture surrounding games was never the same after '98 and StarCraft was a huge contributor to that. Half-Life, Resident Evil 2, Tekken 3, Unreal, Metal Gear Solid, Ocarina of Time, Brood War and several other phenomenal games make it a watershed year in the history of gaming. For the sake of our sanity, let's keep our focus on StarCraft. Just typing that last paragraph made me dizzy with nostalgia.

As I've explained in the previous chapter, StarCraft's RTS contemporaries were quality games, often with innovations and worthwhile gameplay in their own right. Upon StarCraft's release, legitimate arguments were taking place wondering which game was superior and which would reign supreme. Total Annihilation and Command & Conquer fans touted their games as above and beyond StarCraft for years.

StarCraft's superiority was not *so* apparent immediately following its release. It took patches and the development of the game into a fast-paced strategic masterpiece that supported an intellectually impressive meta-game, a dynamic base-game and a bloodthirsty competition like none other in order to fully arrive at the fact of its dominance.

Once one begins examining the state of today's competitive StarCraft, it becomes apparent that the game is worlds away from where it was in 1998. The key to StarCraft's superiority is not so much in where the game has gone as it is in the fact that the game can so readily go places. Most other games are monolithic and immovable objects. Following StarCraft from its release has been like speeding in the world's first automobile while most bystanders just keep walking.

A combination of luck, patience and excellent decisions led StarCraft to become the premiere competitive game of all time, so stubborn that after a decade of high level play and passionate fans, it would not be bled dry.

The discussion of which game was at the top of the RTS genre was a legitimate one in 1998. In 2010, if you are still having that discussion, there is something that millions of fans know that you don't. Allow us to enlighten you.

Blizzard today is a company known for its delays, a group of people who will wait and wait until a game is truly ready, no matter the cost. In the middle of the 90's, the opposite was true. After releasing a torrent of mostly middling console games from '91 to '93, Warcraft and Warcraft 2 were released within eight months of each other. StarCraft was slated to move out at a similar pace.



In 2008, Sam Didier, the art director at Blizzard, told EuroGamer that the team moved quickly and took some of the old Warcraft stuff, and said 'let's draw over them and give them a space feel.'

"We did that and it was rushed," said Didier, "and obviously [it was] not the coolest thing in the world."

Everyone agreed. StarCraft's first public showings at the 1996 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and the 1996 Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) were universally panned as "Orcs in Space", simply an unenthusiastically made knock-off. This was a criticism that was startlingly accurate. The artwork as well as the dynamics of the game essentially added up to a clone of Warcraft 2. Those involved have since fessed up, admitting that a purple-tinged clone is exactly what they were aiming for.



However, it is not what they would end up with. Negative reviews of the new game were everywhere Blizzard looked and so the team set to work on rewriting the game engine and creating a new look for the universe that came to be known as StarCraft.

3D tools (specifically, 3D Studio Max) were used to create a different aesthetic, visually and in the gameplay itself, though a full 3D conversion was avoided by Blizzard. This decision, made with the opinion that 3D would sacrifice the quality of gameplay, was lamented by some at the time. Years later, with numerous lackluster 3D RTS titles on the market, the developer's feeling of vindication for that choice has not worn off.

StarCraft was Blizzard's first strategy game in which the faction's units were not remotely symmetrical. The designers thought of Warcraft 2 as a game with chess pieces - equal parts, for the most part, doing battle on equal terms. On the contrary, the diversity of units in StarCraft was and, for the most part, is unparalleled. The Zerg, Terran and Protoss are three utterly unique factions whose defining characteristics are completely exclusive of the other two races.

As development continued, ideas were added and shed. One particularly strange idea that did not make it to the final product was revealed by Bill Roper, the producer of StarCraft, in 1996: There would be three theaters of war (space, planetary and installation) and only a small number of units would be available in each, thus requiring completely different approaches to strategy. This idea was dropped quickly.

The 1997 showings of the game were received much more positively thanks to the many changes implemented. Rather than the top-down view of Warcraft,

StarCraft adopted an isometric view so as to give the world a 3D feel. Likewise, the units had received major visual upgrades. Glenn Stafford, the man behind the music of Warcraft 2, was charged with creating a soundtrack for the new sci-fi game. The interface was shifted and given a much-needed face lift. It is considered so efficient and well done that a decade later, StarCraft 2's interface is not much more than a shinier copy of its predecessor.

As has become standard Blizzard practice, units were born and transformed throughout the development process. Many of the units we know today went through various phases (the Terran Science Vessel once had legs, the Wraith was called the Phoenix) before reaching their final name, appearance and functionality.

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After almost two years of soon-to-be characteristic delays, March 31, 1998 saw the release of StarCraft in the West (it would be released in South Korea later). Already, a relatively major competitive scene had developed.

There was immediately a large immigration of players from Warcraft 2, whose competitive scene effectively ceased to exist soon thereafter. The StarCraft beta test saw the development of individual talents and the game was already developing into a giant of e-sports. Finally, upon release, overwhelmingly positive reviews combined with hype from Warcraft and the red-hot RTS genre added up to an enormous sales and player base.

"Slick."

"Cutting edge."

The game was Blizzard's biggest launch to date, selling one million copies in three months - an impressive feat in that era.

In 1998, you had to strain mightily to find a critic who found major fault with StarCraft. They did exist, of course, and the comment sections of their articles have since been filed with 12 years' worth of I-told-you-so put downs.

Before I continue on to discuss some of the major complaints about StarCraft, I must note that the game as it stands today is not the same game which Blizzard released in '98. It took approximately three years of patches and fixes until May 2001 (patch 1.08) before the game had essentially the same foundation as it has today. Still, many of these complaints do not apply to anything changed during that period, rather to core game concepts and so I think that they are worth briefly discussing.

Some critic's negative remarks focused on the lackluster single player, revealing that the author so thoroughly missed the point that they had come back around and hit themselves in the face. As with all Blizzard's RTS titles before StarCraft 2, StarCraft's single player is a dinky little distraction in the grand scheme of things,

fun for some (I enjoy it on occasion) and skipped by others but of relatively little lasting impact.

On the other hand, this was 1998 and the "average" gamer (as '98 critics understood them) was not necessarily looking for a multiplayer experience such as the one StarCraft offered. I understand this and so I do see the critic's side of it.

You must forgive me for getting defensive and insulting back there. I don't know what got into me.

The most common complaint at the time was that the game lacked originality. I find myself cutting these critics some slack. The game was released on the (heavily modified) Warcraft 2 engine and so, even with the substantial visual upgrades, could certainly be pointed out as clearly Warcraft's offspring - Warcraft itself started with questionable originality.

A few critics pointed to Dune 2 as the originator of asymmetrical armies and said this was yet another copycat job by Blizzard. As we've already thoroughly been through, there is the smallest, tiniest bit of truth there! And yet these critics get no slack cut as over a dozen years of play have proven their dismissive underestimations of the game's diversity wrong again and again and again and . . .

Critics of the multiplayer (inexplicably including a Blizzard employee or two) have moaned and continue to bellyache that the game is more about speed than strategy, all about clicking quickly and not at all about thinking through your actions. Although these criticisms are among the most frustrating to hear, they are understandable. Without having a somewhat clear sense of the incredible depth of the StarCraft meta-game and the countless strategies visited over the course of the decade, it is easy to see astronomical numbers (300 to 400 actions per minute by professional players) and assume that speed is the lone, overwhelming factor in StarCraft success.

As we will explore, this particular qualm is largely wrong but do not rush out in a hate mob to assault the nearest critic just yet! Instead, we will explore the game and try to illuminate what it is about these assumptions that are false. But just in case, get your pitchforks sharp and torches burning.

Finally, any detractor whose principle complaint is that the game is not "original enough" deserves a roll of the eyes and this: Yes, the personality of the game was ripped from science fiction archetypes such as Warhammer 40K. Yes, the gameplay is clearly descended from its forefathers in the genre. And? When the sum total of the parts is superior and long-lasting brilliance, then complete originality for its own sake - rather than for the sake of quality - is overrated.

The short version: So what?

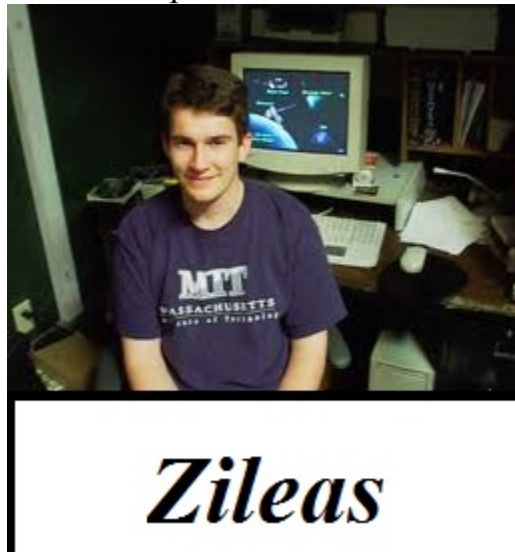
Now that I've been through some of the original complaints (original sins) and have got your blood boiling, we can recall that StarCraft has won honors such as 'Game of the Year' and 'Greatest Game of All Time' dozens of times as well as going on to sell over 11 million copies. Clearly, you and I are not the only fans of the series.

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In the beginning, the competitive scene developed in places where Warcraft 2 had been thriving. A new Battle.net attracted newer players while Kali, the old online gaming network, was home to Warcraft 2 veterans turned StarCraft players and immediately saw the very top level of play for most of the eight months in which the original StarCraft was an only child and for some time beyond.

On November 30, 1998, the expansion pack known as Brood War was born, thus shoring up the game's transformation from 'Game of the Year' to 'Game of the Future'.

As became the norm for Blizzard titles, Brood War spent part of its time in utero in public view: beta testing. The expansion had, of course, been fully planned prior to StarCraft's release - units such as the Valkyrie had brief stints in the original game's beta testing before being removed temporarily. Competition steadily grew in intensity inside the beta, culminating in a Blizzard-sponsored tournament a week prior to the retail release of Brood War. Tom "Zileas" Cadwell, an American Protoss player, was the beta's champion.



Zileas was an MIT computer science student at the time and would go on to develop an independent and well-received RTS game dubbed StrifeShadow and, later, would work at Blizzard on Warcraft 3: The Frozen Throne and World of

Warcraft before leaving in '05 to obtain a MBA degree. As of 2010, he is working at Riot Games on the title League of Legends, one of the most highly regarded video games releases of 2009.

The second place finisher in the tournament was Agent911, a former WarCraft 2 player and Terran user who later went on to work at Gas Powered Games, the developer for Supreme Commander, the 2007 "spiritual successor" to 1997's Total Annihilation.

Clearly, 'StarCraft savant' is a nifty thing to have on your resumé.

Over the course of the tournament, Zileas became such a feared Protoss player that his units began to receive their own colloquial names. When carrying Reavers, his Shuttles became known as "the Shuttle that fires Scarabs" because of the speed with which he maneuvered his harassing Reavers. He was so fast that it became almost impossible to hit his Reavers before they had launched their Scarab bombs into groups of enemy workers. Zileas' revolutionary work with the unit changed the way it was used and forced Blizzard to weaken Reavers through balance patches, increasing the Scarab cool down and build time. Even so, the deft touch he displayed served as a model for Protoss players for years to come.

Over the course of seven games in the finals, a wide range of strategies were thrown at each competitor including proto-early expansions and a now-bizarre looking Scout and Zealot rush. The many balance patches of Brood War have changed much, such as making the Scout one of the few utterly unusable units in the game (except to embarrass). However, in 1999, they were utilized to great effect despite their expensiveness.

It is important to note that in addition to balance changes, replays and game speed have also altered the fundamental nature of the game. It took until May 2001, in the milestone 1.08 patch, for replays functionality to be added to the game.

During the beta tournament, the game speed was 'fast' as opposed to 'fastest'. Blizzard employees have stated several times that the game was never meant to be played competitively on the 'fastest' setting. However, community pushes and the quality of competitive play made the quickest setting the default for almost every level of play. One notable exception was the Battle.net ladder, which remained set to its default speed of 'faster' until its demise years later. For this reason as well as a general deterioration of play and rampant cheating, the Battle.net ladder quickly became obsolete, abused and eventually disbanded.

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Zileas, of Brood War beta fame, was one of the most influential StarCraft players of his era.

In the early Brood War era, a rift persisted between the old Warcraft 2 turned StarCraft players and the "new school" who had come to the game through other avenues. In addition to the social breaks, the style of play also differed greatly between the two camps.

"[Warcraft 2] players strive to build a strong economy to finance overwhelming hordes of units," read an ancient and now lost article on Sirlin.net. "When they outnumber the enemy 10 to 1, they attack; 5 to 1, they surround you. You get the idea. Individual battles matter little to these players, since it's more important to build a large mobile force capable of attacking the opponent's weak spots."

The article continues, explaining the difference: "Warcraft's interface and units didn't allow players to gain much benefit from micromanaging individual battles. Warcraft's units were more homogeneous, meaning you didn't see kill ratios of 50:1 like Templars and Reavers are capable of in Starcraft. In short, macromanagement was the only way to go. Build a large army. Divide the enemy's army. Concentrate the firepower of your army."



Cue the "new school".

"And then there was Zileas," concludes the article. "He came along and pointed out the amazing effects micromanagement of individual battles can have in Starcraft, and he preached the revolutionary ideas of divide and conquer and concentration of firepower on the small scale, that is."

Fundamental moves such as shift-queue (allowing groups of units to have a list of orders to follow) attacks, paying special attention to unit formation, constant worker production and the art of worker harassment can all be traced back toward Zileas.

It must seem strange to many that the idea of constant worker production had to be invented, that the habit of harassing workers needed to be devised. After all, it all seems so obvious now.

Simply put, StarCraft was very much a blank slate upon its release. Ideas as seemingly simple as transferring groups of workers to newly built expansions (rather than building them one at a time) were groundbreaking. It took a player the caliber of Miguel "**Maynard**" Bombach (a former Age of Empires player), probably the most dominant American player of all time, to popularize a concept as simple as the worker-transfer. And it changed the game forever.



Dudey, an accomplished old school StarCraft player also known as ilnp, had this to say about Maynard at his peak:

"You guys have no idea what dominance is -- you weren't around when the game was new. The only people who could come close to Maynard's sort of dominance was Grrrr... and BoxeR. We're not talking win most everything, win a lot, impressive play. We're talking most of the top players were directly influenced by his play and his play alone, after a long period in which many refused to play him because they swore he cheated. We're talking literally invincible in even 2 on 2 play with shitty allies against every other top player in the world in practice, ladder, and tournament games."

Maynard's thorough dominance, borne out mainly on the Kali server and before modern competition had truly taken off, has thus largely been forgotten. He is remembered more for the worker-transfer bearing his name than his God-like status in the first year of Brood War.

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Although he stayed near the top, Maynard's hold on the title of world's greatest player slipped as 1999 progressed.

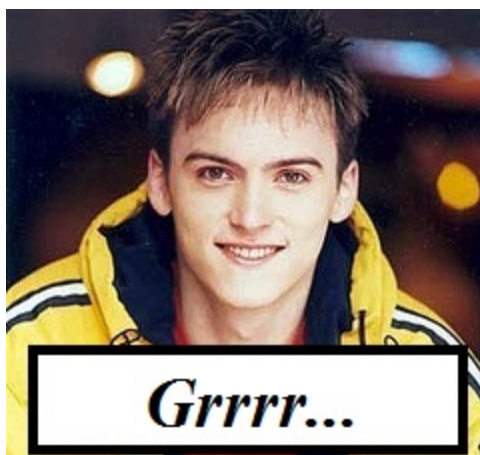


That same year, Koreans started popping up on Battle.net with greater and greater frequency. **Christopher "Pillars" Page**, an American who spent four months as a professional gamer in Korea, explains Korea's rise in the StarCraft world.

"Both Starcraft and SC:BW were released later in Korea, and it took them a while to get up to speed. What one noticed about them at first was the relatively mechanical and robotic style of play. The way many Koreans seemed to learn to play was to master a single racial match-up on a single map and come as close as possible to perfecting it. They followed build orders rigorously, and often very efficiently, but didn't adapt well to new situations or creative responses by their opponents. Often they would play a moderately strong game for the first ten minutes of the match, but once the game became more dynamic and opened up a bit they would have difficulty doing anything other than throwing the same mixture of units at you over and over again.

"Obviously, this didn't remain the case for long."

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The first true superstar of StarCraft, the one who truly attained *celebrity*, followed Maynard's domination with a two-year burst of brilliance that burned brighter than almost anyone in the past decade. I speak, of course, of the Protoss French Canadian, **Guillaume Patry "Grrrr..."**

In late 1999, before launching into stardom on the Korean professional circuit, Grrr.... was the most feared player in the world. Online ladders and live events alike fell to him like dominoes and he took prize purse after purse for thousands of dollars in total loot. The AMD Professional Gaming League and the i2e2, the two largest prize pools in the world at the time, were both taken down by Grrrr... prior to his landing in Korea.

I spoke with Guillaume recently about his experience.

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It seems that over the past five years, the StarCraft world's memory is worsening. The beginning of StarCraft and of professional gaming is forgotten by too many people, the titans of the era are not given the credit they deserve.

Even **Guillaume Patry "Grrrr..."**, the greatest non-Korean StarCraft player of all time and once a giant, seems to be mentioned less and less these days.

Patry's journey began at StarCraft's release. Like most people, he played the official ladder back then. There was no such thing as professional gaming in those days and Patry, like most gamers, played for the love of the game.

In Season Two, about three months after the game was released, he rose to some prominence by having several accounts in the top five of the ladder. He won a "Blizzard World Championship" and placed 3rd in a PGL tournament held in San Francisco.

His father, seeing his ascendancy, was immensely proud even if he did not play the game himself.

"Being the best in the world at anything," said his father, "is something to be proud of."

By the time he moved to South Korea in January 2000, he was indeed at the top of the world. He won three televised tournaments within three months of his arrival and his fame exploded. He was soon being asked for autographs on the street by a diverse cast of people including "60 year old men and women with their two babies."

"I won the televised tournaments but that's all I won," said Patry. "There were many offline tournaments which I lost but no one saw them. People used to say 'you have to put a camera on this guy for him to play well.'"

"General~Khalsa", a community figure, was responsible for bringing Patry and a team of foreigners to compete in Korea.

"[Khalsa] is a piece of shit," said Patry. "He started ripping us off and laughing, saying 'this is business.' He had under-aged kids live across the world, I think what he was doing was more than business. If only he knew pro gaming would be around for ten years, I think his approach would have been different.

"Say we had a contract that said he takes pretty much 40% of everything I made and provides housing. We get a sponsor for 8,000 a month for me. He gives me 4,000 a month and stops paying for rent.

"It was a free for all back then. I don't think there's a single gamer that played in 2000 who is not owed money."

But that did not stop Grrrr... from loving Korea. Prior to his arrival, he said he played Brood War every single day. Once he was in Korea, his practice time fell precipitously.

"I was irresponsible. I regret it. I was drinking almost every day. I loved the food, the culture, the people. The night before the final of the OSL, I was out until 4 am. I didn't get drunk. I won but I really could have used the practice."

To this day, he remains the only foreign player to have won a Korean Starleague.

"I knew I was drinking too much," he said, "when I showed up for tournaments late and my hands would be shaking from being hung over."

The excessive drinking remains a problem to this day, he says. However, his ability to become immediately excellent at whatever game he picks up - StarCraft and, now, Poker included - remains a weapon in his arsenal.

As the television era of StarCraft took off, Grrrr... was the most feared player in the world.

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In early 2000, Grrrr..., Maynard, Pillars and Jérôme "Thor" Rioux were approached by General~Khalsa, a well-known member of the Kali community, said Pillars, and were offered to start a professional gaming team composed of

foreign players which would move to South Korea and compete in the burgeoning Korean professional StarCraft leagues.

"This seemed like a pretty insane and fun opportunity," wrote Pillars in 2008, "and I eventually decided to go. The four of us showed up in Korea in early 2000. We stayed in the international dorm section of a prominent women's college (Ewha Women's University) in Seoul for the first few months and made Slki Bang (the internet cafe and home to the best Korean professional team of the time) our training space."



For Pillars and most of the foreign invasion, their results in Korea were lackluster and their motivation and willingness to dedicate their lives simply did not measure up to the natives' will power.

Guillaume Patry, on the other hand, was an unstoppable force in StarCraft and Korean culture.

In an era where perfect technical play was a distant dream, Grrrr... stormed through opponents - or, rather, he Scarabed through them - with relative ease.

He remains the most successful non-Korean of all time by far, having won several prestigious tournaments including the all-important first OnGameNet StarLeague (OSL), consistently the *most* prestigious league in all of StarCraft, predating its little brother MBCGame StarCraft League (MSL) by two years.

As the televised StarCraft scene began to boom, Grrrr... was its chief celebrity. He appeared on talk shows and was the subject to more than his fair share of screaming female admirers. His foreign good looks and charisma (call me, Giyom,

we'll go out to dinner sometime) added up to a level of celebrity not seen before him.

His in-game dominance and his relatively laid back training schedule led to the perception that he almost never trained. This is a perception based in some truth: although he had trained daily in Canada, his training was relatively light once he moved to Seoul. Like the other foreigners who had at first accompanied him on his trip to Korea, the motivation to keep up with the native's hours was hard to find. For Grrrr..., though, the lighter hours did not detract from his winning - at least not in the beginning. However, his "lightest" schedule while still an active player, about a year after he left Korea and was well past his peak, was 20 hours per week in 2003 - that's three hours per day, every day, well past the point when his professional career had ended. And he was still quite good.

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The OSL's position as the superior tournament is in its perceived pedigree. It is older, its television ratings are higher, its live audience is larger and its original champions are StarCraft legends: Grrr..., Garimto and BoXeR. As the late 2000's have come, other tournaments have risen in prestige - particularly the MSL and the team-based Proleague - but the OSL has remained on top, if only because of history.

Outside of the world of StarCraft, other major e-sports tournaments had been established by 2000. Notably, the Cyberathlete Professional League, a semiannual FPS-focused tournament based in Texas, began in 1997. It would eventually hand out millions of dollars in prizes for various games (most consistently Counter-Strike) before sputtering mid-decade and folding in 2007. The CPL was, for years, the pinnacle of e-sports in the Western world.

While the CPL was streaming its footage online and holding twice-a-year events, the OSL and MSL had dedicated television channels and were packing arenas with crowds of over 10,000 on a weekly basis and 100,000 on the biggest days. The OSL's prize began around \$15,000 and has skyrocketed to as much as about \$90,000 for first place in 2010. The 'Golden Mouse', the trophy one receives upon winning three OSL championships, is the most coveted prize in StarCraft. It is a symbol of greatness. Those who hold it include Nada, July, Jaedong and Flash.

The StarLeague popularized the idea of tournaments producing custom maps to keep strategies fluid and games interesting. The constant flow of well-balanced but constantly changing maps has helped, from both a player's and spectator's point of view, keep StarCraft progressing rather than at a standstill.

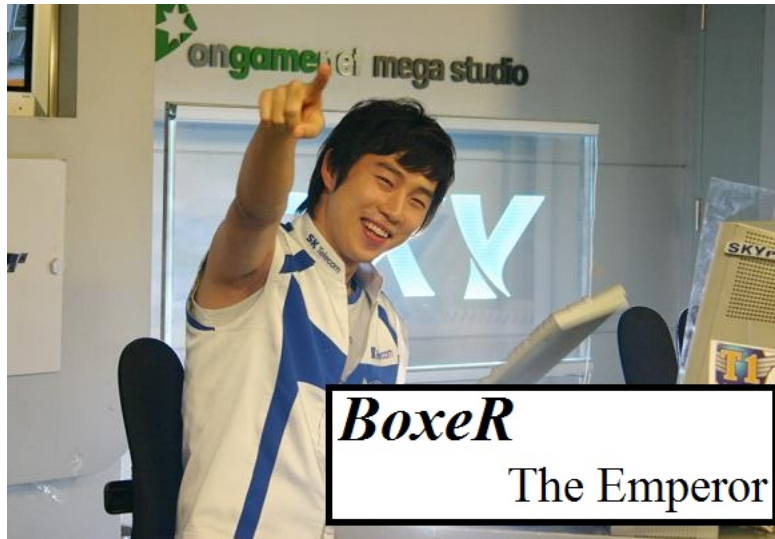
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"Beauty is not the goal of competitive sports, but high-level sports are a prime venue for the expression of human beauty. The relation is roughly that of courage to war."

David Foster Wallace

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In mid to late 2000, Grrr....'s run as the world's best ran out of time. Although he would continue to play at a top level (his last great tournament was placing third in the May 2001 StarLeague), the lack of hours put in caught up to him and his dominance had come to an end.



The mantle of the world's best Protoss passed to Kim Dong Soo "**GARIMTO**". However, for most of his prime, Garimto would sit in the shadow of StarCraft's all-time greatest celebrity, the most renowned and revered professional gamer of all time: Lim Yo Hwan "**BoxeR**".



If this is the bible of StarCraft, BoxeR might just be Jesus with spiffier clothes. The man known to the hundreds of thousands of members of his fan club as "The Emperor" landed in the throne of StarCraft right as patch 1.08 hit, introducing replays to spread the word of BoxeR around the world.

Ironically, 1.08 ended the era of patched balance changes, so as to balance the game perfectly right before an unheard of 20 year old came out of the dark arcades and showed that in StarCraft, factional balance meant little when genius was at hand.

His unquestioned supremacy, his unparalleled charisma in game and out as well the maturing of the professional circuit meant that he has remained the iconic figure in StarCraft history, nearer to Michael Jordan or Diego Maradona than most other e-sports stars. His popularity helped raise professional gaming to a new plateau in Korea and the widespread love of BoxeR has long outlasted his spectacular results.

The President of the Korean E-Sports Association (KeSPA) had this to say about BoxeR when writing the introduction to the legend's biography:

"Lim Yohwan, with the thorough mentality of a professional as his foundation, has imprinted on the minds of the public through his sincere games that progamers are not 'game-addicts without any prudence,' but 'hard-working professionals.'"

BoxeR is one of the few e-sports professionals who transcends not only the game he plays but, often, the escapes the box of games at all and slips comfortably into the expansive idea of greatness.

At the dawn of the age of BoxeR in early 2001, Terran was considered a weak, slow race with miles of ground to make up before it could match Protoss and Zerg. A Terran had never even made it out of the group stage in the OSL - in the first two seasons, both winners were Protoss users Grrr.... and GARIMTO.

Turning the game on its head, BoxeR was a pioneer of creative attacks and an artist who was able to take disadvantageous positions and throw them in the face of his opponents as he stretched each of his units beyond their prescribed physical limit. The hulking, immobile Terran race became a sped-up monster in his hands. Dropships became lethal hit-and-run weapons. Floating buildings became mobile fortresses, ready to land in an opponent's base at any time.

Micromanagement, the ability to control units on a small or individual scale, was BoxeR's greatest advantage. Some of his most iconic signature plays include: the simultaneous Ghost Lock Down of almost a dozen opposing Battle Cruisers. Killing a Lurker with a single Marine shooting, running and avoiding spikes, shooting and running and shooting. Irradiating two Science Vessels and using them to wipe out a player's worker population.

The worth of a single unit was never looked at in the same way once BoxeR landed on top. As Zileas had taken strides in this direction, Grrr.... had highlighted the use of a few key units in the Protoss arsenal, it was BoxeR who took the entire Terran army and proved their worth beyond all previous measure.

BoxeR won an unprecedented two straight StarLeagues in 2001, the Hanbitsoft OSL and the Coca-Cola OSL. Only Garimto, the best Protoss in the world, prevented him from winning a third straight. The SKY2001 OSL finals, which Garimto came back from a 2-1 deficit to win, remains one of the most talked-about upsets in StarCraft history. Additionally, BoxeR won the KPGA Tour in early 2002 over his greatest rival, the best Zerg in the world at the time and forever the "King of Second Place", Hong Jin-Ho "YellOw".



Of these three players (BoxeR, Garimto and YellOw), it was surprisingly YellOw who was able to maintain the highest level of play for the longest time. Garimto faded first and BoxeR's reign as "unbeatable" had ended in 2003 and his position as a top-level professional fell soon after. YellOw was consistently on top of the Zerg race until 2004, an impressively long hold on the top. Only Jaedong has held that honor for longer.

Even after BoxeR's fall from the very top, his popularity remained at unparalleled levels until his entry into the South Korean military in 2006. He was more than the sum of his victories, he was a heroic testament of artistry and willpower rising to the throne.

Cementing his international fame were his two victories in the World Cyber Games of 2001 and 2002. Although less prestigious and stocked with talent than the Korean leagues, the WCG has the air of an electronic Olympics. BoxeR faced off against non-Korean opponents and his games were shown throughout the world, boosting his already considerable notoriety.

In fact, the 2001 and 2002 World Cyber Games proved the pinnacle of the competition as far as StarCraft was concerned. Although it was the most popular

game in each successive year, the title of WCG champion became increasingly irrelevant with each passing tournament.

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As the game of StarCraft was exploding in South Korea, it was changing in the West. The RTS genre continued to march on even if at a slowing pace, most significantly with the release of Warcraft 3 (which will be discussed further in the Book of Sequels) in 2002. Warcraft 3's most lasting contribution to the genre was permanently shifting the status quo to 3D.

With its release, an excited fanbase was quickly established and a pro circuit analogous to StarCraft's solidified in Korea with significant tournaments running in Europe as well. While the Warcraft 3 pro circuit was organized similarly to StarCraft's and was easily one of the most successful of all time, its early momentum was not sustained. The popularity of the televised leagues never matched that of its sci-fi older brother.

As time passed, competitions with a significant prize pool were becoming much less common in the West and, overall, the level of play began to stagnate. Although several westerners did play in televised Korean leagues throughout the decade (Dutchman "**Liquid** Nazgul" and American "**Idra**" were two of the more famous), they generally had limited success while competing.

One notable exception was the Australian Peter "**Legionnaire**" Neate, who is the only non-Korean to complete an all-kill - that is, an individual 4-0 sweep of the pro team Toona.

As the financial support for the game dried up in the West, a cult following began to amass in various corners of the internet around the birth of replays in 2001. Although several websites significant to western fandom have come and gone, the one truly worth mentioning is Team Liquid, which has been the most important outside of Korea for almost seven years. Founded in September 2002 (it is eight years old as of this writing) and grown as a mix of Europeans and Americans, it has served as the central beacon for western StarCraft through thick and thin.

A substantial following also took root in China during the decade. In the second half of the '00's, China's StarCraft scene was almost certainly the most impressive outside of Korea, producing several professional gamers of some merit and holding numerous significant tournaments. Language barriers maintained separation between the West and China but various competitions and collaborations in the latter part of the decade have brought the two communities closer together.

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As BoxeR began to fade, the Terran Lee Yoon Yeol "**NaDa**" took on the mantle of greatness.

BoxeR's strength was always his micromanagement. His weakness was his macromanagement, his inability to consistently secure the resources and army size generally thought to be required for victory. During his reign, BoxeR confounded those expectations and won titles with sheer force of will. As now seems inevitable, another great player eventually came to the top, using BoxeR's weakest point to do so.



NaDa's ascendancy was a milestone in top-level StarCraft play. NaDa's play was considered technically perfect, a product of countless hours of practice, unheard of timing and a huge focus on macromanagement. The style was accurately summed up as 'pure power'. Whereas before NaDa, a less technically sound player had always reigned at the top (Grrr.... and BoxeR), one with the focus on micromanagement rather than the entire game, after NaDa, the entire pro-circuit and the top in particular became much more focused on macromanagement and technical perfection in their games.

The old adage of 'BoxeR is Jordan' led American Protoss user Rekrul to sum up the new player in 2003 this way: "NaDa is Shaq."

NaDa's powerful and utterly muscular play rolled over opponents. By long-term statistic measurements, NaDa is the greatest player of all time. He won three straight KPGA tours in 2002 (the precursor to MSL), an OSL in 2003 and two more OSL championships over the course of four years. He is the only player to have won three of each tournament. By the middle of the decade, he had won several hundreds of thousands of dollars and had cemented his place among the greatest of all time.

While NaDa's championships came over the course of four years from 2002 to 2006, he was not universally considered the best in the world during much of the last two of those years. Choi Yun Sung "**iloveoov**" wore the crown for most of that time.



If BoxeR was the brightest star in the StarCraft universe, iloveoov was the black hole which devoured him.

Iloveoov's style took NaDa's powerful macromanagement style and raised it to levels never before seen.

According to longterm statistics, iloveoov is the second greatest player of all time. However, during his peak, he was so far and away the most dominant player that he owns the records for both the greatest single streak of all time (33-3 in major matches during the first half of 2004) and the greatest single Terran versus Zerg streak of all time (25 straight wins versus Zerg in 2004).

Although his two OSL and three MSL championships fall one Starleague short of NaDa's record, it is the opinion of many that iloveoov's more intense peak play proved him to be the best player of all time.

In 2004, he won three straight MSL championships against Yellow, NaDa and the Protoss Park Young Wook "**Kingdom**", one of the greatest Protoss players of the era.

November 2004 saw him win his first OSL in convincing fashion against Boxer, perceived to be his mentor. Iloveoov's already considerable negative status among

fans only intensified after Boxer broke down in tears on stage following the match and the arena emptied quicker than any Starleague in memory.

The Terran's hated status can be traced to two roots: his unprecedented consistency during his peak and overpowering style which led to many to see him as an unthinking robot, much in contrast to the view of BoxeR as an intelligent artist blazing paths with a new medium.

With hindsight, one can see that this view was based more in emotion than fact. Iloveoov invented and honed more new strategies and build orders than almost any Terran has during the television era.

The final root of the hostility was the front of confidence he put on in interviews.

"I always use interviews strategically," said iloveoov. "That's why I would mock my opponents, or pretend to be strong. I thought all of that was momentum."

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that his ostentatious bragging and his technically superior play would lead to hate amongst fans.

But at the time, even through the hate, one could do little but stand in awe of his accomplishments.

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The Proleague, a team league in which players battle until an entire team is eliminated, has its roots in 2003. It proved an overwhelming success: in 2004, the Proleague Grand Final saw a live audience of over 100,000 come out to watch the greats play.

Meanwhile, the OSL continued to grow and the MSL, though more than viable commercially, remained the second string.

For the first half of the decade, the best players in the world were almost always Terrans. BoxeR, NaDa and iloveoov won seven OSL championships and seven MSL titles (counting the KPGA tours).

Until the middle of 2004, it seemed that winning championships was something that only great Terrans, excellent Protosses and no Zergs could do.

Six Protoss OSL championships were won from 2000 to 2004: Grrr..., Garimto twice, Reach, Kingdom and Nal_Ra.

These are some of the most storied names in the race's history. Park Jung Suk "**Reach**" is a player who defied iloveoov, using his own tool - overwhelming macro - against the Monster Terran. During an extended era of Protoss weakness, Reach's singularly strong play (and handsome face) earned him the nickname "Man Toss".

Kang Min "**Nal_Ra**" is remembered as one of the most creative Protoss players of all time, analogous to BoxeR in his prime. From his rise in 2003 and into the

next several years, his creative play and rivalry with players such as Savior won him a legion of fans who persist to this day.

During the 2000 to 2004 time period, five Terran titles were won: Boxer twice, Sync, NaDa and Xellos.

For seven of those finals match ups, Zerg players came in a disappointing second place: H.O.T.-Forever twice, SKELTON, JiNam, YellOw twice and ChoJJa.

In the MSL, the story was similar.

From 2002 to 2004, seven Terran MSL championships were won: three by NaDa, three by iloveoov and the first by BoxeR.

Nal_ra won the only Protoss MSL title of the time in mid-2003.

Zergs fell to the runner-up position four times during the period: Yellow, the King of Silver, did it three times and ChoJJa fell once.

The Terran race was top-heavy for much of the opening of the decade. Legendary players Boxer, NaDa and iloveoov carried the race to title after title but this did not translate to thorough domination on every level of the pro circuit. Protosses still won a significant number of titles and competed on every level.

Zerg, often the most used race, was shut out of a title until (appropriately) July 2004, when a revolutionary Zerg user came to the forefront and brought his race to the top with him.



Park Sung Joon "**July**" was the first great Zerg.

July will forever be remembered as the man who took the Mutalisk to new heights. He used a technique (originally developed by Seo Gyung Jong "**Shark**") known as stacking which allows entire groups of the flying unit to be controlled

with such precision that it is as if they are of one body. The unit entered and remains in a state of prominence largely thanks to Shark's innovations and July's ability to translate them into championships.

In July '04, during his rookie season, JulyZerg became the first Zerg to win the OSL and begin his trek to be the first Zerg #1 in the world. He was nowhere close to as dominant as the previous #1's but, for two years in 2004 and 2005, he was consistently among the best in the world, winning two OSL titles and earning runner-up twice.

He occupied the #1 position in the KeSPA (Korean E-Sports Association) rankings 11 months from 2005 to 2006, sandwiched in between two brilliant and oppressive reigns at #1 by iloveoov.

Still, July had proven that a Zerg could become the world's best and that simple push of encouragement is all it took for the greatest Zerg of all time to arrive.

Ma Jae Yoon "**Savior**" was the first Zerg to truly dominate professional StarCraft. He personally put an end to iloveoov's reign with multiple lopsided victories over the Terran master on his way to three MSL victories in 2005 and 2006. His first OSL appearance in 2006 saw him win another championship and walk the "Royal Road", the prestigious honor of winning a major championship in your rookie year.



The word "Bonjwa", coined during July's reign (although he is no longer considered 'a bonjwa'), came to frequent use during this era to describe a player of complete dominance, a player at the level of BoxeR, NaDa and iloveoov: Savior.

Many believe that Savior, known as "The Maestro", was the last truly great player of Brood War, that all who came after him failed to reach the heights of dominance he rose to.

After years of macromanagement-specialized players dragging the game whichever way they wanted, Savior pulled back. With the impeccable micromanagement of BoxeR, his Lurkers and Mutalisks and, most of all, his Defilers became legendary as they were stretched beyond what anyone had imagined. Among the StarCraft faithful, his real name is one of the most recognized for one simple reason: when the television commentators watched his beautifully orchestrated battles come to apex, they could not speak but to scream "*Ma Jae Yoon!*" again and again, louder and louder until voices were lost.

High-profile victories against resurgent old masters iloveoov and NaDa forever ended the debate concerning Ma Jae Yoon's own greatness. While the rest of the Zerg field struggled with maps perceived to have anti-Zerg features, Savior remained atop the world. Following an especially devastating victory over NaDa to win the OSL in early 2007, the StarCraft world took a deep breath and prepared for the plunge into the extended era of Zerg dominance.

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The Maestro by Alex "Aeres" Dellinger.

Ma Jae Yoon. It is a name that elicits many things: respect, adoration, loathing, contempt. Of all the professional StarCraft players past and present, it is difficult to find one more capable, or more villainous, than the man known as "sAviOr".

Perhaps more than any of his fellow progamers, his legacy is that of opposites.

On the one hand, his magnificent control of the Zerg race and brilliant execution of bold strategies earned him three MSL titles and a Starleague title, along with the coveted honorific of "Bonjwa", a designation of StarCraft mastery that only three players had received prior to him. On the other hand, many despise sAviOr passionately, due to his role in leading a match-fixing ring whose participants intentionally lost games, in exchange for financial gain from online betting sites.

The foundation of Ma's reputation is at once a combination of masterful play and behind-the-scenes cheating. Whatever one's perspective on sAviOr's morality, however, it cannot be denied that he was and will remain one of the best and most influential StarCraft players of all time.

sAviOr's career began rather uneventfully. As a teenager of 16 years joining the 2003 progaming scene, his matches were generally limited to preliminary or qualifying games, with some major television matches being aired a year later.

Ma's initial entry into the MSL tournament (MBCGame StarCraft League), while not stunning by any means, was indicative of the potential the youth held in e-Sports. His career finally began to pick up steam upon placing first in the UZOO MSL tournament, but even at this early stage, controversy swelled around him.

The admiration and praise normally bestowed upon a newly-crowned MSL champion was not as prominent for the young Zerg player, due to the games he played. In that time, the Protoss vs. Zerg matchup was believed to be imbalanced in favor of Zerg; since Ma only played Zerg and Protoss opponents in the MSL, with the exception of NaDa, the sole Terran player to fall to sAviOr, fans claimed that racial imbalance, not skill, was the reason he had prevailed.

This perception would soon change, however. sAviOr entered the next tournament, the 2005 CYON MSL, as an unrecognized champion; upon his departure, he had gained the recognition he so deserved as a champion. While he placed second in the tournament (bested only by Zerg player ChoJJa), the focal point of the series was sAviOr's utterly dominating performance against Terran player, and former Bonjwa, iloveoov. The crowd favorite for the two sets, iloveoov was humiliated by the Zerg player, being shut out 0-2 in the first set, and 0-3 in the second. What left the audience starstruck was not merely Ma's awesome play, but rather the method in which he defeated iloveoov. The Terran's forte was macromanagement play, defeating his opponents with superior control of resources and production facilities; sAviOr denied him of even a single victory *by playing the same macro game* that made his opponent so fearsome, "essentially beating iloveoov at his own game". The stunning blowout from sAviOr instantly propelled him to the spotlight, and was a more daring achievement than any MSL title could hope to be. The CYON MSL sparked a rivalry between the two players, one in which the Zerg player consistently defeated the Terran legend. And thus sAviOr's own legend began.

sAviOr was riding high at the outset of 2006, and his sights were aimed even higher. He showed exemplary play in all three MSL tournaments that year, winning each title with ease, barring a tense encounter from Terran player Midas in the second MSL. Ma became the ace player for StarCraft pro-team CJ Entus (then known as Greatest One), and entered the 2007 season as fearsome as ever. But the road to even further stardom was more treacherous than before, not only for the Maestro but for all Zerg players. The 2007 map pool began showing a trend toward anti-Zerg play, but while other Zerg players suffered, sAviOr became the Zerg beacon of hope, still managing to hold off the bias toward Terran play by defeating both Iris and Hwasin in amazing comeback victories to reach the Shinhan Bank Starleague and GOMTV MSL finals matches. The pro-sAviOr attitude reached a fever pitch upon Ma's defeat of NaDa in the Shinhan Bank finals, elevating his status to that of perhaps the greatest Zerg player of all time.

The Destroyer (as sAviOr had come to be called) entered the MSL finals with the hopes of the crowd on his shoulders. His opponent was the Protoss player Bisu,

who at the time was fairly unknown. Ma's fans were supremely confident that their idol would crush the incumbent finalist; there was no way their hero could lose.

Game 1 of the finals was played on the triangle-shaped map Longinus II, notorious for the advantage Protoss held thanks to the additional Vespene Geyser available for harvesting at the natural expansions. Despite this detriment, no one doubted for a second that sAviOr, who started in the bottom-left position, would prevail against top-left spawning Bisu. Bisu's failed attempt to block a greedy sAviOr from claiming his second and third bases was shortly followed by setting up a Nexus at his own natural, along with a Forge to defend with Photon Cannons against any early aggressive actions by the Zerg player. Ma continued to exploit his preferred macroeconomic style, claiming a fourth resource node across the map, while Bisu constructed a Stargate in order to use Corsair frigates to snipe sAviOr's Overlords, which sAviOr countered with a Spire to hatch Mutalisk fliers. The Protoss, sensing an opportunity to exploit the Zerg's willingness to sit back and macro up, decided to advance quickly on his tech tree, constructing a Citadel of Adun and Templar Archives, adding Dark Templar to his strike force. Bisu's fleet of 3 Corsairs managed to pick off scouting Overlords and allowed Dark Templar to scour the map, sneaking into the Maestro's main and taking down the Spire right before his Hydralisks reached the base. sAviOr's double-gas expansion took some harassment from Bisu's unorthodox Dark Templar and Corsair unit mix, while the Zerg launched his own assault on Bisu's newly constructed mineral-only expansion with Lurkers and Zerglings; unfortunately for the Protoss, he couldn't save the expansion from being destroyed due to a lack of Observers available to reveal the burrowed Lurkers. By the time they arrived at the sieged base, it was too late for the Nexus.

Bisu's attempt to harass the Zerg's double-gas expo with Dark Templar was repelled by a swarm of Mutalisks, but not before Bisu used the diversion to sneak another DT into sAviOr's main, undetected, for future mayhem. This was compounded by an attack at sAviOr's natural with a force of Zealots, a Dragoon, and an Archon, which went unnoticed by the Zerg, thanks to the constant Corsair sniping going on all over the map. Yet another attack was commenced by Bisu when he ordered the hidden Dark Templar in sAviOr's main to destroy the Spawning Pool; the DT was taken down by Mutalisks before the Pool died, but the distraction was still a major boon to Bisu, since the Mutas were forced to abandon the natural to defend the Pool. He took this time to re-expand at his destroyed mineral-only base.

The Mutalisks returned in time to drive off the attack at sAviOr's natural, but

not before the defensive line of Sunken Colonies and Lurkers was defeated; to make matters worse for the Zerg, Protoss reinforcements were already en route to take advantage of the hole in the Zerg's defenses. sAviOr was forced to defend against the squad of Zealots by pulling his Drones off minerals to fight, while Bisu claimed yet another expansion. By this time, Bisu was rolling in resources, and used constant pressure to buy time to amass a deadly army of Zealots, Archons, and High Templar. sAviOr's double-gas base, along with his Spire, finally falls to this attack. Ma rallies a final desperate assault upon Bisu's mineral-only expo, but is driven back by a superior Protoss army. With no hope left, sAviOr GG's.

The crowd was awestruck. How had this newcomer so soundly outplayed the Maestro? It was unfathomable! Hope still remained for the Zerg hero, but his confidence was clearly shaken by this new "Bisu build" (as the Forge expand into dual Corsair / Dark Templar opening came to be known), and was simply unsure how to defeat it.

Game 2, played on Reverse Temple, began similarly to the first game in the set, with Bisu fast-expanding and scouting sAviOr's own expansion, but this time, the Protoss managed to delay the Hatchery with a blocking Probe for so long that Ma was forced to expand at the mineral-only expo instead. Bisu's scouting Probe remained alive for an incredibly long time in sAviOr's main, forcing the Zerg to construct a Lair at the mineral-only expo, which was scouted by Bisu's first Zealot.

Anticipating another Corsair opening, sAviOr built his Spire earlier than in the prior match; a Mutalisk offensive at Bisu's main was repelled by a phalanx of cannons and Corsairs, forcing the Zerg to pull back and throw down more expansions.

While this happened, Bisu was busy warping in Reavers after constructing a Robotics Support Bay, thereafter switching to a mass-Gateway build while still pumping out Reavers and Corsairs. A minor engagement left sAviOr with a few less Zerglings, and Bisu retreated. Another expansion was constructed for the Protoss moments before a large offensive push commenced toward the Zerg's mineral-only base, consisting of Zealots, Dragoons, Corsairs, and a Shuttle ferrying two Reavers. sAviOr's response was equally formidable; his collection of Hatcheries had produced an army of Hydralisks and Zerglings with Mutalisk support. A devastating flanking maneuver took down Bisu's ground army, but not before the Corsairs fried every Mutalisk. Bisu responded to the mass Hydras by warping in several High Templar for Psionic Storm support, and Shuttled a Dark Templar into sAviOr's main; at the same time, a Zerg force approached and destroyed Bisu's mineral-only expo (again, a lack of Observers prevented the Lurkers from being seen). Another push toward sAviOr's mineral-only was

ordered, but while the Protoss army was well-rounded (Zealots, Dragoons, High Templar, and Reavers), Ma's army was substantial as well, and it seemed like the Zerg would handily defend against the assault.

Unfortunately for the Maestro, his decision to burrow all of his Lurkers in close proximity was seized upon by Bisu, whose Templar took most of them down at once with Psionic Storms. Bisu's macro eventually overwhelmed sAviOr, as expansion after expansion fell; by the time the Protoss reached the Zerg's natural, sAviOr had no more units to defend, and concedes the match. Bisu solidified his lead, 2-0; one more win would defeat the Destroyer.

Game 3 began on BlitzX, and sAviOr's confidence had been shattered. It was Ma Jae Yoon who thrived on mind games and sheer macro power to overwhelm the opponent; now that he was the one being overwhelmed by his opponent, his game started to fall apart. Bisu enacted the same Forge-expand, Corsair-opening strategy against sAviOr, and again, sAviOr responded by building a Spire in the hopes of damaging Bisu's economy with Mutalisks; the Spire was scouted, and Photon Cannons were erected around the main and natural. Ma's attempted Muta harass was foiled by the Cannons, and each player macros up for a time.

Bisu struck at sAviOr's third base with Zealots and Corsairs, which were met by a flock of Scourge; try as they might, the Scourge were unable to take down the Corsairs. Lurkers were again able to repel the Zealots, as Bisu once again had no Observers, but the damage was done as sAviOr was forced to pull his Drones off of mining. Bisu's army bypassed the Lurkers and advanced to the natural, moving past the line of Sunken Colonies positioned there and entered the main base.

Constant Hydralisk patrols steadily whittled down Bisu's army, but sAviOr's lack of combat units prompted the use of Drones to fight back against the opponent.

Only two Zealots survived the march to the main and began slicing up the Drones there, while the Corsairs hunted down every Overlord in the area.

sAviOr's final Mutalisks tried to defend against the Zealots, but were shot down by Bisu's Corsairs. The pair of Zealots were finally killed by a lone Hydralisk, but the Maestro was given no reprieve from the Protoss, as two Dark Templar made their way into the Zerg natural and cleared the Sunken Colonies defending it; an influx of mass Hydralisks killed the Templar just as Bisu launched yet another assault upon sAviOr's third base, an attack which was also defeated by the Hydras.

The failed push was enough of a distraction for Bisu to Shuttle four Dark Templar into sAviOr's defenseless main base.

sAviOr knew it was over, and GG'ed, thus ending one of the biggest upsets of StarCraft history, and certainly the biggest of the Maestro's career. An expected demolishing of the Protoss morphed into a complete reversal, in which the

champion of the Zerg fell without winning a single match.

That MSL finals series against Bisu marked the onset of decay in sAviOr's reign. He entered a slump from which he would never fully recover, being eliminated from the Season 2 MSL quarterfinals by Terran player Firebathero, despite having appeared in the finals five times in a row. His fall from the pinnacle of progaming became clearer tournament after tournament. Ma's title of OSL champion was usurped by a defeat at the hands of his teammate, Terran player Iris, in the Daum Starleague; the following season would present sAviOr-less finals in both the Starleague and MSL tournaments. A one-two punch consisting of both failure to qualify for the 2008-09 Starleagues, and a demotion to the B-class rank in CJ Entus (the lowest ranking in his career), would serve as the bottom of the downward spiral Ma had been sinking through. But sAviOr refused to fade into oblivion as a has-been pro; a quick reversal of fate shot him back up to the A-class team, where he enjoyed a sort of revival for the next two years. Although sAviOr would never again reach the peak of skill he had attained in his prime, he would still prove to be a formidable player to compete against, as evidenced by him clinching the Blizzcon 2008 and 2009 tournament titles, on top of exacting his revenge over Bisu by defeating the Protoss player in a series of special event matches.

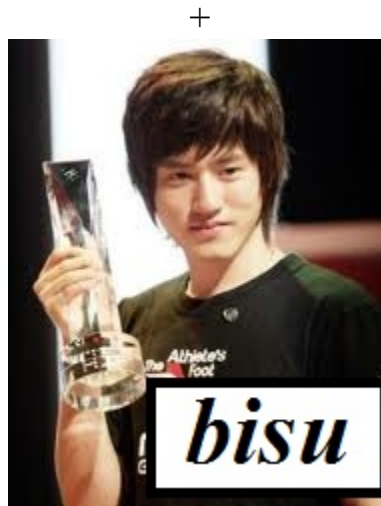
Ma was not destined to retire a legendary hero of StarCraft, however. Rumors began to surface in April of 2010 about the possibility that several matches might have been fixed. TeamLiquid.net moderator and founding father Waxangel first noted several discrepancies in a post on the popular StarCraft site, referring to an assortment of curious lineup changes made at suspicious times, as well as a link to a betting site that mysteriously closed all bets on a match between Luxury and Hwasin before it began. Veteran community figure Dan "Rekrul" Schreiber did some digging on the issue, and confirmed that a group of eleven progamers were arrested and taken to trial on charges of match-fixing, a serious offense in South Korea. These players, which included the likes of Anytime, Luxury, and StarCraft's beloved sAviOr, had gone through slumps previously, but it seemed that their slumps were self-imposed; betting sites were paying the accused upward of 10 – 20,000 dollars to throw certain matches. KeSPA had been dealing with the issue with the utmost secrecy, but on May 16th, the story was revealed to the public and confirmed by various Korean sources, and was soon being reported around the world as breaking news. All eleven players had their progaming licences permanently suspended, and various officials associating with the promotion of e-Sports (such as the commentators for OGN, and American commentator Dan "Artosis" Stemkoski) feared that the integrity of the game would

be irrevocably shattered, and called for harsh penalties on the offenders. Prison sentences were given out for the convicted players in October; sAviOr was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

If one word can describe the man Ma Jae Yoon, it is “polarizing”. Never has a progamer had such a divided legacy. In his prime, you were either an adoring fan who idolized him, or a critic who despised him. No ambivalence was present when one mentioned the Maestro. Topping off sAviOr’s legacy was the match-fixing scandal that ruined his career, stripped him of all titles, revoked his progaming license, and landed him a prison sentence, all the while being denigrated by former fans, bitter enemies, and eventually the whole of e-sports.

The magnitude of Ma’s achievements are not to be denied but one must not discount the damage his bid for wealth dealt to the faith of his fans. We can only wonder what Ma Jae Yoon thinks of himself now; was it worth it? Would he have chosen to do anything differently?

One can only hope that he atones for his actions, and one day is accepted once more by the progaming scene.



With four major titles under his belt, Savior advanced to the GomTV MSL finals in 2007 to face an up-and-coming Protoss, Kim Taek Yong "**Bisu**". Attempting to become the most successful MSL champion of all time, Savior was utterly dominated in three games by the young Protoss.

Mentally shaken, Savior's downward spiral accelerated with further losses, most notably to the Terran Firebathero and, numerous times, to Bisu. The Maestro had completely lost his form and hit his first low-point when he was briefly demoted to the B-team of CJ Entus, his employer.

However, the greatest descent and the lowest point of Savior's career came in 2010, after he had apparently made strides back to a high level of competition. It

was revealed in the Korean media that extensive match fixing had taken place throughout the professional StarCraft circuit. Savior and 10 other professionals received lifetime bans for the cheating from KeSPA.

In the West, the incident was often analogized with the infamous "Black Sox Scandal" in which baseball players fixed the 1919 World Series and were forever banned from the game. Aside from the fix itself, many fans theorized that relatively low pay motivated actors in both incidents to collaborate with professional criminals in order to make ends meet.

Though the scandal is a stain on his reputation and brought on the end of his career, he remains most known as "The Maestro", "The Bonjwa" and the player who brought Zerg to the stars.

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Near the tail end of Savior's reign, StarCraft 2 was revealed to the world.

This led to a long-term influx of new faces to the StarCraft community and a revitalization of the Western community in particular.

TeamLiquid, by 2007 the long-term king of western StarCraft, saw a rise in popularity immediately.

The TeamLiquid StarLeague (TSL) was held in 2008 with some of the largest prizes ever seen outside of Korea. The winner, Canadian Jian Fei "IefNaij" Wang took home the biggest chunk of the \$10,000 prize pool after coming out on top of a field of thousands.

As the StarCraft community continued to expand, Team Liquid held the 2009 TSL with \$20,000 in prizes. American ex-professional gamer Tyler "**NonY**" Wasieleski won, defeating professional gamer and community villain Greg "**IdrA**" Fields along the way in perhaps the most talked about series of western StarCraft in almost 10 years. Nony took home a full \$10,000 for his efforts.

Due in large part to that game, NonY is perceived to be the last great hero of Western StarCraft, IdrA its last great villain.

New players in the Western community meant new fans for the Korean pro circuit and new eyes to watch the next great player, whomever that might be.

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One of the great non-Korean players of the entire decade has been Jos de Kroon "**Ret**". His brief tenure in South Korea has been the subject of much confusion. Around the release of StarCraft 2's beta, I asked Ret himself to help me tell the story of that time as well as look forward to his future. This is what I found.

There is a distinct air of isolation in the plane.

You're 30,000 feet above the earth, sitting uncomfortably close to a handful of strangers. The incurable feeling when your organs are thrown an inch out of place during take off and when your head rises a few feet above your body during turbulence only increases the separation between you and the rest of the world. You're filled only with thoughts of the future because the present requires you to sit motionless in an uncomfortable seat next to people with whom a conversation seems impossible. You effectively shut down for a time and wait for a return to normalcy. You think of little else except putting your feet on solid ground again.

Stepping out of an airplane after a long flight, a sea of relief can wash over you. Maybe you see your loved ones, familiar terrain or at least taste the brand new air of a strange place. The blood begins to pump through your body once again and, exhaustion notwithstanding, you seem to hit the ground running.

But when Jos de Kroon landed in Korea to start his much anticipated professional gaming career, the isolation persisted. He went from 6 miles up in the airplane to standing on new ground but for the duration of his stay, he felt as separate as a stranded astronaut. And often, just as cold.

Even before he took off from the Netherlands to Seoul, Ret was nervous. He was a kid in his early 20's on a 5,000 mile trip toward a mysterious career with the pro gaming team eSTRO. He had worked toward this for years but his dreams were full of unknowns. His game had holes (his Zerg versus Zerg weighed heavily on his mind). But more than his StarCraft struggles, he worried about how the Koreans would receive him.

"I am totally different from IdrA or NonY," says Ret. "I'm from a different background and culture and I can say that I'm the type of person that, when he doesn't feel included in the group, completely shuts down. I will be the hardest working kid on a team if I feel like a part of the group and appreciated but if I feel neglected, I will just turn on you. I'm a very emotional person, I think IdrA and NonY are more level headed."

As is widely known, Ret's fears of exclusion proved well-founded.

Upon arrival, eSTRO didn't have a computer for him. He sat idle for several days, watching TV and interacting with the team over food. This brief, unremarkable time was actually the high point of his relationship with the other

members of the team. Ret attributes it to the novelty of the situation: “I was new, so people talked to me more at that time.”

That didn’t last.

When he was finally assigned a computer, he was placed immediately next to a door kept open in the middle of the frigid Korean winter. Ironically, the door was kept open for air conditioning. He was within eyeshot of another available seat but was denied when he asked to move. He sat shivering in full winter clothing as long as he was there, trying and largely failing to concentrate on the game of StarCraft.

“I’m used to doing my own thing in life,” says Ret, “and when I play StarCraft from home, I make sure my conditions are 100% perfect. I buy new keyboards every month and a half. I make sure my gear is in tip top shape. But then I went there and I’m playing in the cold and it was: ‘This is what I went professional for?’ My mind couldn’t accept it.”

Quickly after he had arrived, Ret’s level of interaction with other team members precipitously dropped from low to lower. One day a player would happily talk with Ret, the next day he would be ignored by the same person he thought he had befriended. No one played with him or even allowed him to observe games, he was stuck on ICCup. He’d ask and ask and would endlessly be answered: “Next time.”

Next time, next time, always next time.

It was becoming evident to Ret that the team was increasingly annoyed with him. He is a heavy chain smoker (his idea of significantly cutting back is once or twice per 4-hour practice session) and the team regularly vocalized their disapproval of this. They also didn’t want him to leave the house during free time to buy drinks and food at a local supermarket as he was apt to do when he couldn’t eat Korean food.

And then, in the now infamous episode, he was accused of leaking replays to the outside. In the world of professional gaming, this is a cardinal sin.

As he watched a private Hwata versus Void replay, Ret was whispering back and forth with friends online. From a distance, his teammates thought he was chatting in-game – that is, watching with others. Ret recognized this and quickly tried to assure them that he was, in fact, alone in the replay.

To his face, they accepted Ret’s assurances. Afterwards, they proceeded to tell the coach that he was leaking replays. Ret was told to leave the house.

Ret stayed with fellow Seoul resident Dan “Artosis” Stemkoski. In fact, Ret’s relationship with eSTRO was so spotty, so turbulent that of the almost 4 months that Ret stayed in Korea, 3 months were spent sleeping in Artosis’s apartment.

As the stress of being expelled and potentially fired half way around the world from home clouded his mind, Ret’s game dropped off. In one of the rare occasions

in which he found himself back in the eSTRO house, he lost to Draco in ESL while he sat shivering in the cold next to the always open door, breathing in the freezing air.

It took TSL and two failed Courage tournaments – the tournament in which the winner receives a pro-gaming license – to put Ret's mind's eye back on the game. Then it took a streak of half a dozen Zerg versus Zergs, his weakest match up, to end his third and final Courage tournament. That was the last straw. It was time to go home.

Among others, Hwanni and Artosis were hospitable and helpful for months through Ret's troubled stay but it still took another 5,000 mile plane ride for his feet to hit the ground running. And after all of that, he says that no one should feel sorry for him. He's come out of it feeling better than he has in years.

For the last few years playing StarCraft in Holland, Ret had been living a very unhealthy lifestyle. Eating junk food and sitting in his chair for hours on end without any exercise led to extraordinary weight gain. During his stay in Korea, he started working out and participating in athletics. Combined with healthier eating, this upward streak has continued now that he is home.

Even more than hanging out with Artosis, Tasteless, IdrA, Rekrul and all of the foreigners at IEF, Ret says that the biggest positive effect of his stay in Korea has been his new healthy lifestyle. It is no surprise that he is happier now than he was in Korea but, more than that, he is happier now than he was before Korea.

So, he is doing well and that is important. But let's be honest – you want to know if he still has it in him.

Initially, Ret felt uninterested in StarCraft upon his return to Europe. Even the release of the StarCraft 2 beta didn't stir the fire he was used to. He found it difficult to sit down and play.

It is only now, over a month after the beta began, that he sees tournament after tournament pile on and feels the motivation to compete once again pulling at him. He is a player whose career is marked by starting and stopping and starting once more, consistently remaining amongst the top tier of players through a unique blend of talent and will power.

If Ret really wants it – whether it be the Team Liquid Invitational or another go at a professional career – there is no one here who can write him off. It is only a matter of circumstance and of the mind of the man himself.

Whether or not he wants another professional career is yet to be seen. He is going back to school in the fall and plans to see that through to the end. If a real opportunity for pro-gaming arises, he says he will take it very seriously.

But here is what we do know: At this very moment, Ret is one of the best StarCraft 2 players on the planet. He has the connections to train with the cream of the crop and the raw ability to beat them all.

At this very moment, Ret wants to win. Going forward, that is really all we need to know.

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The following is written by Dan "Artosis" Stemkoski.

This is a story about a player who, all though respected greatly, deserves much more. A player who should never be forgotten. A player who should always be mentioned when discussions of the best players are being had. Sha Jun Chun. PJ. PJ is the greatest Chinese SC1 player who ever lived. He is also, undoubtedly, the highest skilled non-Korean player of all time.

PJ's career started long, long ago. When he was first getting known well in the foreigner scene, he was known as LinYu)PJ. Back then, PJ was a Terran player. At that time, he was considered one of the best Chinese players, and a reasonable threat to any non-Korean who met him in a tournament. This was around the same time JulyZerg was really becoming known.

When SKTelecom T1, the most reputable Korean professional SC1 team decided it was time to expand their market to China, PJ was drafted along with his Chinese rival, LX, to join the team. At this time, he switched to Protoss. After a while on SKTelecom T1, both PJ and LX decided to move back to China, to take part in their ever-growing e-sports scene. Despite PJ constantly being amongst the best in China, it took him some time to really become the beast which he ended his career as, so lets jump ahead a bit.

The beginning of PJ's dominating years began in 2007. Yearly in Korea, there is a tournament called the International Esports Festival, or IEF. In 2007, PJ was invited to this event. During this tournament, he defeated former SC1 undisputed #1 world-wide player, iloveoov. Although considered a huge upset for any non-Korean player to defeat a Korean champion, it wasn't totally unheard of. People quickly forgot.

Then came the World Cyber Games (WCG) 2007 World Championships. PJ breezed out of the deadly best of 1 group stage and into the round of 8. In the round of 8, he met the most dominating Zerg of the time, and former undisputed world-wide #1 player, sAviOr. Guess what happened? PJ beat him with straight-up play 2-1. The number of times any Korean professional gamer, let alone a champion, has lost in a best of 3 in a tournament to a non-Korean, can be counted on one hand. It's nearly unheard of, especially in Protoss vs Zerg. PJ then took out

White-Ra of Ukraine, a legendary Protoss player in his own right, and lost to Stork (one of the top 2 Protoss players of all time) in the finals. Often times no non-Korean even gets a WCG medal out of luck, but PJ crushed top level players in a hard bracket to win his.

Two tournaments in a row, PJ takes out Korean SC1 champions. That's unbelievably impressive. Yet this was just the start. I must take an aside here, to explain exactly what an S-Class player is in StarCraft 1. In the Korean pro scene, A-Class and S-Class professional gamers play countless games on TV for our enjoyment. The difference between the two classes is vast: A-Class players are amazing, for sure. The undoubtedly would crush non-Korean professional gamers 99% of the time. S-Class, though, are gigantic favorites vs A-Class. They are the true champions. Their understanding of the game is superior in every way. If an S-Class player was to lose to an A-Class player, it would be quite an upset. S-Class players are viewed as nearly invincible by the non-Korean professional gamers. Already, PJ has taken out two S-Class Korean pros, one in a best of 3.

2008 was an off-year for PJ, not placing as well as previously. 2009 though, is where the magic happened. IEF 2009 was one of the most epic and large international LANs of all time. Held once again in South Korea, many top professional players from around the world competed against Korea's home-team of 3 S-Class players (Stork, EffOrt, and Bisu), a former S-Class champion, SlayerS_BoxeR, and B-Class professional, Terror. The groups were drawn, and PJ was put into the "Group of Death". Bisu, EffOrt, iNcontroL, Artosis, Jaystar, and PJ. Two S-Class Koreans, two top Americans, the second best Chinese player at the time, and PJ, the best non-Korean. Only one player would advance.

All bets were on EffOrt or Bisu, being top-end Korean players, on their home turf. PJ had something else to say about that. Although he lost a close game with Bisu, PJ ended up destroying EffOrt, an S-Class Korean seen as the 2nd best Zerg in the world at the time. PJ advanced from group-play with a 4-1 record, surprising everyone present, most of all the Koreans.

The tournament had an odd format, with 5 groups of players. PJ drew the short end of the stick, and had to play a playoff match against the high level B-Class progamer, Terror, to make it into the top 4 of the tournament. PJ ended up losing 1-2, but put up a great fight, ingraining in every mind that he could stand toe-to-toe with the Korean pros in a way no non-Korean had done in nearly a decade.

The last tournament of the 2009 season was the World Cyber Games 2009 World Championships, in Chengdu, China. PJ was put into the same group as notable players such as DIMAGA and ParanOid, but also Bisu, the S-Class Korean Protoss, considered by all to be in the top two Protoss of all time along with Stork.

PJ easily went through his group until facing Bisu. Against Bisu, PJ's play was S-Class level. He went blow for blow with Bisu, barely losing in the end. It was miraculous play. PJ came in second in the group, and moved on to the round of 8 with Bisu.

In the first match in the round of 8, PJ faced off with Stork. This match was in the player area as opposed to the stage, and it was crowded completely with spectators. The Chinese fans knew that one of their own was facing a God of StarCraft, and he had a chance. PJ lost the first game, but played very well during it. In the second game, PJ started to win, and then the chant began. "PJ PJ PJ PJ". It grew louder and louder. The feeling was electric. Everyone was cheering for PJ to knock down this titan of StarCraft. When he won game 2, the crowd went absolutely wild. It was enough to bring tears to your eyes.

Koreans dominated StarCraft 1 for years upon years. No one else ever had a chance. But here was PJ, a player we had all known for nearly a decade. He had ascended. He was even with the absolute best players of all time. He didn't have a huge salary like them. He didn't live in one of their houses playing with the best of the best all day every day. He didn't have huge televised tournaments weekly to drive his motivation. He was on the outside looking in, yet through hard work and perseverance, PJ had become an S-Class calibre player.

Although PJ lost game 3, I feel that this moment was the proudest we've ever had outside of Korea. PJ did it. He showed that the impossible dream of so many non-Korean players was in fact possible.

PJ was an absolute hero and inspiration in StarCraft 1. I will never, ever forget him.

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Bisu's defeat of Savior in the 2007 MSL finals catapulted him in the eyes of the world. Afterwards, his dominance of the Zerg race was so thorough that he became known as "The Revolutionist". The Protoss versus Zerg match up was altered through his inventive use of massive Corsair fleets and his surgical Dark Templar.

When Bisu won the next season of MSL as well, the StarCraft world wondered if they had another master on their hands. However, instead of going on a Savior-like march of destruction, Bisu confirmed fan's fears: he was inconsistent in his dominance. His career has resembled that of a high-altitude roller coaster: it is always looking to the clouds, going up and down over and over again.

While Bisu was struggling to maintain his hold on the top of StarCraft in January 2008, a future king was climbing up to dethrone him.



Lee Jae Dong "**Jaedong**", known as "The Tyrant" Zerg, wrote the next chapter in StarCraft history.

Winning Rookie of the Year honors in 2006, he had been climbing to the apex of StarCraft ever since, sitting behind Savior as the best Zerg for what must have seemed an eternity before finally claiming his race's top spot in the beginning of 2008. As of 2010, he remains in the top spot for Zerg and has done so for 34 straight months, breaking Yellow's streak of sustained racial dominance of 27 months.

As his career progressed, Jaedong became far and away the most successful Zerg versus Zerg player of all time. The match-up is usually called "rock-paper-scissors" because of how easily one build can beat another without a player's skill entering the picture in a significant way, however Jaedong continuously shocked viewers as he built a better than 80% winning percentage against fellow Zergs with unprecedented and thrilling micromanagement, in particular of his Mutalisks, and extremely solid macromanagement. Previously, a 60% winning percentage in the match-up had seemed an exceptional event.

Over the course of three years, Jaedong has become one of the best players of all time as he's raked in hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money and guaranteed contracts. He has won two MSL titles and a Golden Mouse (three OSL championships) and, at his best, has showcased a level of domination worthy of being called masterful on the level that recalled Savior's highest point. Truth be told, as far as technical skill goes, Jaedong is more adept than The Maestro ever was.

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More than most competitive games, StarCraft rewards creativity. Players such as BoxeR (Terran), Nal_ra (Protoss) and Savior (Zerg) are remembered as ingenious inventors who turned popular perceptions of the game on their heads.

As time passes, the game of StarCraft shifts and warps. Different units and build orders ascend to prominence and descend to obscurity, only to change again when the next great imagination touches the game.

Most players noted for their imagination above all are famous for their micromanagement - that is, the control of small groups of units. However, it is important to note that many players noted for macromanagement skills - the control of the bigger picture, eg. economy and production - have also invented and altered the way the game is played. It is simply easier to appreciate the way one single unit acts than the way an entire economy and build order dynamically interacts to create something new.

Iloveoov is not the first player to come to mind for most when the word "imagination" is mentioned. His overwhelming macromanagement led him to be criticized as a computer. But in fact, he invented highly efficient build orders and executed them at a level close to perfection. Still, it is hard to think 'artist' when 200 units are stampeding on your base. In those situations, jaws drop and thoughts stop.

The modern era has seen a progression. Whereas older players tended to be perceived as either/or, a player such as Jaedong is noted both for his artistry with single units - his Mutalisk work is particularly impressive to watch - and his ability to muster the numbers to convincingly crush opponents.

The next rivalry packs the most skill out of any in StarCraft history. Both players are noted for their multiple weapons. In this rivalry, Jaedong clashes with a player noted for innovative build orders and having a sixth sense for seeing weakness in an opponent's defense.

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Rivalry by Tom Hackleman

The power structure in competition can be monopole, multipolar or dipolar. To be monopole is to have one dominant force that is clearly superior to all others.

Whenever that power fails, it is always a surprise. However, the situation becomes stale eventually. All competitors fall one by one, and there is little deviation from the dominance. It is difficult to gauge exactly how much better the monopole is compared to the field and difficult to gauge how good it is compared to its past self.

The opposite of monopole is multipolar; to have many entities vying for the supreme spot, but none able to separate themselves from the pack. What it has in variety it lacks in perfection. No entity has perfected their field, so a success may be due to minimization of error or amazing skill.

Between these two is dipolar, to have two entities that rise above the rest to show all that is possible in competition. Dipolar maintains both the variety and the scene of perfection, and this is why dipolar is a special kind of competition. Out of this comes rivalry.

Rivalry: the titanic struggle observed by mere mortals. Every confrontation is an unbelievable struggle that can only be outmatched by the next time they meet.

A good rivalry will consume its parties. The motivation “to be the best” is slowly consumed by “to beat *them*.” This is the paradox of rivalry. Both competitors want to do nothing else but to bury their opponent; to dominate them so severely that they no longer exist. Out of this goal comes harder training and new strategies to try to suppress “them” once and for all.

Both entities refine themselves toward their pinnacle and become better than they have ever been. The attempts to diminish each other have actually made the rivals stronger. It is impossible to talk about rivalry in StarCraft without mentioning the boxer/yellow rivalry between Lim Yo Hwan and Hong Jin Ho.

These two battled each other for years, with the rest of the StarCraft world as their back drop. Boxer and Yellow produced some of the most exiting games and unique strategies ever seen. What Lim Yo Hwan has done for StarCraft is undeniable: he helped turn StarCraft from a successful game into a multimillion dollar spectacle, a spectator sport with millions of rabid fans. It is hard to argue that Boxer could have been as successful or as entertaining without Yellow to push him. This rivalry, however, is forever tainted with Yellow’s black mark; or rather his silver mark. Yellow holds five silver medals and no gold. Despite the fact that the record between the two legends stands at Yellow 31, Boxer 33, Yellow has always been perceived as inferior; just not having enough to win the Starleague.

After the reign of the last bonjwa, Ma Jae Yoon, came to an abrupt end, the power structure in the world of professional StarCraft fell into a multipolar scrum.

The fall of Ma Jae Yoon ushered in the era of the six dragons, a time where six Protoss players dominated StarCraft, and gave new life to the legend of the fall (the legend being that Protoss players win the OSL during the fall). The six dragons faded within a year, and gave way for “Leesang Taekbang,” a time of dominance by the two strongest dragons, along with the new young players Lee Young Ho and Lee Jae Dong. The leftover dragons soon faded away as well to leave only the two young prodigies. A lack of success on the biggest stage was never a problem for this rivalry. Within one year, both of these players had already won three star leagues a piece, there was not a current player with more, and only three from the history of the game had claimed more.

In January of 2010, their paths would cross once again in the Nate 2010 MSL finals. This tournament was the biggest tournament to date, and was the biggest match of either of their careers. In a field of sixty four (including qualifiers) these two dominated all competitors to confront each other once again on the biggest stage. Both competitors are beacons for their class of competitor and both players single-handedly carry their teams during Winners League but that does not matter now. There are no teams to back these two up. It is just Lee Young Ho and Lee Jae Dong, alone in a room with nothing to help them but the skill that has brought them here. Both knew they would be playing each other and the two have trained for weeks on end for this one engagement. At stake is hundreds of thousands of dollars, and a place in history. Should Lee Young Ho emerge victorious, he would win his first MSL and be the second person ever to win both MSL and OSL in the same season, the first in the modern age. If Lee Jae Dong wins, however, he will be the third person to win both multiple MSL and OSL titles. But there is one more thing at stake, something that may be even more important than money or history: to utterly crush the dreams of an arch rival on the biggest stage possible.



The Ultimate Weapon

On one hand we have Lee Young Ho, FlaSh. He is the ultimate weapon. The term “ultimate” justly describes his ability because as opposed to some machine that repeats an action over and over, FlaSh possesses the uncanny ability of adaptation and strategy. This master tactician has time and time again shown an unparalleled ability to analyze a given situation and determine the proper action that will be most devastating to his opponent. His immense ability to out-strategize an opponent is not limited to minor in-game alterations but expands to his large scale out-of-game strategizing. FlaSh has been demonstrating his strategic prowess since his introduction into the professional scene, back in 2007.

Lee Young Ho entered the professional StarCraft arena at the age of fifteen. And even then, at such a young age, the powers that be in the StarCraft community recognized his immense potential. FlaSh qualified for the very first Starleague he attempted, a feat impressive in and of itself, and went on to great success there. In a field of forty eight, FlaSh advanced all the way to the semi-finals by beating such prominent figures as Kim Taek Yoon (Bisu) and Ma Jae Yoon (Savior). His semi-finals series ended in a 2-3 loss to the eventual champion, Kim Joon Yung (GGPlay). There were many in the StarCraft community that did not respect the fifteen year old kid and he was dubbed "that little bastard Terran" (*Ed. note: one of the best nicknames ever*). FlaSh was heavily criticized for the use of the cheese.

A "cheese" is a particular type of strategy that is considered highly unorthodox. They are risky strategies that, if discovered early, will easily be countered, and leave the aggressor in a nearly impossible position to fight out of. A successful cheese requires perfect execution, and an opponent who is ill prepared for such a quick strike. FlaSh was known for his excessive, and often quite effective, cheese usage. FlaSh's lack of traditional play allowed many people to attribute FlaSh's success to "luck" as they failed to see the underlying skill and tactical brilliance beneath the cheese. FlaSh showed unparalleled success with the cheese because, as opposed to other pro gamers who use cheese only for the element of surprise, his are rooted in fundamental tactics and simply wrapped in a package of surprise. Flash continued for the next year with a primarily cheesy play style and was an above average pro gamer in tournaments and team leagues.

Then he changed: his game play evolved.

In the GOM TV Star Invitational, FlaSh was pitted against the veteran protoss player Song Byung Goo (Stork) in a best of five series. Stork at this time was a seasoned player who was credited for modern Protoss vs. Terran play but FlaSh came prepared with a revolutionary strategy of his own. Rather than continuing with his cheese tactics, FlaSh unveiled his new strategy, the double Armory build. The Armory is a building of the Terran that allows upgrades for mechanized soldiers to be researched. This build highlights the naturally defensive nature of Terran. It requires the user to hunker down and buy time until an overwhelming number of upgrades to kick in. The Terran then breaks out, and is able to push through the Protoss with ease. While the build was imperfect, FlaSh stuck with it and won 3-2.

This series, however, was only a precursor to the 2008 Bacchus OSL finals in just a mere two weeks later. FlaSh met up with Stork in the finals for yet another best of five. This time Stork was prepared for the double Armory build. Stork

utilized a strategy to expand all over the map during the period that Terran sits in their base, to assert a severe economic advantage. Stork looked to utilize a greedy build. He thought that while FlaSh hid in his base, he would be free to take expansions all across the map and set up an economy that would be strong enough to fight the Terran army. Stork paid dearly for that greed. FlaSh's double Armory build from their previous series was nothing but a ruse for this far more important one. FlaSh anticipated that Stork would look to get greedy, so FlaSh devised a plan specifically to punish such economic aggression. Flash won the series in dominating fashion, with a 3-0 decision. What is probably most brilliant of FlaSh's elaborate plan was that the double Armory build was not a gimmick or a flawed strategy. The double Armory build was a legitimate build order, and actually became a staple of Terran vs. Protoss play for not only FlaSh, but for every terran in professional StarCraft for months after.

This win over the established Stork was FlaSh's ultimate coming out. There were few left who thought that FlaSh was "simply lucky" or "that little bastard Terran". He is now the ultimate weapon. He is not the ultimate weapon only because of his brilliant strategies that revolutionize the game. He is not the ultimate weapon only because of his in game tactics that time after time bring a smaller, weaker force to victory. He is not the ultimate weapon only because of his near perfect mechanics, to control his units perfectly and execute the before mentioned strategies and tactics. He is not the ultimate weapon only because of his flawless timing, to attack his opponents at the absolute worst time possible for them, and abuse the deficiencies in each and every build order he encounters. He is the ultimate weapon because of all of those things in combination and because of his cheesy past. Even when his opponents try to use cheese tactics in a desperate attempt to overcome his superior attributes mentioned above, he always manages to snuff them out. Because of his rich history in the cheese, he has developed an extra sense in game and can immediately tell when something is off or amiss.

FlaSh is the ultimately well rounded player, the ultimate weapon.

FlaSh came into the NATE MSL as the favorite after winning the OSL a week earlier, and the presumed best player in the world. He did well to prove that in his pre-final matches. FlaSh went 10-2 with dominating victories over some of the biggest names in the game. More important than just the 10-2 record is his 7-2 against zerg opponents. These games are particularly important because it is the race that his finals opponent, Jaedong, has mastered. Because of his zerg filled schedule, he had spent significant time practicing for and against other great zergs, such as Kim Myung Woon (ZerO) and Han Sang Bong (Kwanro). As the best in

the world with significant practice, FlaSh could not be in a better position to take his first MSL.



The Tyrant

On the other hand we have Lee Jae Dong, “Jaedong”. He is the tyrant. He is utterly brutal in his assault, with an unwavering demeanor. As opposed to FlaSh who is constantly scrutinizing and adapting to his all of his opponent’s moves and actions, Jaedong simply does not. Once he decides on a strategy during the pregame, he stays with it and imposes his will on to his helpless competition.

Jaedong’s success is due in large part to his unparalleled mechanical strength. He has the mental toughness and the fine motor control to maneuver forces more intricately and more effectively than anyone who has ever picked up a mouse, all the while maintaining a vibrant economy and high levels of troop production. The level of control and skill Jaedong shows in all of his matches is nowhere more evident than in his Muta micro ability.

The Mutalisk is a flying unit in the Zerg arsenal. They are fast and the cheapest flying soldier in the game. However, that speed and high volume comes at a price. Mutalisks have remarkably weak attacks and are fragile. They cannot be the main stay of an entire army, as they are simply liquefied when they are forced to fight

toe to toe with another more hearty kind of unit. That is until Seo Gyung Jong, Shark, revitalized the unit. Shark is a pro gamer who never had significant success in any professional arena, and would be rather unknown if not for his contributions to the mutalisk unit. Shark developed a particular tactic which involves selecting eleven mutalisk in combat along with one insignificant unit back at the base.

When this combination is told to move, the entire mutalisk force moves to the same point and stack on top of each other, effectively becoming one unit. The other unit that is far away will eventually make its way over to the mutalisks, but will take a long time.

The mutalisks will remain stacked, effectively acting as one unit with eleven times the health and attack eleven times stronger, so long as the pack does not stop moving. This wouldn't be a terrible problem, except that mutalisks, like almost every other unit, cannot attack while it moves. If the mutalisks begin to attack something, they all stop and shoot, but the game then auto-corrects against the stacking; by having the units slowly drift apart, making the individual mutalisks vulnerable to being picked off. To use the Mutalisk micro effectively, a pro gamer must click in the direction of the target, press "H" to tell the mutalisk to "hold position," and causing them all to shoot, then immediately click behind the mutalisks, to prevent deceleration, and to prevent the gradual splitting. This process of "click H click" is repeated multiple times per second causing the mutalisks to be a formidable force. The Mutalisk micro, while being labor intensive, is quite simple and does not lend itself to alteration. It is said that every professional StarCraft player's Muta micro is the same. Everyone's, that is, except Jaedong's.

Jaedong has brought the Mutalisk micro to its perfect form. Not only does Jaedong execute this repetition flawlessly every time, and not only does Jaedong continue to produce units while attacking. Jaedong Mutalisk micros twice over. Instead of controlling just one group of eleven mutalisks, Jaedong controls two groups of eleven, creating the most formidable mutalisk force in the world.

When Jaedong decides to use Mutalisks, he uses Mutalisks better than anyone in the world. When he decides to use Ultralisks and Defilers, another popular Zerg strategy, he executes that with similar devastating effectiveness. Jaedong has no need to change his strategies in the middle of games. He simply out executes all of his opponents, and demands to be the best. Like an iron-fisted ruler, his words, and his decisions are law on the battlefield. Those who contradict that law are mercilessly executed. There is no need to look at anyone else's actions, or take anything else into account. He does what he wills and the world is powerless to stop him.

Jaedong up to this point was a perfect 10-0 in the NATE MSL. Despite this winning streak, he was still considered to be slumping until he played the Protoss powerhouse Kim Ku Hyun, Kal. In one of the most dominating series his career, Jaedong utterly demolished Kal, 3-0. It was at this point, that fans agreed, Jaedong had returned to form, and the Jaedong vs. FlaSh finals would truly be something special, and would be remembered for all history.



The First Bolt of the Storm

On January tenth, 2010, the day had come. The culmination of 94 days, 142 individual games, and countless hours of practice from the 64 competitors has been reduced to one final series. Jaedong and FlaSh's epic confrontation was now to pass. The familiar intro video fades away to reveal a steel capsule centered on a grand stage. The door slides off to the right, and the reigning Titans of the game, Jaedong and FlaSh, emerge.

The mere sight of the two of them, standing next to each other so calmly, created a feeling of uneasiness that emanated through the camera. To have such powerful pro gamers, that are so different and have so much to play for, standing next to each other felt near sacrilegious. The camera zooms out to reveal the off site playing location. The NATE MSL had decided to try a new system for competition, where the competitors would engage in a high tech room, with visual effects in the background. The audience, estimated in the one hundred thousand range, would watch the action in the main stadium, a few miles away. The two competitors walk out, take their customary bow towards the camera, and reluctantly shake hands. Then they each lumber over to their individual computer

stations, and begin their respective warm ups; utterly immersing themselves in the game. The first theater for this fight is the map Match Point.

The statistics for Match Point feature an interesting dichotomy for this particular match up. Overall, Terran held the statistical edge over Zerg with a 10-5 record on this map. However, this map features FlaSh's worst statistics of any map in the tournament, with a mere 2-2 record against Zergs. This mediocrity is surprising considering that FlaSh has a 70.79% win rate against the Zerg lifetime, far higher than any other modern Terran. Jaedong, however, is an unknown quantity on this map. He has yet to play a game against a Terran opponent on this map professionally. Match Point is a map with a long strip of elevated terrain that stretches like an "N" across the map. The natural progression of expansion by players is to establish their first four bases vertically along their side of the map.

The scattered bases lend themselves to quick, guerilla style attacks from an opponent, and the heavy use of aerial maneuvers which bypass the natural geography, and can abuse a stretched out army that tries to defend all outposts.

After a last second swig of a sports drink by FlaSh, and some final meditation by Jaedong, the countdown timer starts. The only thing standing between these two men is a brief five seconds. In the main stadium the crowd eagerly awaited the start, when a lone voice could be faintly heard from the right side, "하나 , 둘 , 셋 , 넷!" And the entire right side of the stands responded with an eruption "JAE DONG FIGHTING!"

Countering, one lone voice once again penetrated the mumbles of anticipation, this time from the left side, "하나 , 둘 , 셋 , 넷!" And just as vigorously as the previous outburst, the left side bellowed, "YOUNG HO FIGHTING!" It didn't matter that the spectator's heroes were miles away, unable to hear their rallying cries. Both Jaedong and FlaSh had heard the chants before and subconsciously knew that they encapsulated the hopes of not only their tens of thousands of respective fans in attendance, but hundreds of thousands more across the nation of South Korea, and across the world.

Flash is randomly assigned the color green and a starting position bottom left, and Jaedong starts in the top right corner, fittingly controlling red forces. Both players start off with very safe strategies, FlaSh going for 12Rax and a 12Pool for Jaedong. FlaSh's choice in strategy dispelled the thought in the back of so many people's heads: that FlaSh may look to revert back to former style, and try to use cheese to unnerve Jaedong in the first set of this best of five. In what can be taken as a mutual sign of respect, both players' builds are balanced between establishing solid economic foundations, while still being able to hold off any possible early

aggression. They don't stress an aggressive early attack, yet they are not greedy to the point that it would open a timing window when no defenses are in place.

At the three minute mark, both players now begin scouting each other, to look to gain insight on what is to come. Jaedong had sent an overlord (the slow flying unit that allows the population of the Zerg forces to grow) at the beginning of the game and it only now arrives at FlaSh's base to survey the terran's build, while FlaSh, sent an SCV (the combat-weak unit responsible for all resource gathering, building constructions, and repairs) which now arrives. Both of the early scouts are immediately turned away by preliminary defenses, the overlord retreats behind the cliffs, repelled by a lone marine, and the SCV is chased by the quick and ferocious Zerglings, Jaedong's first agents of destruction. And with the repulsion of these scouts, the fans are now able to see their favorite player's mid-game strategy take shape, as each player begins the second phase of their builds without the prying eyes of their opponent.

Jaedong begins his favorite, and most basic, 2 hatch mutas, and FlaSh begins the standard, two base Marine and Medic. The two hatch Mutalisk build involves producing Mutalisks very quickly out of two Hatcheries. It is a more aggressive build than most that Jaedong could have utilized, but it is far from being considered a cheese. FlaSh's Marine and Medic build could not be any more predictable or mundane. FlaSh plans to use the high damage per second rate of Marines in a combination with Medics, which will increase life expectancy of the Marines. FlaSh demonstrates his commitment to his infantry based army by constructing both an engineering bay, the building that upgrades infantry armor and weapons, along with the academy, which not only allows for the production of medics, but also upgrades in range, speed, and rate of fire.



The first pivotal point of the game has now come. The 2 Hatch Mutalisks strategy has created a small timing window where Jaedong will have a significant

advantage over FlaSh. FlaSh has yet to construct enough production facilities to train a force that can defend his entire base. If Jaedong can do significant damage to the small force FlaSh has created, and more importantly the economy, Jaedong will be able to transition into the next phase of the game with a large economic advantage. However, if Jaedong is too late with his Mutalisks, or does too little damage with his first attack, then FlaSh's hoard of Marines will grow too large for Mutalisks to confront alone, and Jaedong will have to find ways to compensate with an economic and technological deficiency. As Jaedong's first six Mutalisks arrive the second purpose of FlaSh's engineering bay is utilized. It allows for the construction of missile turrets, the static anti-air defense of the Terrans. FlaSh demonstrates his impeccable timing by finishing construction of his turrets within seconds of the mutalisks' decent. Jaedong swoops in and begins to attack the turrets, and brings along with them his original four Zerglings to raze the buildings before they have the opportunity to inflict serious damage. FlaSh is prepared with a counter, and positions his Marines so that they are momentarily safe from the barrage of the Mutalisks, but are able to liquefy the Zerglings with ease.

The Mutalisks, however, are more than capable of eliminating the lone turret without the additional support. After a few rapid volleys, the Mutalisks turn around and now prey on the SCVs who have been gathering the precious resources FlaSh requires to finance his army while being surrounded by combat. One is quickly eliminated before the Marines are able to reposition themselves, and the squad is able to momentarily repel the Mutalisk raid. Jaedong regroups the Mutalisks and begins an attack on the Marines, who have formed a vulnerable line stretched along the length of the SCVs they must defend. Despite that more than half of the Marines were lost and not a single Mutalisk was killed, they did fulfill their purpose: they bought enough time for SCVs to construct three more Missile Turrets, and re-solidify aerial defenses.

The Mutalisks turn away and retreat from the now heavily fortified expansion, and fly outside of FlaSh's reach. The Mutalisks then stop moving and begin to spread. Had FlaSh properly defended his base? Had the window of opportunity closed? Was Jaedong about to over-haul his tactics, and try something new?

Jaedong certainly thought the answer was no, as three more Mutalisks flew in from the top right, and the nine stacked up and flew in for another raid. FlaSh had set up formidable defenses, but they were centered around his expansion and he had yet to set them up inside of his main base. The nine Mutalisks dart into the main base this time, right over the turret that was in mid construction. FlaSh moves down his Marine and Medic force, which is now quite large, but they only

managed to do little damage before the Mutalisks fly out of range, deeper into the main, behind the SCVs.

The Mutalisk micro process begins again, with devastating effects to FlaSh's economy. As the Marines hurry to defend the helpless SCVs, the Mutalisks simply fly farther north, continuing to pelt the workers. When the Marines do manage to get into position, the Mutalisks fly back down to the southern end of the mineral line, creating a sort of cat and mouse game; a game that FlaSh is rapidly losing. Flash determines that his efforts to shield his working SCVs are futile, and he pulls them off mining, and into the safety of the nest of turrets he had set up earlier.

This move slashes FlaSh's economic output by over half, and propelles Jaedong into a great position. Jaedong continues his deadly spiral; with each pass FlaSh loses two more soldiers. FlaSh is unable to continue to replace his losses to the Marine force. The Mutalisk pack eliminates the final Marines and in the bottom right corner and, almost as rapidly as Jaedong's Mutalisks had originally descended on the ill prepared defenses, a message appears in the bottom left hand corner:

"KT FlaSh: gg

KT FlaSh has left the game"

Flash had declaired "gg," the international shorthand for good game, acknowledging that there is nothing he can do to turn around the game and, rather than waste everyone's time, he will honorably surrender. In lightning speed, and with remarkable decisiveness, Jaedong had won the first game; and with that victory, had taken his first step towards winning the finals. In contrast, FlaSh had let an opportunity slip away, and left to contemplate how many more opportunities will there be?

Balancing the Scales

Within ten minutes the second set was ready to commence. This time, the field of battle is on Ultimatum and, despite having the same theme as Match Point, the dynamics are starkly contrasted. Ultimatum, specifically designed for this MSL, is a four player map, meaning that Jaedong and FlaSh will not immediately know their opponent's starting position. The configuration of the bases differs from the linear path of Match Point. The path between the main base and the nearest two expansions curls, creating a triangle. This triangle dynamic diminishes the ability of the flying tactics that Jaedong just demonstrated extreme mastery in the game before. If the outside expansions are defended from aerial assaults, the main base will be naturally defended; being nestled in a pocked created by two walls of defenses, and two edges of the map. FlaSh has a better record on this map, with a

2-0 perfect record against Zerg. Jaedong's compatibility with the map is once again a mystery, as he has not played any Terrans on this map as of yet.

The game starts, with a white Zerg in the top left and a yellow Terran in the bottom right, creating the maximum distance possible between forces. Both players show slight variations to what they demonstrated in game one. Jaedong looks for a 12 Hatch, while Flash continues with a 12 Rax. The 12 Hatch is a slightly more greedy build than the 12 Pool. The 12 Hatch secures an expansion slightly faster, for a stronger economy, at the cost of early Zerglings. The early Zerglings are not as valuable as they were on Match Point. The uncertainty of the location of their opponents causes Jaedong to be unable to make any wildly aggressive early pushes, and FlaSh to be unable to cheese effectively. FlaSh, while still using the same build order, alters the placement of his first buildings, changing their effect on the overall flow of the game. Instead of placing his first two buildings inside of his main base, FlaSh places them in front of what will become his first expansion, creating a wall. FlaSh looks for a stronger defense for his expansion, keeping ground armies away from the fragile marines. Jaedong sends out a worker along with his first overlord to ensure he will scout FlaSh fast, just to be sure FlaSh is going for a standard Marine oriented build. Jaedong continues with his greedy strategy; constructing his third Hatchery before beginning construction of his spawning pool. Jaedong once again expands upon the foundation for infrastructure and once again delays any fighting units. FlaSh's initial scouting SCV scout hovers into Jaedong's territory, unopposed, and sees Jaedong's greedy build. Due to the defensive nature of FlaSh's own build, he is ill prepared to take advantage of the situation.

Regardless of his own build order limitations, FlaSh senses the need to apply pressure to Jaedong's unprotected economy, and pushes out with a small squad of five infantry. Jaedong immediately spots the small party, and quickly begins construction on two Sunken Colonies. These two static defense building would be more than enough defense against FlaSh's paltry attack. Then, once half way across the map, the FlaSh's force turns back. It would appear that FlaSh had done nothing more than using his infantry to trace a large "0" in the battle field, but FlaSh's movements were far from whimsical. By constructing the Sunken Colonies, Jaedong was adjusting the build order he wanted to execute and, once again, delayed the production of any offensive capabilities. FlaSh had tactical reasons for delaying Jaedong, but the psychological aspect, controlling the pace of the game and forcing Jaedong to break his rhythm, cannot be overlooked. The effectiveness of the subtle psychological cannot be quantified, and will be left to the opinions of those who will have watched this series.

Parting from the near perfect timing that he has shown in the past, FlaSh begins constructing turrets early, especially when considering the added distance by cross map positioning. It would appear that the tyrant's dominating performance had resonated with FlaSh after the first game, and FlaSh is refusing to lose in the same way twice in a row. And before the first batch of Mutalisk are ready to take to the skies, Jaedong pulls yet another build order surprise and begins construction on the Queen's Nest. The nest allows for the production of the Queen unit, but it serves a far more important role than just producing the rarely seen Queen. It is a prerequisite to upgrade to the top tier of Zerg units, to unleash the full power of the swarm's arsenal. It would appear that, without attacking or even looking at FlaSh's base, Jaedong decided that Mutalisks would not be instrumental to his victory, and that he will beat FlaSh in the technology race. Jaedong produces his initial nine Mutalisks, and immediately sends them in to try to find soft spots in FlaSh's armor, but FlaSh has turrets in absolutely every attack lane. Jaedong does not seem worried as the audience watches his unorthodox build order continues to unfold.

In a matter of thirty seconds, the defender-attacker roles of the Mutalisks and the Marines have swapped. The Marines move out with a force too large for the mutalisks to counter. Jaedong picks off some of the outlying marines as they make their 40 second march across the map. The Sunken Colonies that Jaedong had been forced to build earlier are now crucial to his survival, so much so that he has set down five more. The Mutalisks execute their job to perfection. By the time FlaSh makes his way across the map, he has lost a third of his army and stares at a wall of seven sunken colonies. FlaSh realizes that the defense is a bit too much to break through, and turns back. Jaedong had taken the upper hand, as he killed a large portion of FlaSh's army and lost next to nothing. Continuing to apply pressure, Jaedong shifts his focus from the halted Marine force back to the Terran base. Without the Marines to defend, the Mutalisks are able to maneuver around the Missile Turrets, and eliminate half of the SCVs before FlaSh can respond.

Jaedong has populated his expansions with workers, and has finished the upgrade to allow for top tier units to be produced, while FlaSh can only produce Marines. With advantages in almost every facet of the game, Jaedong continues to surprise in build order choices; as he begins construction of the rarely used greater spire. This building that allows for the creation of Zerg's most advanced flying units.

Immediately after the completion of the Greater Spire, Jaedong puts the attack on momentary hold, and begins to transform his flock of Mutalisks into Guardians. Guardians play the role of slow flying tanks for the Zerg swarm. These behemoths can out-range the turrets and, provided they stay atop cliffs, can

decimate the marine forces without taking retaliatory fire. However, the significant investment that the Guardians represent may work in FlaSh's favor.

Flash had already constructed Starports and a Science Facility to produce Science Vessels. The Science Vessels would have been used as a support to the infantry force, but due to the new unexpected threat, Wraiths are a far more beneficial option. Wraiths are the most basic aircraft in the Terran fleet. Their quickness, ease to build and fragile nature have caused them to be known as "paper planes."

Wraith, however, are the strongest counter to Guardians. The Guardians lack an air-to-air attack to defend themselves against Wraiths, and are far too slow to flee.

Immediately after FlaSh's two Starports produce a wraith each, the Wraiths begin to attack the guardians. Jaedong, realizing the dire position his Guardians are in, makes the rational decision to have them attack despite the Wraith fire; to try to do as much damage as possible. The destructive power of the Guardians is demonstrated, taking out turrets and marines as if they were made of butter. The Wraiths take out every last Guardian in a matter of seconds. Despite the ferocity of the attack, not enough damage was done to compensate for the cost of the Guardians. FlaSh, looking to continue his momentum and take the upper hand, follows up his Wraiths with Dropships. The dropships are aerial transports, and can carry up to eight infantry each directly into Jaedong's main base, bypassing the formidable static defense Jaedong has been building at the choke point outside of his natural.



Jaedong scouts this transition, and makes the only defense possible. He lines his cliffs with Scourge, small suicide bombers that only attack air units. If FlaSh attempts to move in with his Dropships, two Scourge will immediately eliminate it before it is able to drop off its occupants. The Scourge only have to delay FlaSh

for a short time; until the significant hit to the economy the Guardians represented can be recuperated, and the warriors replaced. But FlaSh has a plan to bypass the scourge and strike the soft underbelly of Jaedong's base. In a move reminiscent of another leader of Terran, FlaSh utilizes the seldom-seen defense matrix ability.

Flash moves in, and the defensive matrix absorbs the sSource attack, allowing for the Dropships to deliver their payload. Jaedong sends every soldier he has to deal with the new grave threat, but it only able to kill half of the invaders, who at this point have begun to cause significant damage. With the Scourge being only a one time defense, there is nothing to prevent FlaSh from using a Dropship to ferry troops up the cliff. Jaedong quickly regroups and devotes all of the production capabilities of his five hatcheries to send a wave of zerglings against FlaSh's army, but once again the zerg was only able to kill half of the marines, and FlaSh continues to ferry more reinforcements in.

Jaedong produces a few Scourges navigates them around the Marines to destroy the remaining Dropships, but the Scourges have merely closed the barn gate after all the horses have gotten out. FlaSh has already taken out some key building, and begins to plunder Jaedong's economy with the sizeable force that has already been lifted up. Jaedong continues to pump Zerglings, and the waves of soldiers eventually do take out the Marine force. FlaSh looks to hammer in the final nail, and moves his Science Vessels into Jaedong's island expansions at the twelve and nine o'clock positions to begin the technique known as the eraser. In a technique popularized by the legend Lim Yo Hwan, two vessels cast toxic green clouds on each other, and fly over a drone mining operation. The green cloud quickly kills the organic drones, while having no effect on the mechanical vessels. Jaedong finds himself with no tech, no economy, his main base completely gone, and FlaSh knocking down the Sunken line, which has swelled to near twenty by this point.

With no way to save his defenses, and no way to take the fight to FlaSh's untouched bases, the message appears

"HwaSeung Oz Jaedong: gg"

When a City Stands Still

The series now moves to the pivotal third game. Looking ahead, set four will be on Fighting Spirit, a map that FlaSh has significantly more experience and success on; with a lifetime 6-1 record against Zerg compared to Jaedong's 2-1 against Terran. The fifth set is back on Match Point, which after the first game FlaSh now has a losing record on against Zerg, not to mention the significant psychological advantage Jaedong would have remembering the thrashing he issued. Whoever

wins this set will have a significant advantage being up 2-1 and needing to only win one more game out of two.

The upcoming map, Odd-Eye, is considered to be quite a strange map among pro gamers. It is the only map in the final that lacks rotational symmetry, having bridges in the north and mountains in the south. Every expansion on the map is hard to defend because they do not have nice choke points which block enemy troops and are natural places to put defenses. The map is situated like a circle, meaning that there is no center to hold, and there is not an obvious order to expand in, and large armies could conceivably advance on opposite sides of the circle and never see each other.

FlaSh starts out top left as yellow while Jaedong starts bottom right as brown. Streamlining his play effectively, FlaSh once again opts for the same conservative build order. Jaedong, also playing true to his nature, is undeterred by the results of set 2, and at least starts his build the same way, with a fast expansion. Because this map does not have the natural defensive positions, FlaSh will not be able to create a continuous wall out of his buildings as easily as he did in the last two games. As FlaSh sets down the third building in his wall, Jaedong begins construction of his third Hatchery very quickly again. This play from Jaedong is symbolic of his position as the best Zerg player in the world. Three hatch Mutalisks was the signature opening of the Zerg that Jaedong dethroned to become the best in the world, Ma Jae Yoon. For Jaedong to follow this build so religiously throughout this series is almost a tribute to Ma Jae Yoon, and a passing of the torch from the great of old to the new king of the swarm. With only two possible starting positions for two players, both FlaSh and Jaedong knew where their opponent started. Scout timings are very similar to game one, with the SCV arriving just about the same time as the Overlord. Both scouts see the same build order for the third game in a row, and after their unwanted stays expire, the next steps in the build orders begin.

Knowing that the three Hatcheries will delay the production of Mutalisks, FlaSh is able to focus his resources on a strong early economy, and more troop production facilities. Before the Spire (the prerequisite for Mutalisks) is complete, FlaSh looks to take the advantage he missed last game. He pushes out with the entirety of his forces, about twenty Marines and Medics. In the meantime, Jaedong is trying to start a hidden expansion at the top right corner of the map, and hopes the Marine and Medic group will not detour from their path, and walk right past the undefended expansion.

This game, in contrast to the first two, Jaedong does not rely solely on Mutalisks in the early game, and complements them with a sizable amount of Zerglings. The

Mutalisk and Zergling combination move out to confront the infantry before they approach Jaedong's base, or worse; they scout the hidden expansion. The Zergling force darts up into position on a piece of land that separates FlaSh and the expansion. FlaSh decides that it would be unwise to engage an opponent with the tactical ground, and pulls back. The Marine and Medic force regroups towards middle, gathering a few reinforcements, while Jaedong quickly puts his Zerglings into position. Jaedong sends Zerglings around both sides of the circle, and surrounds the vulnerable Marines in a pincer move. Even the reinforcements are not enough for FlaSh, and the Marines are quickly overwhelmed and slaughtered. Jaedong had diverted FlaSh's attention from the top right, and forced FlaSh to occupy himself with the more immediate threat. Jaedong had won the first battle of the game.

Jaedong's first Mutalisks have come out and once again he looks to transition into the high level units with fast tech. While Jaedong waits for his investment in tech to produce the high level units he craves, he sends his first batch of Mutalisks in to the heart of FlaSh's defenses. Despite Jaedong's micro shining as brightly as ever, the three initial Hatches, the ground army, and the hidden expansion have delayed the Mutalisks far too much to be as effective as they were in game one.

While the Mutalisks do score many kills, FlaSh is now producing more Marines faster than Jaedong can kill, and the extensive investment in turrets prevent Jaedong from doing damage to the mineral line. FlaSh's unparalleled game sense detected that something was amiss; that Jaedong should have a larger force or more buildings in his base. Quickly after, FlaSh scouts the expansions around the map, and discovers the hidden expansion. The extra production buildings FlaSh had constructed now begin to show their value, as a massive Marine and Medic force push out and head straight for Jaedong's no longer hidden expansion. Jaedong frantically tries to hinder the Marines with Mutalisk harassment; in an effort to buy enough time to finish construction of three Sunken Colonies. FlaSh pushes through the hail of fire with ease, and quickly moves into position in front of Jaedong's front door. In this rush to get to the expansion, FlaSh completely bypassed Jaedong's growing Zergling force, and was now finds himself caught.

He could easily defeat either the Sunkens or the Mutalisk and Zergling force, even both combined if they are from the same direction. But to take on the structures with units attacking from multiple flanks would result in a blood bath similar to the one Jaedong caused minutes ago. Attacking the units is also an undesirable option, as the quicker Zerg force can simply flee, and start a chase that results in no economic damage. FlaSh continues to pump Marines, and send in reinforcements, while Jaedong continues to prepare his defenses at the two-o'clock

position. Jaedong makes the critical move to advance towards FlaSh's base to cut off any more reinforcements from adding to the threat. Jaedong does catch a squad of reinforcements stranded, and ravages through the Marines. FlaSh realizes that the threat of a pincer move is gone and swiftly descends onto the poorly defended expansion with his main army. As soon as the reinforcements are dispatched of, Jaedong quickly turns around and heads back to the expansion to try to save his investment.

Just as the final Sunken falls in the east, the Marines turn to confront the Zerglings swarming from the west, and the Mutalisks descending from the south. FlaSh rapidly rearranges his forces, positioning all his Medics to the west side of the formation, creating a wall. The Medics have stronger armor than the Marines and prevent them from being attacked so using them as human shields allows Marines to deliver maximum damage from a safe distance for a longer time. The Medics do keep most of the Zerglings out in the beginning, but the additional Mutalisk support is too much, and the Marines begin to fall. The two players end up trading every Marine for every Zergling. Six Medics are still alive, and they start to flee as the Mutalisks pelt them from above. FlaSh continues to produce waves of infantry, and has yet another squad of twenty infantry ready to keep up the attack. The Medics are unable to unite with the reinforcements, and because of this, the squad of reinforcements is quickly dispatched of by the Mutalisks, and a new batch of Zerglings.

The intense fighting has not deterred Jaedong's vision of his original strategy. He has finished his tech research and constructed the Ultralisk Cavern. The Ultralisk is the most expensive of all zerg units, costing sixteen times more than the Zergling. It is a massive creature with scythe-like tusks and is capable of taking exuberant amounts of damage. It will be a little longer before they are able to be produced in significant numbers, and now it is critical for Jaedong to hold his expansions to be able to afford the monstrosities. Jaedong looks to contain FlaSh, and deny any forces from moving freely across the map. However, he abruptly meets yet another twenty five Marines. This time, the Zerglings are horribly out of position, and this new squad of Marine easily eliminates Jaedong's entire forward army of Zerglings and Mutalisks. Without Medic support, the Marines cannot continue forward to destroy the expansion, and must retreat to regroup, giving Jaedong precious time to produce his Ultralisks. Jaedong attempts to secure yet another hidden expansion, on the opposite side of the map. This time there is no force defending it, and Flash is very easily able to run it over with his pure marine force.



After returning from the minor campaign, FlaSh's force unites with a force of equal size at his base. FlaSh now boosts an impressive force, with forty Marines, ten Medics, and five Science Vessels. The Science Vessels, despite not having a conventional attack, will be FlaSh's primary way of disposing of Ultralisks. Their irradiate ability, when used directly on the Ultralisk, will continue to weaken it until it dies, or at least is severely crippled. The irradiate also provides the secondary benefit of damaging all of the organic life surrounding the poisoned target. There is no way to stop the slow death after the irradiate has started, meaning that the only defense is to destroy the vessels before they can use their irradiate.

Knowing this, Jaedong produces Scourge to very quickly kill the vessels, and will be looking to pick off any vessels that stray too far from their Marine escort throughout rest of the game. FlaSh's forces begin to move up towards Jaedong's highly contested expansion. Jaedong has nine Ultralisks and a handful of Zerglings prepared to defend. Unfortunately for Jaedong, his Ultralisks outnumber his Zerglings, and this ratio results in disaster. The Ultralisk's role is not to completely destroy an army; it is to just soak up fire while the Zerglings can act as the main damage dealer. If there are too many Ultralisks, then the Zerg army will not be able to inflict enough damage fast enough. If there are too few, the Zerglings will disintegrate before they even reach the enemy. Jaedong realizing that his army is in no condition to fight and retreats, with the expansion falling quickly after. Flash begins to push downward towards Jaedong's main base.

The Ultralisk army regroups and engages the enemy, but Jaedong knows that this is still an unfavorable engagement. The Ultralisks act as a diversion, to draw

fire from the Marines, so that a swarm of six scourge can swoop in, unnoticed, and eliminate three science vessels. As soon as the Scourge reached their goal, the Ultralisks made a hasty retreat. With the Ultralisk retreating, FlaSh begins to move his forces down, directly to Jaedong's main, and Takes out yet another one of Jaedong expansions. But this mass movement gives Jaedong a golden opportunity. As the Marines move down the side of the map, they create a long vulnerable flank along the west side. Jaedong quickly seizes the opportunity and crashes into the middle of the line with his entire force. The effect is seen immediately, and Jaedong begins to inflict massive damage. The scourges swoop in shortly after and take out every science vessel while flashes army melts away. FlaSh's entire forward force is lost, and Jaedong still has seven Ultralisks and two dozen Zerglings. This is far from a crippling blow for FlaSh, as he already has a sizable force back at his base ready to move out.

There is a subtle aspect of the game that has gone unnoticed by most of the spectators. Jaedong has created fast paced action across the map; FlaSh has been doing the exact opposite. After taking the expansion at his natural, Flash has no other expansions, and hasn't even tried to set any up. Should Flash continue to ignore his economy and focus only on his army, eventually he will be unable to replace his vast army as he has been doing. Flash has the option to either attempt to overwhelm Jaedong with only the two bases he has now or to apply pressure at some point and use his aggression as a defense for a new expansion. Both are legitimate options but the clock is ticking no matter which he chooses.

Jaedong continues to look for every opportunity possible and once again begins to expand to the lucrative expansion at the bottom left. The expansion in the bottom left is unique, as it is the only expansion on the map with two geysers. The two geysers gives whoever controls it a significant boost in gas production, something that Jaedong desperately needs for ultralisk (and eventually defiler) production. FlaSh immediately recognizes Jaedong's attempt to expand and moves out with the entirety of his army, which is now bigger than it ever was. But as opposed to the last time Jaedong attempted to expand here, Jaedong has time to position his army into defensive locations. The science vessel cloud hovers over the Zerg forces and irradiates five Ultralisks before the battle even begins, abusing Jaedong's lack of scourge. FlaSh moves up the hill with his entire army, and the first defiler of the series makes its presence felt with the dark swarm.

The dark swarm is a swarm of insects that is so dense that it creates an orange cloud on the battle field, so dense that it will block or render useless ranged attack directed at targets inside of the cloud. This swarm allows the close combat Zerglings and Ultralisks to close the gap between them and their foes without

taking unnecessary fire. Jaedong casts his swarm, and the Zerg does massive damage to the Marines underneath the swarm. FlaSh quickly counters by moving his force back out of the swarm, and it able to inflict massive damage of his own.

Two more swarms are generated, and once again the Ultralisk and Zergling forces are able to devastate the emasculated marines. But the Marine force continues to retreat until they are able to return fire, and reduces the Zerg army to only two Ultralisks and a few Zerglings. Jaedong pulls off the attack, and retreats to the safety of the dark swarms. The situation looks desperate for Jaedong, when a Zergling force, accompanied by another Defiler sneaks back around FlaSh's Marines, and suddenly the Marines sandwiched between two dark swarms.

Jaedong's surround evens the playing field, and both forces frantically scramble to get their reinforcements into the fray. Neither side can seem to establish an upper hand.

FlaSh's time has run out, and one of his bases has run out of minerals. Flash takes all of the SCVs that were mining, and sends them into the combat zone. The SCVs will not only do a little damage in the fight, but will also act as barriers to keep the Zerg away from the Marines, and they will also be able to construct a new base if FlaSh is able to exterminate the Zerg. Eventually the dark swarms subside, and the Zerg is shown to only have two Ultralisks left to fight the Marine force of thirty. The Ultralisks pull back to the center of the expansion, and the Marine force recovers all of the ground they ceded in combating dark swarms. Jaedong continues to throw more and more units into the frying pan that is the combat zone.

The next wave of Science Vessels irradiates yet another pack of four Ultralisks. The forces clash again, and again, but the reinforcements start to dwindle, as both player's economies falter. The massive armies and their massive reinforcements have been reduced to six Marines, 15 medics and 2SCVs against two Ultralisks and six Zerglings. Flash pushes down with his ragtag bunch of units and Jaedong prepares to defend one last push, and one final attack to finally destroy the base, and establish one of his own when...

Power outage.

Everything goes black, there is shouting, and mass confusion in the stands. People begin to speculate what is going on.

"Jaedong turned off the game!"

"No, FlaSh turned off the game!"

"The North Koreans are attacking!"

"The game was so intense it destroyed the electrical grid!"

Within twenty seconds the lights were turned back on, but the game was lost. There was a power outage in the building and the progress made was not saved.

Mass arguing broke out in the stands between the left side and the right over who was winning. With no one knowing exactly what was going on, debate raged on for all of a minute before a Korean eSports Association (KeSPA) referee walked out to the main stage and everything fell silent. She was about to announce what happened and, more importantly, what was KeSPA decided is going to happen.

She spoke to the baited breaths of thousands in the stands, and the bated breath of millions in their homes. She spoke to a silent world.

“판정하겠습니다, NATE MSL 결승전경기 이영호. 선수 대 이재동 선수 경기에서 스튜디오네. 정전 사태가 발생해 모두 아웃 되는 현상일. 발생되었습니다. 이와 관련하여 본 심판은. 양선수의 자원 사원과 멀티상황들을. 고려해 봤을 때 이 제동 선수에 상황이. 우세하다고 생각되어 스타크래프트 즉시. 판정 규정에 고려하여 이 제동. 선수의 우승을 판정하겠습니다.”

And instantly there was uproar from the stands. The shouts of anger and the shouts of joy were indistinguishable amongst the rabid fans. KeSPA decided that because of an economic advantage Jaedong would be awarded the game, and the series would move to set 4. In an unprecedented move KeSPA simply declared a winner based on what analyst perceived to be an advantage. That analysis was law, and there was nothing that anyone could do. FlaSh couldn't use miraculous timing to dig his way out of this situation. He couldn't develop some new strategy, or use new tactics. It was so absolute. In what will be remembered as KeSPA's most controversial decision, FlaSh was defeated.

As MBC zoomed in on FlaSh's face, it forced the viewers to consider his situation. Here is a seventeen year old who is playing for hundreds of thousands of dollars and to be the first dual league winner since the legend Lee Yoon Yeol "NaDa", in one of biggest series of StarCraft to date. In front of millions of fans, against his arch rival, and to be utterly crushed not by an opponent, but by a referee's decision. There was no right decision on KeSPA's part, to simply play the game over would be just as unfair to Jaedong, but it is impossible to feel anything other than sympathy.



A FlaSh in a Sea of Darkness

And yet, there is no time to lament over what has transpired. There are still two sets yet to be played if FlaSh, who at this point looks utterly upset, wants to achieve his ultimate goal. As stated before, FlaSh has a significant advantage on this map, Fighting Spirit, as FlaSh has seen more success on it than any other map in the finals. Fighting Spirit is in many ways the opposite of Odd-Eye, it has no forced circles, and there is a clear center. The expansions are far easier to defend, and there is an obvious order to them. There are also multiple starting positions yet again creating the sense of the unknown seen in game 2 when the game starts.

The game starts with yet another cross map divide. FlaSh is orange in the top left, and Jaedong is back to the most appropriate color, red, in the bottom left.

FlaSh starkly deviates from the strategy he had used in the previous sets, and begins with the aggressive 8 Rax build. Unfortunately, his aggression is countered by two different factors: Jaedong is at the farthest location possible which means that early aggression will take longer to move from one base to the other, and Jaedong has also changed his strategy, utilizing the Overpool, which is a natural counter to an aggressive build like the 8 Rax. Jaedong uses one of his early Zerglings to scout, and runs to FlaSh's base. FlaSh's Marine force is

uncharacteristically out of position, as it should have been able to kill the Zergling before it was able to scout the base. Jaedong learns of FlaSh's aggressive build, and knows to invest in a sunken for defense.

Realizing his position, FlaSh must move out with his first ten marines. He is in such a rush that he neglects to wait for Medics, which would drastically improve his Marine effectiveness. The squad arrives only to discover the Sunken that has already been constructed, and is more than enough to stop that few marines with no Medics. Jaedong continues with his safe and effective build; while FlaSh hurries to do some kind of damage before all is lost. Flash sends three more Marines and the first Medic as reinforcements, while Zerglings are once again able to sneak into the main base. This time, they are not here to scout; they are here to inflict damage, and manage to take out some SCVs. With an even greater economic disadvantage, FlaSh can wait no longer and attempts to break through Jaedong's three Sunkens. FlaSh moves down, but he does not focus his fire, resulting in two colonies gravely wounded, yet none destroyed. The attempt to quickly break into Jaedong's base is clearly futile, and FlaSh pulls back with only four marines left.



FlaSh pulls his remaining forces back to his base, attempting desperately to set up his first expansion to close the economic gap. Jaedong has finished his Spire, and is now sending his first batch of mutalisks to FlaSh's base. FlaSh's economy has been crippled too severely, and has been unable to build a single turret. The Mutalisks arrive and with a significant Zergling force, are able to punch a hole in FlaSh's defenses. Even though Jaedong lost more resources, he has such a comparably stronger economy that he can afford to make unfair trades, and is continuing to tighten the screws into FlaSh. Jaedong, not letting the significant lead go to his head, continues to play soundly by expand to maintain economic superiority. The Zerglings push through the hole and, with the help of the

Mutalisks , kill every Marine. The Medics run back and are saved by the the few turrets which Flash has been able to build in the meantime, but FlaSh is left without an army. More Zerglings push in as FlaSh is forced to use SCVs as his only defense against a ground attack. Their attack is weak, and the Zerglings take out the turrets, allowing the Mutalisks to wreak havoc. The camera focuses on FlaSh, who has a look of deep disappointment on his face as the game has clearly slipped out of his grasp. For the final time, the bottom left hand of the screen reads:

“KT FlaSh: gg

KT FlaSh has left the game”

Both players get up and shake hands one last time, but they both have the same look of disappointment on their faces. FlaSh is disappointed for the loss, but Jaedong is disappointed for the way he won and how it will be remembered. He thought he was the better player, and that he could win without KeSPA’s help. He now must live with the taint on this title for the rest of his career.

As fans watch Jaedong go back to his boot to retrieve his keyboard, the fans did not see the expression of a champion, it was almost somber.

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If you take 2008 to early 2010 as one monolithic hunk, Jaedong can be named the most successful player of the era. However, even at his most dominant, his peak can't be compared with the likes of iloveoov or NaDa. Jaedong's periods at the top have fractured by great spurts of play from his chief rival, the Terran Lee Young Ho "**Flash**" as well as resurgences from two Protoss users, Bisu and Song Byung Goo "**Stork**".

Flash, in particular, has served as a phenomenal foil to Jaedong (the reverse also being true), testing each other and vying for the top perch above StarCraft professional gaming. Flash moved quickly from the rank of amateur to up-and-coming professional. He spent time in various organizations before bubbling to the top at the KT Rolster team.

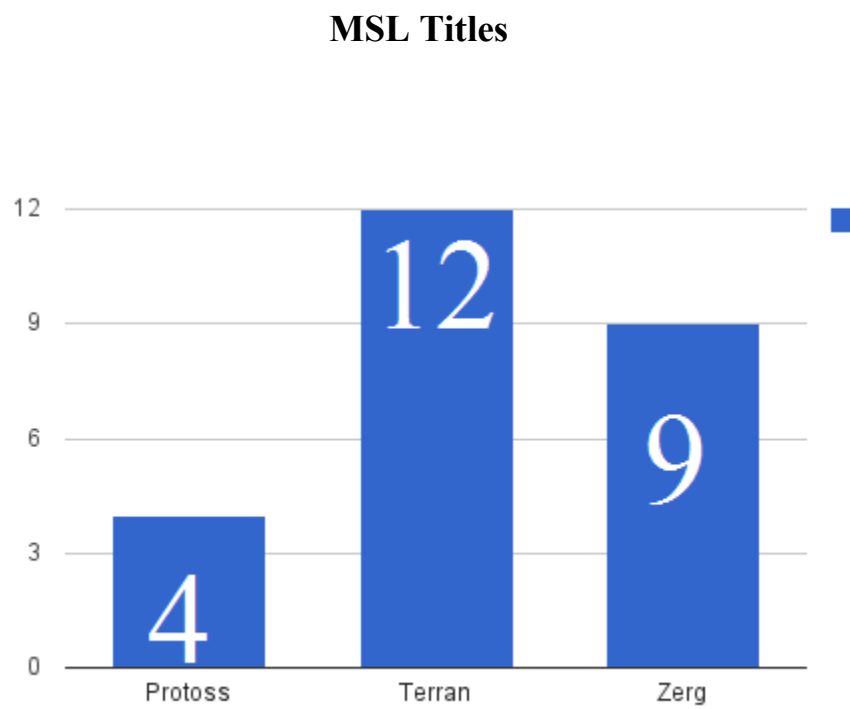
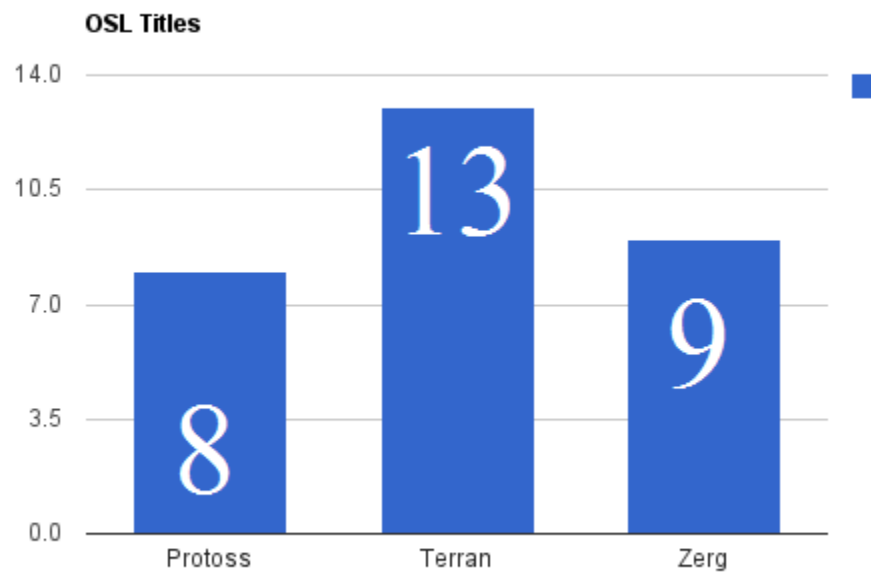
His inventive Terran versus Protoss and tireless macromanagement created an unenviable amount of hype for the young phenom as the 16 year old won his first Starleague in 2008. He won three significant invitational tournaments that year, beating up on the likes of Jaedong, but would not return to a Starleague final until January 2010. After capturing his second Starleague title in an incredible match against the Protoss "**Movie**", Flash was in a position to become the first player since NaDa to simultaneously hold both the OSL and MSL title.

Just a week later, Flash faced Jaedong for the MSL title and the chance at history. In the controversial and draining battle described above, Jaedong defeated Flash 3-1.

It took until 2010 for Flash to accomplish that goal: His victories in the MSL and OSL, both, importantly, over Jaedong, have brought both great StarCraft championships under one deft hand for the first time since NaDa was atop the StarCraft world.

As Brood War continues to thrive and StarCraft 2 is released, the Flash and Jaedong remain locked in the same battle they've been in for two years now - to win ultimate supremacy before the end. Although neither player can claim to match the dominance of the greatest players of all time, they can more than match their abilities. Now, the two vie to become the *last great StarCraft player*.





Book of Records, credit to Bifur from Russia.

Age

The youngest age of TV win - 🇷🇺 BaBy (13 years, 2 months and 17 days)

The oldest age of TV win - 🇷🇺 BoxeR (29 years, 5 months and 1 day)

The youngest OSL champion - 🇷🇺 Flash (15 years, 8 months and 10 days, Bacchus OSL 2008)

The youngest MSL champion - 🇷🇺 Mind (16 years, 1 month and 14 days, GomTV 3 MSL 2007)

The youngest player to win OSL silver - 🇷🇺 Fantasy (17 years and 4 months, Incruit OSL 2008)

The youngest player to win MSL silver - 🇰🇷 Kal (17 years, 4 months and 19 days, GomTV4 MSL 2008)

The youngest player to achieve the Golden Mouse - 🇷🇺 Flash (18 years, 2 months and 6 days, Korean Air Season 2 OSL 2010)

The youngest player to achieve the Golden Badge - 🇷🇺 NaDa (18 years, 1 month and 29 days, Baskin Robbins KPGA 4th Tour 2003)

The oldest OSL champion - 🇷🇺 iloveoov (22 years, 3 months and 27 days, Shinhan Bank OSL 2005)

The oldest MSL champion - 🇷🇺 BoxeR (21 years, 7 month and 10 days, KPGA 1st Tour)

The oldest player to win OSL silver - 🇷🇺 BoxeR (25 years, 2 months and 1 day, Sol OSL 2005)

The oldest player to win MSL silver - 🇰🇷 Nal_rA (24 years, 4 months and 1 day, Pringles 1 MSL 2006)

The oldest player to achieve the Golden Mouse - 🇷🇺 NaDa (21 years and 363 days, Shinhan Bank Season 2 OSL 2006)

The oldest player to achieve the Golden Badge - 🇷🇺 iloveoov (20 years, 9 months and 24 days, SPRIS MSL 2004)

OSL and MSL performance

The most OSL and MSL wins - 🇷🇺 NaDa (6)

The most OSL and MSL finals appearances - 🇷🇺 NaDa (10)

The most OSL and MSL Semi-final (Ro4) appearances - 🇷🇺 NaDa (11)

The most OSL and MSL Ro16 appearances - 🇷🇺 NaDa (26)

The most number of OSL silver - 🇷🇺 BoxeR (4)

The most number of MSL silver - 🦋 YellOw and 🦋 NaDa (3)
The longest streak of OSL finals appearances - 🦋 BoxeR and 🦋 Flash (3 finals straight)
The longest streak of MSL finals appearances - 🦋 sAviOr (5 finals straight)

The only progamer to appear simultaneously in both OSL and MSL finals 3 seasons straight - 🦋 Flash
The only pair of progamers to appear simultaneously in 3 MSL finals straight (🦋 Flash and 🦋 Jaedong)
Pairs of progamers to appear simultaneously in both OSL and MSL finals in one season: 🦋 NaDa and 🦋 ChoJJa (Baskin Robbins KPGA 4th Tour, 2002/10/25 - 2003/1/18, and Panasonic OnGameNet Starleague, 2002/11/15 - 2003/02/14), 🦋 Flash and 🦋 Jaedong (Bigfile MSL, 2010/07/01 - 2010/08/23 and Korean Air OnGameNet StarLeague Season 2, 2010/06/16 - 2010/09/11)

KeSPA

The longest streak of being at TOP-1 KeSPA - 🦋 BoxeR (17 months straight)
The longest streak of being at Top-30 KeSPA - 🦋 NaDa (87 months straight)
The highest number of KeSPA points - 🦋 Flash (4292.5, September 2010)
TOP-1 KeSPA Terran - 🦋 Flash (30 months, 18 straight)
TOP-1 KeSPA Zerg - 🦋 Jaedong (34 months straight)
TOP-1 KeSPA Protoss - 🌿 Bisu (22 months, 11 straight)

ELO

The highest ELO Peak - 🦋 Flash (2443 pts)
The highest ELO Peak between Zergs - 🦋 Jaedong (2378 pts)
The highest ELO Peak between Protosses - 🌿 Bisu (2366 pts)

The highest vsT ELO Peak - 🦋 Flash (2317 pts)
The highest ZvT ELO Peak - 🦋 Jaedong (2289 pts)
The highest PvT ELO Peak - 🌿 JangBi (2260 pts)

The highest vsP ELO Peak - 🦋 Jaedong (2322 pts)
The highest TvP ELO Peak - 🦋 Flash (2318 pts)
The highest PvP ELO Peak - 🌿 Bisu (2270 pts)

The highest vsZ ELO Peak - 🦋 Jaedong (2341 pts)
The highest TvZ ELO Peak - 🦋 Flash (2330 pts)

The highest PvZ ELO Peak - 🌿 Bisu (2255 pts)

Win and loss streaks

The longest win streak - 🗡️ GoRush (16-0)

The longest TvT win streak - 🦋 Flash (22-0)

The longest TvZ win streak - 🦋 iloveoov (27-0) (proof)

The longest TvP win streak - 🦋 Flash (13-0)

The longest ZvT win streak - 🗡️ YellOw and 🗡️ Jaedong (12-0)

The longest ZvZ win streak - 🗡️ Jaedong, 🗡️ EffOrt (11-0)

The longest ZvP win streak - 🗡️ Jaedong (15-0)

The longest PvT win streak - 🌿 Stork (14-0)

The longest PvZ win streak - 🌿 Bisu (10-0)

The longest PvP win streak - 🌿 BeSt (17-0)

The longest loss streak - 🗡️ JinNam (0-16)

The longest TvT loss streak - 🦋 DarkElf (0-13)

The longest TvZ loss streak - 🦋 Really (0-13)

The longest TvP loss streak - 🦋 Casy (0-12)

The longest ZvT loss streak - 🗡️ Clon, 🗡️ TheWinD, 🗡️ JinNam (0-11)

The longest ZvZ loss streak - 🗡️ JinNam (0-9)

The longest ZvP loss streak - 🗡️ Shark (0-7)

The longest PvT loss streak - 🌿 SangHo (0-11)

The longest PvZ loss streak - 🌿 TerAtQ, 🌿 fOru, 🌿 RainBOw (0-9)

The longest PvP loss streak - 🌿 Zeus, 🌿 Movie (0-10)

Game

Most kills with a single unit - 🌿 Snow (72 kills with a reaver, 2010/07/17)

Longest broadcasted games:

All: 🌿 Stork vs 🗡️ GGPlay (18.06.2008) - 1:22:55

TvZ: 🦋 firebathero vs 🗡️ sAviOr (24.06.2007) - 59:45

TvT: 🦋 Shine vs 🦋 Canata (16.04.2009) - 1:20:44

















PvT: 🦋 Light vs 🌿 BeSt (03.03.2010) - 52:00

PvP: 🌿 Chalenge vs 🌿 Rock (26.06.2007) - 1:10:27











ZvZ: 🗡️ YellOw vs 🗡️ GGPlay (07.08.2005) - 42:19

Fastest wins:

All: 🗡️ hyvaa vs 🌿 Pusan (20.03.2010) - 2:51

TvZ:  Flash vs  Jaedong (11.08.2010) - 3:10
TvT:  Leta vs  Flash (19.02.2009) - 3:25
TvP:  Flash vs  Bisu (26.09.2008) - 3:20
PvT:  Stork vs  BoxeR (13.10.2007) - 3:55
PvP:  Bisu vs  PokJu (25.06.2007) - 3:38
PvZ:  Movie vs  FireFist (5.12.2009) - 4:13
ZvZ:  Jaedong vs  Calm (20.05.2010) - 3:22
ZvT:  Niza vs  Yooi (16.11.2004) - 2:57

Draws in pro SC:

 Chalrenge vs  Rock (26.06.2007)
 Flash vs  JangBi (07.07.2008)
 Sea vs  Hwasin (14.05.2008)
 Shine vs  Canata (16.04.2009)
 HoGiL vs  ZerO

Credit to **Ampleaf** for creating the sections "Longest broadcasted games", "Fastest wins" and "Draws in pro SC"

- The Book of Sequels

"One isn't born one's self. One is born with a mass of expectations, a mass of other people's ideas -- and you have to work through it all."

V.S. Naipaul

Because of a shared name and a shared competitive nature, professional gaming inevitably draws comparisons to sports. Football and Counter-Strike, StarCraft and basketball, so on and so forth. The analogies are interesting and worth being explored in some depth. E-sports fans envy the enormous following of sport across the world and quite openly hope to experience growth on that scale, whatever the odds may be. Asking questions about the inner workings of sport is one way forward on that path.

One divergence to be explored is the speed of change in these games. In e-sports, change tends to come relatively rapidly. Even at the slowest game developer, balance patches, new maps and sequels regularly shift paradigms in competitive games, forcing players and fans alike to adapt, to learn within and about a new competitive environment. These fundamental shifts are always on the horizon in gaming, in the form of patches, maps and sequels.

In contrast, basketball fans are not holding their breath until the game's sequel arrives. Hoops will probably not rise to 15 feet (4.5 meters) tall, courts will remain 94 feet (28.65 meters) long for the foreseeable future. The game seems stable. The sport your father loved is same the sport you love and thus it is passed down from generation to generation.

But sport is not static. Basketball has changed multiple times over the past half century, moving from a defensive-centric game to the promotion of offense. Rule changes (the shot clock, for one), related culture and style changes (reducing physicality and promoting individuality) and personnel changes (the modern athlete is superior to his predecessor) have created a contemporary game that is appreciably different from basketball in the 1980's or 1950's.

American football is an even more striking example of change in sport. The National Football League has aggressively changed rules in order to promote a faster and more high scoring game to please a greater number of fans. Modern football fans - especially those who appreciate a defensive game - will tell you,

the games of the 70's, 80's and, in several ways, the 90's are significantly different from today's game. It seems that every off-season, American football fans are waiting and wondering what sort of change will next alter the game they love.

The commonality of change does exist to a certain and significant extent but fans of competitive gaming wonder about change virtually every day. In a way which no sport experiences, nearly every aspect of e-sports possess the potential to be altered in a fundamental way.

Each time a sequel to a beloved e-sport looms on the horizon, a fiery argument erupts. Are sequels good for e-sports? Are they a way to take long strides forward, to improve a game and to attract more players and viewers?

Or are sequels thinly veiled money grabs with the game's well-being a much lower priority in development? Do sequels dumb down e-sports in order to appeal to the masses and, in that process, lower the quality of the game and longevity of the e-sport's success?

In the end, are sequels good or bad for e-sports?

In these debates, Counter-Strike: Source is often brought up as the most striking example of an e-sport sequel.

The original Counter-Strike (CS) is one of the all-time greatest e-sports, attracting a worldwide following and maintaining a heated competitive circuit for over a decade. Some of the most influential organizations and individuals in e-sports had their start in Counter-Strike. As far as team FPS e-sports go, it is by far the grand daddy of them all. It can be argued that CS can make a claim to that title for all FPS games but you'd have a fight on your hands from some passionate fans from across a handful of other notable franchises. That's an argument for another time.

The original Counter-Strike was released in June 1999. Over the next half-decade, its competitive scene burned as bright as any ever have in the West. In 2004, Valve, the developers of Half-Life (or Goldsource, the game engine on which the original Counter-Strike is run), released the sequel, Counter-Strike: Source (on the eponymous Source engine) to accompany the blockbuster release of Half-Life 2.

Source's gameplay was seen as a severe misstep, dumbed down and error-prone. Its competitive scene never managed to overtake the original's in a lasting way. In the end, CS:Source's chief legacy is seen as the split and strangling of the competitive community. Source helped kill the original's growth overnight while

failing to build a lasting competitive game of its own.

Today, a shrinking but passionate competitive scene survives for the original game. Source's competitive scene is minuscule, the only notable credit to its name being that it dealt a severe blow to its predecessor.

As a StarCraft sequel approached, as arguments over the nature of sequels in e-sports raged daily, the Counter-Strike example was brought up often. It is seen as a cautionary tale across e-sports, a reason for skepticism, a reason to stick to what "works".

Over the years, a nervous and excited StarCraft community slowly crept closer and closer to the release of a sequel, the most anticipated e-sports title of all time.

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The Real Time Strategy genre marched on and branched out.

Relatively far away on the genre's evolutionary tree sit games such as Homeworld and Sins of a Solar Empire (SoaSE), games which take place over vast expanses of space. Games such as these offer a uniquely giant experience, sometimes combining ideas from RTS with the 4X genre (e.g. Civilization, Master of Orion 2) to create a long, immersive experience of monumental breadth.

On the other end of the RTS evolutionary tree sits Company of Heroes. A 2006 title based in World War 2, it was released to critical acclaim and over a dozen notable awards. It plays on a much smaller scale than a game such as SoaSE (or even StarCraft), focusing instead on squad based play and tactical decisions as opposed to overarching strategy.

Somewhere near the latter lies the 'DOTA Genre', an entire genre of games descended from the WarCraft 3 custom map Defense of The Ancients (and the Aeon of Strife map on StarCraft before it). Heroes of Newerth and League of Legends are two of the more critically acclaimed titles of this sort, focusing more and more on tactics of individual heroes (the small scale) instead of a grand conflict.

Old standbys continue their march into the future.

Command & Conquer is the most prolific franchise in the genre, boasting 19 games and four cancelled projects. Two titles (Red Alert 2 and Generals) were led in design by Dustin Browder, also the lead designer of StarCraft 2. 12 of these games came out in between Brood War and StarCraft 2. However, as far as gameplay goes, there's little of consequence to speak of here.

The visual style certainly influenced StarCraft 2, though, with many fans noting

as much the moment StarCraft 2 was announced with Browder at the helm.

And then there is the single player, chock full of cleavage, blonds, surprisingly awesome actors, cheesiness and more. To be frank, there is nothing else quite like the Command & Conquer single player experience. Perhaps that is a good thing, perhaps not. It's a game which "doesn't take itself seriously," says IGN, "it just aims to make you smile."

That's fine by me. Not great or spectacular, but perfectly fine and pretty damn funny.

Age of Empires, another seemingly indefatigable franchise, has sold tens of millions of games and remains a formidable force in the gaming industry. However, in the e-sports world, it has been of little to no consequence for about a decade since it was a WCG event near the turn of the century.

If it seems as though I am omitting a number of RTS titles (Empire Earth, Supreme Commander, etc), I am. However, as we trace the history of StarCraft, there is one title that is relevant above all, one that must be discussed more than any other.

In terms of sheer success in the competitive arena (and in most other arenas as well), the most significant RTS release in between StarCraft and StarCraft 2 was Warcraft 3. The genre has generally moved toward the edge of the spotlight as it slowed somewhat from the late 90's gold-rush and, relatively speaking, was not as financially rewarding for the development studios invested in it. But unlike most of its competitors in the genre, Warcraft 3 was an immediate major financial and critical success for Blizzard.

The game took the classic Blizzard RTS formula - one often criticized as deathly stagnant or praised as perfectly polished - and tweaked it in ways significant to competitive play:

The fully 3D rendering of the game - something which had been debated for and decided against in StarCraft but which had become the genre norm by this time - had substantial implications in gameplay in areas such as unit movement and interaction as well as the ability to use a more diverse set of terrain.



The game was endowed with several features normally associated with Role Playing Games such as heroes with experience points, an important leveling mechanic and usable items.

The focus in StarCraft lay in mostly disposable laymen units (think: Marines, Zerglings, Zealots). In WarCraft, a different point of focus existed around an army's heroes.

Additionally, the population limit was set at 90 as opposed to StarCraft's 200. Each unit was more durable and expensive than had been the case with their StarCraft counterparts. With the significant investment that each costly unit represented, micromanagement became the overriding focus of the game.

Even with an overall slowing and shrinking of gameplay (send your hate mail somewhere else if you somehow disagree), Warcraft 3 remains among the best received and top-selling RTS games of all time, just below StarCraft - as of mid-2010, Warcraft 3's total sales fall about a million short of StarCraft's 11 million.

WarCraft's pro circuit, in Korea and the rest of the world, never reached the rather unbelievable heights that StarCraft had. Despite an early burst of energy, including a brief exodus of StarCraft players toward the new game as well as an irritating mid-decade stagnation in non-Korean StarCraft, WarCraft has paled in comparison from most any angle (audience, playing population, balance, depth, longevity, replayability, community and on and on) next to its sci fi sibling. Only a few years after Warcraft 3's release, StarCraft's playing population was said to rise comfortably above it to the top of the RTS world once again.

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As sequels for other franchises came and went, the wait for StarCraft 2 continued. Each of its main rival franchises (C&C, Total Annihilation, Warcraft) had one or several games released during the 12 year gap between StarCrafts.

Blizzard, already a premiere publishing house by the mid 1990's, became a singular worldwide power with the 2004 release of World of Warcraft, the most successful Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG, I need to take a breath) of all time. It boasted over 12 million monthly subscribers as of its peak in October 2010. From Warcraft 3 until World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King, Blizzard released five Warcraft titles in a row.

In video game history, it is impossible to overlook World of WarCraft. It is one of the most successful games of all time but, perhaps more importantly, has become one of the most influential, most talked about and most significant video game titles ever. All this, keep in mind, without offering a terribly innovative gameplay experience. Instead, in true Blizzard fashion, the game became a giant of its genre through unparalleled refinement, a small learning curve, an immersive experience and serious replayability. This created a monstrously strong revenue stream for the company. Though it is not without faults and major issues, World of WarCraft became a cultural phenomenon and industry milestone as much as a game.

Blizzard's growth continued. In 2008, it joined with Activision to create the

largest publishing house in the world. Fans reaction to the merger has been mixed at best, an interestingly raw sore subject for Blizzard public relations personnel. Activision is widely seen as "the dark side", pushing Blizzard toward considering profitability over user experience (the decision to omit LAN from StarCraft 2, for instance). Blizzard PR has been known to contact large fan sites, irritated about the negative portrayal of CEO Bobby Kotick online. Blizzard did not officially respond to my attempts for interviews within the company in time to be included in this book.

Meanwhile, StarCraft fans waited and watched as Blizzard showered attention on the Warcraft series at what sometimes felt like the expense of StarCraft for an entire decade. Admittedly, StarCraft fans were and are not an easy group to please.

With no choice and mixed feelings, the wait continued.

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Despite not reaching the lofty bar set by its sci-fi brother, Warcraft 3 was a resounding success in many ways. In fact, it was so much a success that numerous StarCraft fans, many of whom tried Warcraft 3 briefly and came back to StarCraft in droves, were scared that the design direction that Warcraft 3 had taken would heavily influence a potential StarCraft 2 game.

Until 2007, a smattering of rumors and conversations about StarCraft 2 always brought up Warcraft's pitfalls and never failed to raise an alarm about the potential ruin that a StarCraft sequel apparently faced if treated in the same manner.

When, in mid-2007, Blizzard finally announced a sequel in South Korea, an air of excitement mixed with alarm. The community's red lights began flashing as many were worried about the game's direction.

When it was announced that Dustin Browder was the lead designer for the project, worries continued to surface. Browder had had leading positions in the Command & Conquer series, a franchise whose gameplay and visual style was generally looked down upon throughout the StarCraft community. Whether or not he would create Command & Conquer in space was on many minds.

Several specific gameplay choices were a topic of many conversations.

Multiple Building Selection (MBS) in particular gave StarCraft fans great pause. MBS is the ability of the player to select multiple unit-producing buildings at once and thus makes easier and speeds up unit production. The worry among StarCraft fans was that this would act to de-emphasize macromanagement (as in Warcraft 3, it would be more difficult to have a significant lead in numbers) and put the focus

too heavily on micromanagement. This would simplify the game, dumb it down and kill competition. It would make the game too easy, repeatedly cried *thousands*. MBS was, for years, the universal scapegoat.

As a slow trickle of glimpses at the game were released to the public over the course of 3 years, much of the community remained worried.

Among other worries, unlimited unit selection, the 3D engine and the seeming reluctance of Korea to become excited about the sequel all weighed heavily on the minds of those who hoped to see StarCraft 2 become a singularly successful e-sport.

On the last point, it has been noted by major community figures that Korean StarCraft sites have experienced vastly underwhelming hit counts regarding StarCraft 2, a truth that lasted at least past the retail release in July 2010. I do not have accurate information for later periods. Although this was periodically written about as a sequel approached, it received a relatively small amount of attention considering the rather large implications it held. Optimism about the worldwide appeal of StarCraft 2 held this worry in some check.

It took the release of the StarCraft 2 beta in early 2010 to *begin* to abate some of those fears with three important new gameplay features which attempted to reemphasize what was perceived as the extremely important macromanagement aspect of the game:

For the Protoss, the Chrono Boost ability to speed up unit production when used created another avenue with which to separate one's unit count from an opponent's.

For the Zerg, the Queen's Spawn Larvae ability doubles the Larvae output for a hatchery over time.

On the Terran side, the MULE is a temporary mining robot which can gather resources at a higher rate than any other worker in the game.

It was these three new game mechanics which surprised many of the worried and seemed to move the focus of the game over toward macromanagement, much to the satisfaction of most fans. These three mechanics would, in theory, ensure a sufficiently high skill ceiling for the game (at least as far as macromanagement went) thus allowing the great to separate themselves from the good.

After years of theorizing about potential major issues in the sequel, the community at large felt for a time - the first time since 2007, perhaps - as though macromanagement was not going to be fatally hamstrung.

The unlimited unit selection became a target for complaints following the far-

from-unanimous acquiescence to MBS. Whereas MBS affects macromanagement, unlimited unit selection (UUS) affects micromanagement.

In StarCraft 1, a so-called '1a-2a-3a syndrome' (so named for the few hotkeys used) existed, in which a novice player would not put significant effort into micro, only throwing units recklessly at an opponent (using only '1a-2a-3a' to do so). In StarCraft 2, this descended into simply '1a syndrome' as UUS allowed (often times deceptively, counterproductively) vast control in only 1 keystroke.

Fear of crippled micromanagement (and a dumbed down game, the common thread among these scares) bubbled to the surface but never reached anti-MBS ferocity.

Without getting any further into the minutiae of fan's and critic's worries about the gameplay, suffice to say the worries were well-founded, thoroughly debated and utterly frustrating to see thoughtlessly rehashed and mostly ignored a thousand times over. Such is the game development process for a blockbuster.

Even most of the great skeptics - that is, those of us with love for the original game and a critical but hopeful eye toward the sequel - were not blind to the sequel's great potential after all the debating was done (though it is never really over on the internet). And finally, the playing had begun.

The potential for longevity, replayability, diversity, creativity, depth and greatness was there. You know what I'm talking about: an e-sport. *The* e-sport. And this time, it had potential on all shores.

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All told, it took seven years development, nearly as herculean an effort as can be undertaken in major game development. It took several years of delays, including the lovely 2009, in which Blizzard remembered themselves and pushed everything back a year. And then the speed picked up.

StarCraft 2 finally hit the beta in force and to great excitement in February 2010. After the aforementioned mid-decade stagnation, the international StarCraft community had been revitalized and its ranks swelled ever since the 2007 announcement of the sequel and the beta saw a fevered level of competition, the likes of which had never been seen outside of Korea. From the launch onward, tournaments were held on what felt like an hourly basis. Games were in no short supply. Beta keys sold for hundreds of dollars on eBay, fans clamored for a taste of a long awaited work. They hoped for a masterpiece.

At the risk of making the understatement of the year, the environment in which

StarCraft 2 was released was quite different from its predecessor's launch. Both were accompanied by significant hype and both suffered delays. But the very landscape of the net was altered by this time, with 2010 offering a much richer environment than 1998 ever could.

The first glimpse many fans got of the game's closed beta was Liquid`Nazgul quickly installing and running the beta on that February day on Liquid`Nony's video stream. Video streams had become a major part of StarCraft culture over the prior few years and exploded with the sequel's release. Streams helped popularize the game in numerous ways: They showed off its good looks and its speed. They helped teachers illustrate the depth of the game. They helped commentators convey the excitement. They offered the Western world an easy glimpse into what StarCraft had been for years in Korea and the response was electric.

Of course, the response was not by any measure unanimous positivity.

From outside the StarCraft community, the knock on the game was immediately familiar to those who had been around when StarCraft was released: No innovation. No originality.

Dustin Browder, the sequel's Design Director and an increasingly loved figure in StarCraft history, offered an admirably honest response:

"We're not trying to be innovative," said Browder in an interview with Gamasutra.com. "We're not trying to change for change's sake. We're just trying to make quality [games]."

The old detractors, admittedly low in volume to these ears, remained turned off by things such as the game's apparent lack of strategy and overbearing focus on resource management and, in those critic's words, the game's emphasis on speed over thought.

Same old, same old, right? It becomes frustrating to hear critiques like this when, as a veteran fan, it's exceedingly easy to spot someone with little to no experience with or understanding of the game they're talking about.

However, from within the StarCraft community, the aforementioned criticisms about simplistic gameplay and poorly built Battle.net 2.0 continued to worry players. Balance issues, of course, were on the tip of a million tongues.

All the same, the ranks of the StarCraft legion grew tenfold and the games began.

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Warcraft: Orcs & Humans' biggest innovation was multiplayer. Warcraft 2 took

advantage of gaming networks such as Kali and became an internet phenomenon. StarCraft used Battle.net and Kali to build a giant community of gamers.

With StarCraft 2, Battle.net 2.0 was revealed to the world. The importance of the multiplayer dimension to StarCraft 2 is obvious even to those who will never touch the game. It is hardly a surprise that several of StarCraft 2's delays (including, apparently, much of the great 2009 delay) were due to the long development of Battle.net 2.0.

So, why has it been so poorly received?

The 1990's were an era in which *any* gaming network was a major advantage. Now, in 2010, gamers are looking for more.

A lack of chat rooms thus crippling sociability (until version 1.2, four months after release), a lack of LAN play (as a blow against piracy, rumored to be the chief contribution of their new overseers, Activision, and their new overlord, CEO Bobby Kotick) hurt local and tournament play, a counter-intuitive and convoluted ladder system in which your true rank is hidden from you, an always-connected experience which recalls Big Brother for some and a lack of tournament capabilities is seen by many as a step backward in time. The major "advancement" for StarCraft 2's multiplayer is the Automated Match Making system, a feature included in 2002's WarCraft 3 on Battle.net 1.0. Even player profiles, an easy but surefire way to engage players, are far simpler than their WarCraft 3 counterparts.

Blizzard has explicitly and implicitly promised improvement to the upgraded service over time. Still, one can't help but be disappointed that a game so apparently dedicated to e-sports and social gaming has a multiplayer dimension with so few features fostering its development.

But hey, it's got Facebook integration. Great.

Blizzard has a lot of work to do on that front.

A flurry of news beginning with a conference call for Activision Blizzard investors in January and culminating in the February launch of beta began the road toward the retail release of StarCraft 2 in earnest.

The competitive scene began where Brood War's had left off but was altered in a significant way thanks to another one of Battle.net's so-called innovations: disconnected gateways.

In StarCraft 1, players were always allowed to freely play any other person with internet access. In the beginning, one gateway existed. Over time, gateways were split (into USEast, USWest, Asia and Europe) but players remained free to join all

four realms regardless of their own location.

In StarCraft 2, a game client is specifically designed to play with one gateway only (North America, Europe, Latin America, South East Asia or Korea). Players cannot move freely and legally between gateways to play others outside of their region without purchasing another game client.

This decision had meaningful implications in the playing community. In many cases, gamers were cut off from old friends, family and playing partners. Different play styles immediately developed on the different servers as early as the first weeks of beta. Korean Terrans played one way, North Americans another and Europeans still another. It was an odd, seemingly arbitrary meta-game development that would affect major international competition in every tournament early on.

The biggest implication was the limit this placed on international competition. Holding regional tournaments (North American only) became easy with the booming scene but holding international tournaments became the exclusive forum of those with serious excess money and time to dedicate whereas prior, this obstacle did not exist.

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Despite these changes, the competitive beta scene flourished. Competition rapidly grew in intensity inside the beta, as major e-sports organizations such as the ESL and MLG and major sponsors such as Intel and nVidia immediately took notice and began to participate.

The beta lacked the climactic Blizzard-sponsored tournament which most expected to wrap it up. In its stead, a 'King of the Beta' (KotB) tournament was organized by Sean "Day[9]" Plott, the premiere StarCraft 2 commentator outside of Korea. KotB included eight of the best players from across the world such as the Canadian Huk, the German TheLittleOne, the Korean Tester and the Ukrainian Dimaga. On the night of retail launch, Greg "IdrA" Fields was crowned the King of the Beta and awarded a \$2000 prize with a 3-2 win over Korean heavyweight Protoss, Seo Ki Soo "Tester".

Idra, viewed for several years as probably the best non-Korean StarCraft player in the world, carried heavy expectations and a notorious love/hate relationship with the worldwide community. His victory over Tester, considered at the time to be the best Protoss in the world, raised those expectations as retail launched and the major tournaments were set to begin.

On the eve of the beta, I was able to speak with with IdrA about his place in the StarCraft world.

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*The Villain Commodity: **IdrA**.*

Let's start with the obvious: Greg Fields brings out the emotion in the StarCraft community. For nearly every forum post calling him an emotionally unstable player or a rude and tactless competitor, IdrA can point to at least one rude forum poster letting a video game crawl more than a couple of inches deep under his or her skin.



His polarizing nature has rarely seen a brighter spotlight than in his Round of 8 loss to NonY in the 2009 Team Liquid StarLeague (the last great non-Korean StarCraft 1 tournament). The 100,000 and growing views, the thousands of posts and the unquantifiable energy – at once negative and positive and all over the place – evident throughout the thread and entire community is only one more piece of evidence of IdrA's fame and infamy in each little corner of the StarCraft world.

How did this start?

“Well I think it started mainly because I sucked in important games,” said IdrA, a CJ Entus B-teamer at the time. “Ever since I joined TmG I’ve been capable of beating top foreigners in practice games but it took a really long time for that to show through in games that mattered. That meant my ego was kind of disproportionate to my results, which rubbed people the wrong way. Along with that I tend to be fairly blunt in terms of saying what I think and not sugar coating

it.”

This is the point which his detractors thrive on and that even his fans smile at. His many quotable phrases have, in several cases, entered the Brood War vernacular. “A useful skill toi have” replaces GG, the former phrase becoming an exceptional event whenever it does come from IdrA. After he typed ‘GG’ during his quick game 2 loss to NonY, IRC exploded in six hundred laughs and insults per second. The viewers worked at a staggering speed, fingers spazzing and breath short, to spam their emotions to a player many dislike in no small part for the way emotions figure into his personality.

Is his abrasive, honest and often self-superior attitude a boon or a burden for the scene? Is his often uneven play an irreparable Achilles’s heel, both in the game and out?

Without question, he is a boon. The atmosphere he brings to the game is positively electric. For every insult he attracts, he might bring in two viewers to our game.

“Idra is surely good for StarCraft,” says Dan ‘Artosis’ Stemkoski. “He makes the foreigner scene much more interesting. He is a cocky, arrogant player, and he doesn’t hide what he truly thinks. There are too few people like this in e-sports overall. Yes, it polarizes the view on him, but love him or hate him, I think you have to respect that he will always say what he is thinking, unlike *so many* other players. Giving the masses someone to cheer against – or in some cases, for – is great for entertainment value. Foreigner SC just wouldn’t be as interesting without him, I think no one can disagree with that.”

For all the hate launched in IdrA’s direction, there is never more energy in the air than when he plays a perceived rival. No one in the community can inject pure, unadulterated drama into competition quite like him. The adrenaline is undeniably flowing through him during the game and the emotion is worn on his sleeve and seen in his units. As if he’s following a comic book script in which he is cast as the archvillain, he always makes clear that a diplomatic sense of sportsmanship is certainly not high on his list of priorities. Least of all on that list of priorities is pleasing those who might have a problem with that.

“I tend to be fairly blunt in terms of saying what I think and not sugar coating it,” says IdrA, “and people on the internet love any excuse to get riled up so they just take that and run with it. So, I suppose I do deserve the hate in that I recognize what pisses people off and I don’t avoid it, but I think it’s stupid that they’re so

sensitive in the first place.”

With the loss to NonY in the round of 8, the old problem of IdrA’s comes into play – his ego is disproportionate to his results and that rubs people the wrong way. After all, he predicted a 3-0 and gave NonY no chance.

Prior to the game, he was asked what he would do in the unlikely event that he did lose.

“I don’t know,” he told Team Liquid. “I’ve never really been a fan of thinking about situations that aren’t gonna happen. Seems kinda like a waste of time.”

The responses came quick, at machine gun speed, and fell into two camps:

“So much trash talk, so little time,” wrote an obviously amused first commenter, AssuredVacancy

“God, I love villains,” agreed the second, zerglingsfolife.

“This is what a pre-match interview is all about,” wrote commenter Two_DoWn. “If there isn’t any bulletin board material at the end of it, it wasn’t worth doing. Modesty does nothing but make a match’s hype boring.”

The second camp:

“He should lose the attitude and stop the charade,” wrote Singu. “This is not a boxing match IdrA. A humble personality suits you better if you would ask me.”

The second camp is boring, too sensitive and ought to be careful what he wishes for: a lame children’s movie in which the greatest care is taken to not upset the babies in the theater.

In the mean time, the adult’s movie will continue into StarCraft 2.

“I definitely will be playing SC2 professionally,” promised IdrA to me during the earliest stages of beta. “I’d like to start playing as soon as possible. I’m actually sitting here refreshing my email waiting for the key right now. I haven’t talked to CJ yet about their plans for it, but it seems logical to have me switch over as soon as possible. ”

Long live the villain. Long live IdrA the terrible. Long live the passion.

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Another major player in the early StarCraft scene who must be mentioned is Stefan "MorroW" Andersson. Although he only joined the upper echelon of non-Korean players in 2008, his quick ascent has caught the eyes of many and his future after school has a great number of people excited. Before the StarCraft 2 beta launched, I was able to speak with MorroW about his plans to be a professional.

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*The Professional Method: **MorroW**.*

It's all about the mindset, Mr. Andersson.

Wake up. Coffee. School? Maybe. From there, the world to Stefan Andersson fades to the background as Terrans and Neo Tornadoes advance to the foreground. MorroW is wholly focused on the game of StarCraft.

"If I don't play Brood War, I'm wasting time," says the 17 year-old Swedish Terran. "If I just shit around all day with friends or watch TV, I don't improve as a human being."

As was made evident in his TeamLiquid StarLeague play, MorroW has not been wasting much time. He finished second in the TSL ladder with a 206-108 A-level record. The high finish garnered wide praise, his admittedly strategic, numerous and occasionally maligned dodges notwithstanding. On the average weekday, he plays up to 25 games in a day, hours on end, with a goal beyond simply winning. Day after day, Korean after Korean, MorroW's ultimate prize remains a professional gaming career, most likely to be found in Korea proper. Andersson says he has had very few teachers ("Except Flash"), relying first and foremost on a superior mindset to improve faster than his competition.

"I have been [solely] dedicated to practice for a year now. For the first year or so, I didn't practice a lot. I was a casual player and I improved quickly for the few games I played but now I must play a shitload to improve because the higher you get the harder it becomes to push yourself. To improve or play well at this game, I think it all comes down to mindset: Don't be angry after you lose. Don't take risks when you practice or cheese versus better players. The best way to improve is to play standard style over and over and not get angry after you get cheesed. Instead, learn to stop it. This was my method and still is."

After the famous Dutch Zerg, "Ret" Joseph de Kroon's tumultuous and brief stay in Korea, no one would begrudge MorroW an apprehensive double-take at the prospects for a professional gaming career. Ret's time in Korea was full of cold-shoulders, paranoid accusations and a constant feeling of loneliness.

"You aren't comfortable where you are," Ret told Fragster.de in a recent interview, "and it seems like the whole world is working against you to make sure you feel like shit."

MorroW shrugs this off.

“Actually, all the Ret VODs [from Artosis at SCForAll.com] boosted my motivation to go there,” says the Terran, “because I have a better grip now. Before those VODs, I was like ‘Okay, Courage [the Progamer licensing tournament], errr – how hard is that?’ But now I see Ret almost winning it, so that boosts my confidence. If Ret was in the eSTRO team house the entire time instead of on Artosis’ couch then I think he would have won Courage. But this replay leak thing screwed that up. It was not Ret’s fault – if he was in eSTRO as he deserved then he would win Courage. So, Ret’s whole Korea thing encouraged me to be more excited to go there.”

Ret’s stay, heavy on discomfort, uncertainty and being “treated like a child”, encourages MorroW first and foremost because he’s concretely realized one thing: *A foreigner can make it in Korea.*

“Artosis is kind of my guide for this – he asks me what my goal is and he tells me how to get it. He doesn’t tell me what I should do but for my goal he thinks I must go to Korea. And then I say, if Artosis thinks so then I am all aboard because he knows best. He’s the Terran Oracle and he told me there is no spoon.”

Of course, there was already one notorious foreigner in the Korean progaming scene who had beat Ret to it. He remains in the country, inside the CJ Entus house. What of him and his perceived failures and successes? MorroW had no shortage of thoughts on the subject.

“I think he is the perfect example of how you improve slowly if you have the wrong mindset,” says MorroW. “[IdrA] gets angry when he loses, he doesn’t learn from his mistakes, he uses mind-play when he shouldn’t and doesn’t use it when he should. He doesn’t make sense in his builds or play. He’s been in Korea forever and he loses a game by canceling his Command Center. If he could learn to see the game like you should, he would become good but right now I feel like he is very unstable and it is because of his mind-set.”

I am interviewing MorroW only hours after “IdrA” Greg Field’s TSL quarterfinals loss to NonY, the upset heard ’round the world. It’s on the mind of the entire Brood War community, Mondragon and Sen maybe being the sole exceptions.

“The main point I’m trying to make here is if you are going to play StarCraft all day, you should enjoy it. Embrace the builds the Toss throws at you instead of getting angry and saying it’s stupid. You need to get inspired when you get

cheesed. Whenever you lose, there is an opportunity to learn but he doesn't understand this. He just rages all the time and makes an ass out of himself. And I think that's sad because he's a good gamer."

It is very frustrating to see watch someone with so much talent be so unstable.

"I don't think he's talented," MorroW quickly responds. "Talent is mindset. Take Mondragon or White-Ra. Although I think they are a little bit too old now to play so fast, they understand how to improve. Same with NonY, just look at him: one month and he plays super well. It's because he knows how to analyze and improve and I think that is the more important talent in Brood War."

MorroW was knocked out of the TSL in the qualifying stages by the favored "Kolll" Anton Emmerich, a 14 year-old German Zerg prodigy who famously beat IdrA 2-0 on his way to 4th place at the World Cyber Games 2009. With that on his mind, MorroW says he did not watch the match with the same favorite as everyone else.

"I expected IdrA to lose but I didn't expect him to play so badly as he did and I didn't expect NonY to all-in so much. I thought the game was going to be more mechanical and standard. I know how different the games were, more than other people who aren't at a top level or don't play tournaments. They might just say 'Okay, really bad C- allin games' which they were in mathematics but in mind-play NonY did brilliantly and IdrA as well. In game 1, they focused on mind play rather than mathematical play which turned in favor of NonY. I think it was a bad idea of IdrA's to enter mind play against a gamer who has been inactive. The only benefit NonY could have versus IdrA would be the mind play part and IdrA chose to play under NonY's circumstances. If IdrA had just played safe then maybe he could win with standard games but actually, I don't think IdrA would outclass NonY in a standard game either."

Actually, the predictions MorroW made at the start of the round of 16 have not turned out so well. In fact, according to earlier forum posts of his, he wagered that IdrA would win the entire tournament, defeating Kolll in the finals. According to him, Ret and White-Ra would take third and fourth places respectively. None of his initial semi-final predictions remain in the tournament: Kolll lost to Fenix in the round of 16, White-Ra lost to Jianfei in the round of 8, Ret fell to Sen in the same round and, of course, IdrA's demise rounded out the quarter-finals. Hindsight is 20-20 but, to be fair, an awful lot changes from round to round.

Most recently, MorroW ran through an international field of 22 without

dropping a single game and qualified for a spot in the round of 16 at the SwanSong Invitational Tournament, the ultimate prize being a StarCraft 2 beta key. Next on the road to beta, the Swedish Protoss Shauni and a field narrowed to 16 foreigners who MorroW himself describes as mostly “mid-level” except for GosI[Terran], the Mexican Terran Juan Carlos Tena Lopez, whom Morrow praises as “tier 1”.

He'll regroup and take the series 3-1 and then lose the next round 3-1 against the Terran Fenix.

Winning a beta key would be an enormous head start toward his goal of professional StarCraft 2 play. The new game will bring new teams, wealthy sponsors and prestigious competition but MorroW thinks that the road to the top will still run through Korea.

“Koreans will have StarCraft 2 pro-houses and play a shitload every day. I think foreigners will have “proteams” like Mouz, ex-v10 and whatever and we will get more money but it will not be on the same serious level. We won't get pro-houses outside Korea. I think Koreans will practice the most and foreigners who want to do well in StarCraft 2 must go to Korea to get the best practice.

“A year and a half ago, I thought there would be a lot of money in StarCraft 2 outside of Korea but now I think that, while the money will increase from Brood War, it will be 0 compared to *PRO* gamers. It's a funny word in the foreign scene – I talk real money and I'm talking about Korea. I think I must go there but you never know.”

His grand ambition aside, MorroW has decided to take a deliberate and careful approach to learning StarCraft 2. He loves the feel of Terran and he hopes to play the human side but he will random for weeks, thoroughly learning the ins and outs of each race.

As the tournament money begins to materialize, as the Battle.net ladder creeps closer to reality and as StarCraft 2 becomes more than an apparition haunting the franchise's most dedicated fan base, the Swedish outsider MorroW leaves me with one statement.

“MorroW will dominate everyone in StarCraft 2.”

I laugh.

“No. Really.”

Update: In September 2010, Morrow told me that it was still his intention to go to Korea after his education was complete. He will graduate in the middle of 2011.

As previously mentioned, the environment in which StarCraft 2 is growing is a rich one. The net allows for dynamic media to be streamed instantly throughout the world, giving fans many glimpses into great gaming from all conceivable angles.

When StarCraft 1 was released, the battle report was the medium of choice. Blizzard and, one of the early and most important StarCraft 1 sites ever, BattleReports.com, swore by the medium. An author would observe a game and, through screen shots and memory, write the best account of the battle he could. It was a limited but exciting medium.

Today, video dominates. Whether you're speaking of the hobby commentator next door or the professionals in Korea, video is the medium of choice to convey the game of StarCraft.

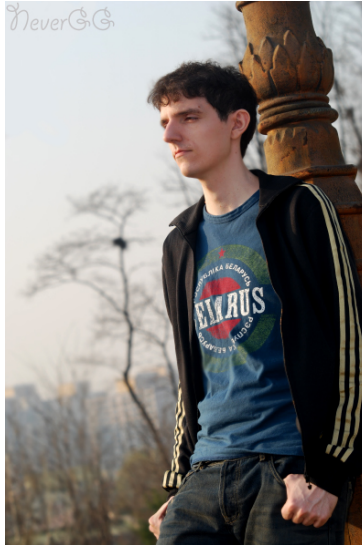
When one asks 'who is the best StarCraft 2 commentator?', there ought to be two names which come to mind above all else. Without a doubt, one of them is Dan "Artosis" Stemkoski.

I was able to speak with Artosis immediately before the StarCraft 2 beta was launched.

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*The Ghost of eSports Yet to Come: **Artosis**.*

The name Artosis rings familiar to nearly each and every Terran, Zerg and Protoss playing the game today. Is there a voice more recognizable in all of StarCraft? While an argument for the Plott brothers might be made, Dan Stemkoski is the voice of Brood War today and, all things considered, an essential voice always. And yet, like the many of us, he is preparing to leave the game of StarCraft behind both personally and professionally.



“I will switch over completely to StarCraft 2 as soon as possible,” says Artosis. “As soon as the actual game is released, I doubt I will continue to cover Brood War in any way . . . I am unbelievably excited for the beta. I can’t properly describe to you how excited I am.”

He speaks for thousands of us. And as he made clear when I talked to him, it isn’t because switching is going to be the easy thing to do. In fact, the coming of the much hyped sequel brings numerous obstacles for e-sports in Korea and abroad.

“[After StarCraft 2 is released,] There will certainly be more money in Brood War than in SC2,” says the old school American Terran, “at least to start in Korea. The pro-scene is really deeply rooted. Many, many people make a living off of SC1, and its fan base is huge. SC2, over time, may become bigger, but most certainly not to start.”

The challenges for the sequel run deeper than a firmly entrenched Brood War culture. Each party with a cent to gain is positioning itself to grab every dollar (and euro and won) possible upon the release of StarCraft 2.

“KeSPA (Korean e-Sports Players Association) has run StarCraft on television for years, making a nice big profit,” says Artosis, an employee of International E-Sports Group Inc. “Blizzard wants some sort of payment for StarCraft 2. KeSPA and Blizzard disagree over the terms of this payment. The problem is at a standstill. No one really has any idea when or how it will be solved. No real plans can be made until KeSPA and Blizzard come to some sort of agreement. Right now there are only ideas about how the merging of SC1 and SC2 can take place.

Nothing definite will be decided upon until the disagreements between the two companies have been solved.

“I know both sides of the argument quite well,” he continues. “Korean culture is different than western culture, as are the laws. I think the only way to truly solve this issue would be for KeSPA to accept that there must be some sort of fees paid to Blizzard to use StarCraft 2 on TV.”

With the possibility of a lack of StarLeagues as we know them today, the prospect of the Battle.net ladder being the most prestigious competition in all of StarCraftdom comes with its own innate trouble.

“I think that Blizzard can certainly keep on patching the game to keep hackers at bay, but they will have to do it quite a bit. There are lots of hackers out there just waiting to try and destroy SC2’s competitive play. As for balance, including different and new maps, that will be a bit harder. I don’t suspect the game will be balanced as well as SC1 for some time. Especially considering the fact that they are planning 2 expansion packs – probably within the first three or so years of release.”

But, problems and opportunities in tow, StarCraft 2 is coming. After three years, it has finally begun to materialize. As he prepares to transition, Dan Stemkoski’s life continues as normal – or, as normal as life can be for a young e-sports professional living in the mecca of his industry. Artosis has called it a gamer’s paradise and this is what it is like to work in paradise:

“I wake up on weekdays at about 8:45. Take a shower, eat, whatever. Get to the IEG office at 9:20. Get online, check what happened in SC since the last time I was online. At this point I will either watch some interesting matches I missed, edit videos, or work on some other sort of e-sports related stuff.”

“If I’m not doing any of those things, I normally make some content for the community. Sometimes its an eSTRO showmatch, sometimes an interview, sometimes a tour, sometimes the weekly news, just about anything available or that comes to mind.

Depending upon what videos I’ve made or edited, I’m normally done with work by about 6:30pm. Then I go to the gym, or hang out with some friends, or my girlfriend. Sleep when I’m tired. Rinse and repeat.”

Not too bad.

Though he is in a committed relationship and counts many professional gamers and notable foreigners as close friends in Seoul, the single person he sees most in

Korea is Hwanni, the eSTRO manager. They are very good friends, says Artosis, they work together and live very near to each other. “Tasteless” Nick Plott and his girlfriend are also close by “a ton.” Prominent community members such as LilSusie, Midian, IdrA and others are reliably consistent figures in the 26-year old’s day-to-day life.

“Oh, Seoul is absolutely awesome at night. It absolutely never closes. The clubs are great, the bars are great, the drinking culture here is second to none. If you want to go somewhere that you can have fun at night, Seoul is that somewhere.”

Not too bad at all.

For better or worse, as you switch from a Firebat to a Reaper, a Dragoon to a Stalker, a Defiler to a Roach, the constant will remain the voice – and, more and more every day, the face – of Dan Stemkoski. His ubiquitous presence can be felt far from the many commentaries he lends his voice to. His most valuable contribution, his most unique ability is his level of access in the high levels of Korea and the worldwide community alike.

As millions of new eyes turn to StarCraft 2 and the community braces for an influx of gamers the likes of which it has never seen, Dan Stemkoski is working to make the StarCraft world smaller and more tightly woven. He is succeeding.

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*Optimistic: **Day9.***

When one asks 'who is the best StarCraft 2 commentator?', there ought to be two names which come to mind above all else. Dan "Artosis" Stemkoski is up there, followed by the man who needs no introduction: Sean "Day[9]" Plott himself. I spoke with him at the beginning of the beta period (before his milestone Day9 Daily #100) to see just how he felt about the game's future and his own past.

It almost goes without saying but I'll say it anyway: The Plotts are the first family of StarCraft. The voices of Nick and Sean, Tasteless and Day, are heard all over the world: From Korea to the States to Europe and beyond. They have fans from the bottom to the top of the community and at all points in between. Lately, Sean in particular has one of the most notable minds in the game. During his reliably insightful Day[9] Daily, he shares with us his sixth sense for StarCraft in a way that is so reliably clear cut, it makes most other strategy discussion look like convoluted bullshit in comparison. He lent his voice to the last TSL and was one big highlight in a tournament filled with them.

But he built his empire on Brood War and now, the community is switching games. Sean himself spends 6 or 7 hours on a good day playing StarCraft 2. Does that sixth sense see through time and space? What does Sean Plott see in the future?

"I think it's wonderful," he said. "I think it's beyond wonderful. It excites me. It makes me so happy."

In a word, he's optimistic.

When I say that the Plotts are the first family of StarCraft, it's important to note that I'm not just speaking about Nick and Sean.

Patrick: Okay, if I recall correctly, your mother has posted several times on Team Liquid.

Sean: Oh yeah, she's an awesome lady.

Patrick: I think she's actually a starred user. You said that she 'gets it', that she helped you get to WCG and that you guys are a StarCraft family. How much does she know about the community? Has she ever played?

Sean: Uh, she's never played StarCraft but I was actually talking to her about that earlier today. 'Mom, you *really* need to learn StarCraft.' That'd be so awesome. But, yeah, she was like any other sort of typical mom in that, when she saw us playing games, she thought 'oh that's a fun thing to do' but let's make sure that they're eating healthy, that they're going outside, that they're not stressing out or missing their homework. All that sort of junk.

But after we continued to play for like three years... Well, Nick and I are just generally excitable people. When Boxer and Grrrr... were good players, we'd come down to dinner and talk to her about it. She'd listen like a patient, sweet mother. But after a long time doing that, she realized it was more than just a casual, simple game. They're really starting to take this seriously.

When WCG 2001 came around, she had these free tickets from a flight of hers that was cancelled and she just took us out to this tournament. It went really well, it was really fun and she was really supportive. We got to meet a lot of people who were mostly older - I was a sophomore in high school so I was turning 15 or 14 at the time of the tournament. A lot of the guys were in their 20's, the admin was 30. For some reason the whole StarCraft community is filled with really funny people, so she got to see all these really pleasant people that we were playing with and that it was super competitive so she started to really get into it.

It reached the point that when Nick was a senior in college and he gets an offer to go work for GOMtv and he has one semester. Mom said, 'you know what? Go for the StarCraft thing, it's your passion.' So we bought a ticket and shipped him off. You know, Mom was paying his tuition and I'm sure she was aware that he'd have to start paying his loans back but she was just so supportive and had so much faith in Nick and in me as well, in both of us. She just is really delighted and pleased. Man I used the word delighted a lot this interview. Fucking delighted. Yeah, she thinks it's great.

So, it's not so much nature versus nurture but nature and nurture working in concert. Growing up with a fellow StarCraft junkie and a supportive mother couldn't have hurt. How does someone articulate the complexity of StarCraft day in and day out. It can't just be a cool mom, right?

Sean: I would first say that would start out with my brother being Nick, Tasteless as he's known. We'd spend so much time talking about StarCraft. We had this rule when we were younger that we couldn't use the computer until 3 pm. And our mom would make us wake up early to do chores so there was like this 4 to 6 hour gap where we couldn't get on the computer so Nick and I would spend that time talking about StarCraft, talking about the stuff we wanted to do and the ideas we had. That was the beginnings of learning to be articulate about StarCraft. But Harvey Mudd was the huge, big push.

Sean went to Harvey Mudd College for mathematics where had to give countless verbal presentations on ideas that soar above the heads of most people. Sean's job was to bring those ideas and people closer together.

Sean: Math people tend to assume that it's sitting down and problem solving and being theoretical and living in la-la land with your numbers and letters. But Harvey Mudd made certain that you would take complicated mathematical topics to the point where you'd literally never be able to understand them to the fullest but your goal was to take these topics and present on them. So, we were constantly doing tons of 5-minute, 10-minute, 30-minute presentations on various subjects because they wanted to make sure that every math student could go out into the math world

and explain the jist of what they do to non-technical people. That was a lot of fun because, you know, I generally like presentations for the most part. I don't have a public speaking fear. It's great practice to take some abstract idea and boil it down to 5-minutes, to get all the good meat there.

Sean's almost Daily Day9 TV grabs over 1,000 viewers at a time on a regular basis (*Editor's note*: This figure was true in March but as of December 2010, he's consistently attracting about 10,000 viewers per episode at the least). Over 77 episodes, he's racked up over 16,000,000 viewer minutes - over 200,000 viewer minutes per episode (*Editor's note*: it's much more difficult to get good numbers for his daily as of late 2010 but they are many times larger). It's an understatement to call him popular. In fact, figures over at Major League Gaming liked him so much that they invited him to cast their first StarCraft 2 event.

Patrick: If I'm not mistaken, you just did a cast for Major League Gaming. Can you tell us how that happened? Can you tell us how that happened and what the experience of working with them was like? Are you interested in working with them in the future?

Sean: They're delightful to work with. The person I spoke with - JP McDaniels - was really nice. He was just not defensive, a very important quality for anyone who wants e-sports to succeed to have. I know it's kind of a weird thing to say. But just because there's so many people who say, 'Ah, I want the tournament to be run perfectly, like this, like that', it's so easy to get into that mindset where you go 'Hey, you don't know what you're talking about, I'm doing my best!'

But he was just so pleasant, he was saying 'Yeah, I'm really excited to cast with you.' He saw my Day9 Daily and enjoyed it, he showed it to his bosses and they did, too - which is really flattering for me, first of all - and then he said, 'Hey, I was wondering if you wanted to do an exhibition cast and shoutcast with me. Yeah, I know I did WoW and I know that a lot of the StarCraft players roll their eyes at WoW but hopefully we can make it work'.

But he was actually amazing to cast with. Every time I stopped speaking, he immediately grabbed the ball and kept going, he paused at great times and asked great questions. My experience with that one individual case was fantastic. Even their tech guy was really great, keeping us in the loop. Given the fact that those were the two personalities I encountered, assuming the rest of MLG is in that

mindset and has that same caliber of individual, I have full faith that they'll pull something magnificent off.

I just think because MLG first did Halo 3 - which they're doing a great job of, I actually watch their Halo 3 coverage a lot - and then they branched into WoW because it's obviously so huge. A lot of other competitive gaming communities like StarCraft and WarCraft get that eye roll. 'Oh, they don't do *our* game, therefore they don't get games.'

Really, as a business they're struggling to find sponsorship so they're going for the games that they can and I think they're doing a great, great, great job with those. So, I'm so pumped for StarCraft 2! It's the first game where you can get great sponsorship and has been in production for 5 years just to make sure the balance and Battle.net 2.0 is at a good enough level for competition.

So, here he is. Millions of minutes watched and receiving professional recognition for his work. What are his plans? How far does he intend to take it?

Sean: I would like to be able to generate money off it somehow. My ideal would actually be neither specifically commentating or a player but to be an ambassador for StarCraft 2, someone who can help the public understand how awesome e-sports are and how deep these games can be. I want them to understand these exciting, dynamic matches and how these players are brilliant and putting in tons of work and why it's so hard and such a valuable thing. I would love some opportunity to do that in the future. And given how e-sports has had this sort of, um, up and down effect lately - you know, some games appear because they're new and then drift away because they don't have that good competitive underpinning they just have those good graphics so they can get sponsored - I'm really hoping that StarCraft 2 can be that game that has all the graphical pizazz to please the big sponsors and get people looking in the first place but also has that StarCraft-level depth and complexity to really keep the people watching it and the e-sports watch. My goal would be to make that happen.

Patrick: What do you think Blizzard and the community needs to do to live up to its e-sports potential?

Sean: I feel like there are these artificial breaks that appear in the communities. A lot of times there will one fan site that appears and two people will get in an argument from different fan sites. There will be this fissure where this community

doesn't connect with that community. So what I'm hoping is that Blizzard serves as the centralizing force.

With StarCraft 1 there were multiple servers: PGTour, WGTour and regular Battle.net and then there was Brain Clan, Game-i and now ICCup which used to be The Abyss. There's so much stuff that it'd be really nice for Blizzard to just buckle down and grab the helm and provide all the centralized competition. Then the fan sites can cover it all they want and there won't be so much of an issue with running the tournament.

Yeah, I think that centralizing force is really important for Blizzard. And also for people to not dismiss newer tournaments. I think they should take all of them as new opportunities.

This really wasn't the case when StarCraft 1 came out. People used to be just happy when a new tournament sprung up. But because StarCraft 1 has this 12 year history of being this competitive masterpiece, people are protective of their game and whenever something new comes out, people say, 'Oh, if it's not just as perfect as StarCraft 1 has been then it's somehow unacceptable.'

I totally understand that kneejerk emotional reaction but I wouldn't defend it. People shouldn't give in to that. They should give credit to the organization.

Patrick: How much confidence do you have in Blizzard to maintain a good ladder? To stop abuse, to keep maps fresh and balanced and provide cash prizes and tournament structure.

Sean: Full confidence, 100%. I think it's a phenomenal job that Blizzard will do pretty much no matter what. Blizzard is the sort of company that if they put the effort into it, they're going to do a great, great job. I have a friend who works on the Battle.net 2.0 division and so I actually know that there are positions like 'Tournament Manager' whose entire job it is to just structure tournaments and events and cool stuff like that. That's awesome, to have that opportunity for that variety so it's not just brute force one versus oneing all day. And to have these split leagues so people can always feel that nice in between state where their opponents are pretty good but not so good that they'll get raped and not so bad that you'll rape them.

Blizzard seems to be taking this whole e-sports thing very seriously. With the release of this whole thing, I think they very clearly understand the size of the e-sports market and to cater to it.

Patrick: You think that they've learned lessons from the WarCraft 3

community? Because I know if you browse Team Liquid, WarCraft 3 is seen as this massive mistake by some people, especially the way they dealt with the ladder.

Sean: Really? You know, I love WarCraft 3. I think it's a great game, especially when Frozen Throne came out, it completely revolutionized how the game worked. They did a lot of great things as far as creating a fun, competitive experience. I think that observer quality was a bit lower than StarCraft just because the base takes up one screen for instance and they don't change much for long periods of time so it becomes redundant as a viewer from time to time. But from the standpoint of a player I think it's great. I think they did a very good job with it.

I think, again, that whole backlash that the StarCraft community had to WarCraft was in the same vein of just being protective of their game, saying 'Our game really is the best!' and 'No, our scene is better!' This completely artificial competition.

I'm of the opinion that I like watching WarCraft 3 and StarCraft, I think they're both awesome. Hell, I bet I'd even like watching competitive WoW if I played it and knew how the rules work. I just like competition.

I wasn't lying. Sean Plott is optimistic. In the face of Blizzard's new, heavy hand - for instance, requiring tournament applications to be submitted by organizers - Sean is nothing but excited.

Patrick: They seem to be keeping a really serious eye on tournaments. For instance, the first ZOTAC Cup was postponed because their tournament application was being reviewed by Blizzard. And then there's the notable conflict between KeSPA and Blizzard. Why do you think Blizzard is doing this? Is it good or bad for the gaming community?

Sean: I think it's wonderful. Beyond wonderful. It excites me, it makes me so happy. I want to anyone reading this to understand that I'm not an official source of information so I really don't know if what I'm about to say is accurate but I'm going to say it anyway.

From what I understand, Blizzard has a beef with KeSPA (Korean e-Sports Players Association) because they don't approve of the way KeSPA has run their tournaments in South Korea. I personally do not like KeSPA very much at all. They make tons of mistakes. So that's why it excites me that Blizzard is stepping in.

First, that they dislike KeSPA makes me happy. Any tournament doing the opposite of KeSPA is doing something right, that's a good thing.

Also, it comes back to the centralization thing. If everything is going through Blizzard, they know what's up and they can draw everything together and weed out the tournaments abusing players or being unfair in some fashion. If they are preventing something horrific like KeSPA from coming to power, I'm ecstatic.

Their only goal, as far as I know, is to make sure the tournament won't be shitty for the player. They're there to make sure the tournament will be fun and looks cool. I like that ZOTAC got delayed.

Also, again back to centralization, if Blizzard is managing the tournaments it forces the StarCraft community to be a bit more centralized. There will be a lot more opportunity for bigger tournaments to happen on a more regular basis.

Patrick: I think you're right about the potential for bigger tournaments. It's funny, though, I haven't heard that Blizzard has a problem with KeSPA's player treatment. I have heard that KeSPA's player treatment is bad but the reason I've heard that Blizzard was dissatisfied with the money it was getting from KeSPA's profit, which is to say it got none and it wanted a larger cut.

Sean: Yeah, well, it wouldn't surprise me if I'm completely and totally off-base with that comment. I could be completely wrong - I don't know - but, in my own personal opinion, KeSPA is an awful, awful organization. It's one of those classic situations: went to the tournament and the organizers didn't understand the game, that level of bad. They basically give the players no rights, they put the players in a slave auction that they call the 'free player's agreement' which was supposed to give players an opportunity to make more money but really forced the players to limit all their options and get paid less. It's just depressed to see an organization that dumb.

In the epic Flash vs. Jaedong series where the power went out in game 3, KeSPA said, 'We re-watched the replay and awarded Jaedong the win because in the replay, Flash, there was no way you could win.'

And then, when it turned out that everyone lost power and there were no replays, the refs just ignored Flash for the most part. And then the next tournament, the refs are joking and laughing and not paying attention to the game.

That's really frustrating when the players put so much time and passion into the game and I put so much time and passion into the game. It drives me insane to see the controlling organization be so incompetent. It's mind blowing.

For instance, Team Liquid with the Team Liquid StarLeague. Their casts get delayed all the time and they handle it as beautifully as they can. They say, 'This is what happened, we're very sorry' and they're very fair and reasonable. They try make everyone very happy and they keep everyone updated and they do it swiftly. So Team Liquid as a fan organization has screw ups and treat it way better. For *free*. So I just dislike KeSPA and I wouldn't be surprised if Blizzard held negative views on KeSPA.

Patrick: Do you think that leagues and players should be able to unionize and hold more bargaining power?

Sean: Absolutely. I think that that's something that needed to have happened in Korea but didn't. A lot of the players are, well, I don't want to say the word abused but treated unfairly. They're forced to practice 14 hours a day if they're not doing well. When they get tired, the coaches say 'alright, you need to practice more.' These players just get burned out so fast. All they're doing is waking up and clicking with exhausted fingers and tired minds on low sleep and not the best diet and somehow KeSPA is getting a lot of money from this situation instead of stepping in and saying 'Players need to be treated a little better.'

I don't want to claim that that's somehow the majority of the player's experience in Korea but the fact that it has happened to anyone bothers me.

Sean is ready to be rid of KeSPA as soon as possible. He hopes and everyone hopes that this sequel will lead to better treatment for players. But what sort of treatment will this mean for our beloved franchise? What will Blizzard do differently?

Companies such as Valve and Nintendo are some of the biggest video game developers in the world but they've blazed a depressing trail in at least one area: competitive franchises they've owned have declined in difficulty for the sake of sales, communities have been split and in some respects, faith lost.

Patrick: Other game communities like Counter-Strike and Smash Bros. have complained about companies insisting on an easier game for the sake of popularity at the expense of competitive gaming. Not so much just with StarCraft 2 but do you think that sort of thing is inevitable in general?

Sean: It's going to take a big game to have a huge amount of longevity to it to really sort of overturn that popular opinion.

If we just think about the game industry, there are about three big components to any good game. The coding and that sort of back-end innovation, the technology of it. Then there is the art, the artistry and the animation and getting that good. And then there is the game design itself. As we've seen over the years, the industry has been constantly pushing forward on all those three fronts so a lot of companies tend to focus on the art and technology sides but competitive gaming is literally saying, 'Let's obsess about the gameplay.' It's hard to quite understand that if all you've been doing is looking at the art, programming and technology as a major company.

It's like if a new movie came out and there was a community that said, 'No, let's keep rewatching this old movie for 20 years.' The sponsors are like, 'No. We're not going to do that', rolling their eyes. It makes sense, they want a lot of visibility. It feels scary to put a whole bunch of money into a game that's 12 years old because 12 years in video game years is a lifetime. That's such an old game. Most games that came out 12 years ago most people don't even remember, like Grim Fandango came out back then if you remember that game.

It's going to take a new game with great art and great technology to get the idea off the ground. And for that game's popularity to hang high for a bit because there's been a lot of games that pop up and promptly collapse.

Like Alien vs. Predator 2. Popped up, was in PGL and disappeared because everyone played Predator. It was apparently really easy with Predator and really hard with everyone else. It became not fun. And companies were like 'Great! Milk that game for a while and then move on to the next one!' And most companies view e-sports in this fashion.

Patrick: Yes, it seems like a really thin line to walk. I haven't been following it too closely but Quake Live seems to be an attempt to bring Quake 3 back to the forefront because they recognize that people love the game and want to play. But finding a way to make that profitable seems really difficult so I can sympathize with game companies but I obviously sympathize with the players, too.

Is StarCraft 2 easy? Well, no, probably not. But the jury is out about whether or not it is easier than Brood War. In an interview last week [early March 2010], Inka from Evil Geniuses said, "I was hoping it would be a harder game to play but at the same time I knew it would be extremely newb-friendly. I'm glad it is out but I always knew that Blizzard would make it easier for sales purposes."

InkA said that it was quite obvious what made the game easier and not as enjoyable as Brood War.

"The gameplay is different and no real macro is needed. Auto-micro is enabled, the competition isn't as interesting. It's just not as hard as SC1. Playing a game you can always improve at is just so satisfying but I don't see myself improving a whole lot in StarCraft 2. I'm not going to improve too much because only different counters and strategies can be discovered. Getting better at mechanics will never be an issue. Being able to do so many things at once while keeping a solid, consistent thought about how your game should go will never be a problem with StarCraft 2."

On the other hand, Liquid'Drone thinks the game has a much higher speed requirement. Nazgul shares many of InkA's worries. Many notable personalities can be found on either side of the question: Is StarCraft 2 too easy?

Patrick: One of the big gripes has been that Blizzard has made it too easy for the sake of sales with things like auto-surround and auto-micro, whatever players mean when they say that. Do you think it might be too easy? Do you think there might be a compromise that might be reached between popularity and difficulty that might be reached? Is there a perfect point?

Sean: I've heard a lot of players state that it's easy and there are skill and speed caps. But it's not so much that I don't quite agree with them, I actually think that statement is the opposite of true. It's actually very difficult, I'm having quite a bit of difficulty and I'm thinking you need to be fast to play this game. There are more things in my mental checklist.

For instance, am I watching the mini-map? Am I scouting for expansions? Am I macroing? Am I doing my build order right? And I'm cycling through that in my head. And now I'm throwing in there, am I producing larvae, chrono-boosting and - it's just a lot of stuff.

There's so many upgrades and abilities. In StarCraft 1, units just get into a battle and wack each other but in StarCraft 2, each unit seems to have a unique ability. I don't think there's been nearly enough experimentation. Even in my tests with friends I have to be super focused.

The other thing I would say is, for god's sake, the game has been out for a week and a half. How could you say it's too easy? I need to play this game for years to

come anywhere near figuring it out. Unless there is some sort of game breaking ability, like a broken glitch, I don't see that happening in StarCraft any time soon.

Sean says he can think of at least one reason for negative reactions this quickly.

Sean: If you think of a strategy - this happens all the time - I'll think of a strategy, I'll try it and it'll work. I'll try it again and it'll work. And after 40 games, it works 38 times and I'm thinking 'Jesus, this strategy is so good' until I start playing with that strategy against those people twice and it'll be one of those strategies where I win first and maybe second but lose every subsequent time. People aren't expecting it but after they file it away in their mental checklist, it's not very good.

Patrick: Yeah, I think stuff like that is pretty inevitable in the first week and a half of beta. People come to these radical conclusions about this is the greatest or most awful game of all time.

Sean: You know, I completely understand thinking 'this is the most awful game of all time.'

You're coming off of StarCraft, I mean come on. StarCraft is such a good game, it's sustained me in terms of entertainment and hobbies for 12 years. And now a new game - if there's anything wrong with it, I'll think, 'why am I playing this when I can just go play StarCraft?' It's frustrating to get hyped up so much and to win 40 games in a row with the same strategy and have it feel invincible. It can drive you insane. That's why I play almost exclusively with a small set of people so I can have that experience of repetition.

Patrick: Last question. The skill ceiling. InkA thinks it's incredibly low. It'll change with new builds but nothing will mechanical can be done differently.

Sean: (Laughs)

Patrick: He thinks that will limit the lifetime of the game. Obviously it's 2 weeks into the beta so this is a crazy thing to predict but I'm going to ask you to predict it anyway. What kind of skill ceiling do you see happening, what sort of longevity do you realistically see happening here? Do you see it being like Brood War, competitive for a whole decade?

Sean: First, I want to say that I do not agree with what I'm about to say because my default answer would be that no one can really answer that until they've played several thousand games in one match up.

What I would still say, though, is that StarCraft 2 feels faster. Things go on a bit quicker. It's at that speed where it will be too fast to control anything in a meaningful way or players will have to be very fast and have razor accuracy with their mouse in order to pull it off properly.

So I personally feel players will discover new micro tricks soon. Even then, even standard army vs. army, things die so quickly and targeting is such an important part of the game that a lot of interesting situations will arise.

There are two major camps when discussing StarCraft 2's competitive future and, if you'll excuse the terrible pun, they're not exactly like night and day. They agree that the game will be played competitively. There will be money, there will be tournaments and there will be our familiar and beloved franchise as one of the top if not the top competitive games in the world. The question is how long will it last? The answer won't become clear for years so you ought to just keep playing, enjoy it while it lasts - no matter how long that might be.

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As beta kept on, a multitude of issues came up (which, though we all forgot at one point or another, is the entire point of beta) and were addressed by sometimes by the community and other times by Blizzard. What follows are two articles addressing how players felt during the opening of beta about the future of the franchise as well as its storied past.

On March 13, 2010, almost a month after the release of StarCraft 2 beta, I canvassed some of the top players in the Western world about their opinions on the game. Micromanagement in particular was a big topic at the time. This article is, I think, an excellent time capsule but also a great way to explain one reason why we loved Brood War with such passion.

Micro Revisted.

A High Templar hits full energy, a Lurker burrows and a Marine stims. You take a quick breath as your heart starts to race. You were tired - it's 6 am, after all, and you almost didn't make it to this point - but now your eyes are wide open with the thought of the battle.

Then, in the space of a millisecond, the Scourge split perfectly, the Marine dodges the spines and the Dragoons, against their terrible pathing instinct, form the most perfect arc anyone has ever seen.

The screen is flaring with explosions and deaths and you're having a hard time not yelling and waking your neighbors. The live crowd in Korea doesn't have to worry about that and they're screaming as loudly as they can. The commentators are having a fit. You don't understand Korean but you're sure that they're not actually speaking any language - only yelling in excitement, technically inarticulate but getting their point of awe across beautifully with their volume.

That was fast and everyone knows it.

The physical requirements of StarCraft: Brood War are immense. It's made fans for life and has alienated more than its fair share of gamers. Brood War players brag about the speed of our professionals and our jaws drop when we see it in action. Speed is a defining characteristic of StarCraft and micro-management is the way it manifests itself in each and every game.



For every fan, there is a critic with whom the severe toughness of the game does not fly. It's too hard, an exasperated stranger might say. Looking to them, a StarCraft loyalist can respond: "It is difficulties which give birth to miracles." And then the StarCraft player can smile, because how often do you get to quote archbishops when talking about a video game?

It does not take a whole lot of effort to find players of the opinion that StarCraft 2's micro-management mechanics are a bastardized version of the original. What one player calls "improved A.I.", another will call the "dumbing down" of StarCraft.

"With micro the way it is, the game isn't going to be as good as it can be," said Nazgul, the Dutch Protoss player. "That's unfortunate for the future of e-sports. The future needs a game suitable for non-gamer viewers to be in awe over moves done by top players without understanding the strategy behind the builds.

"There is so little difference possible between two players when they're attacking each other that the games just play out as build order vs. build order. Once you're ahead it's really hard to give away your advantage because even if your units get caught off guard they will still do the right thing in battle. Zergling surround and worker micro is something that was so important to the early game of Brood War, that decided games based on how you performed it. That element is completely gone now. If you have enough Zerglings you'll just kill your opponent almost regardless of what he does."

Louder, an American Protoss and the first MLG SC2 King of the Beta Hill from

Team Evil Geniuses, called the micro "handicapped".

"The more I play it, the more it falls short."

Inka, another American Protoss and member of Team EG, bluntly said that auto-micro was a joke. InControl said StarCraft 2 was an easier, dumbed down game.

"The people who think you have to be faster are either idiots or didn't play Brood War," said InControl, an American and a newly converted Protoss user. "This game is 100% an easier game that is dumbed down and made that way with purpose so more people can enjoy some success or at least feel like they can compete. This is an excellent short term business model and is unfortunately the general trend in modern video games. StarCraft 2 is gorgeous, fun, and rewards creativity. It is challenging and will have a high ceiling for skill, don't get me wrong. But it does fall short from SCBW in terms of competitive reward and ability. It just simply does."

CowGoMoo, consistently cited as one of the best Terrans in StarCraft 2 (and a Blizzard employee), has his own opinion.

"I think the game requires a lot of micro and speed, but I don't think if it has as many 'awe' moments as Brood War," he said. "For example, the Colossus can do a few cool things, but not as many as the Reaver. On the flip side the Stalker can potentially do more interesting things than a Goon, but the unit feels a bit weak right now preventing this from happening. Hopefully when players start to understand the game better and with some balance changes and tweaks we will start to see more micro tricks evolve."



To be sure, minds are very much split on this. Notable players such as Infernal and Day[9] land squarely in the opposing camp on the issue.

"I've heard a lot players state that it's easy and that there's these skill caps and

speed caps," said Day[9], responding after hearing InkA's statements. "It's not so much that I don't quite agree with them, I actually think that statement is the opposite of true. It's actually very difficult, I'm having quite a bit of difficulty. As I'm playing this game, I'm thinking, 'God, you have to be fast to play this game'. There's actually more to do on my mental checklist.

"For instance, am I watching the mini-map? Am I checking for expansions? Am I macroing? Am I doing my build right? I cycle through that in my head and now I'm throwing in there, am I continuing to produce my Larvae properly? Am I Chrono Boosting on time? There's a lot of stuff going on. There are so many upgrades and abilities. In StarCraft 1, the units get into a battle and start whacking each other. In StarCraft 2, every single unit seems to have its own unique ability and I don't think there has been nearly enough experimentation.

"I need to be really focused to play it well. For people who are not in the beta and are worried about it, worry not. Tons of cool stuff can go on."

Aside from his personal experience, Day[9] points to the wide lack of experience characterizing every player and qualifying every criticism.

"For God's sake, the game has been out for a week and a half. I need to play this game for years before I formulate any strong opinion about its strengths and weaknesses unless, of course, there is some sort of game-changing ability that instantly shuts down all competitive play."

Infernal, the German Protoss, says that the game has completely surpassed his expectations.

"The micro is different for sure," said Infernal. "In some situations, I would agree on the A.I. being 'too smart' which can actually lead to dumb situations. But I really wouldn't go as far as a certain Dutch man [Ret] did to say that there's 'no micro at all'. In my opinion, that's quite nonsense because I actually enjoy a lot of those small things in StarCraft 2, such as my cute cuddle Sentry shields and microing my Collossi over cliffs."

The German Protoss is playing Ret in Team Liquid's first ever StarCraft 2 Liquibition. He says he that concern about the micro mechanics is not totally invalid.

"The auto-surround can be a pain for sure but it's only really bad if you're outmassed anyway. It's not like 16 Zerglings are going to win against six Zealots just because they auto-surround. From an observer's point of view, I think it's really hard to compare because StarCraft was 2D and StarCraft 2 is 3D. Obviously

2D is a lot 'easier' to follow as an observer but given how much of a fan base WarCraft 3 has - a game even more shiny and colorful - I really think it doesn't matter that much. It's just about us getting used to it. Time will tell, but personally, I can follow fights really well after I got used to StarCraft 2.

"The one thing I've really got to complain about is stacking. If you're Protoss and have a few Colossi, your army will literally be one ball that can be hit by one single spell in a fight, like EMP. It's kind of hard to select units if like 6 Colossi are on top of them. However, I have to admit, I don't know how to solve that kind of problem, maybe just make the units spread a little more.

"I'm quite sure that StarCraft 2 won't do for the West what StarCraft 1 did for Korea but it'll bring progaming outside of Korea to another level, that's quite sure in my opinion."

I asked Infernal if the sequel would be able to elicit the same shortness of breath, the same screams from live audiences and the same excitement from everyone with two eyes on the game.

"I can already imagine Koreans screaming. 'AHHHHHH FORCE FIELDU' or 'AHHHHH GUUUARDIAN SHIELDUUUU'. I think there's enough things included to make the audience scream."

Before he left, he ended with a qualifier that had become a common conclusion amongst those that I interviewed for this piece: "I just think it's too early to tell yet."

Although that can't be disputed - it is too early to come to concrete conclusions quite yet - it is not too early to throw ideas around. In many ways, the longevity of StarCraft 2 may depend on it. The ability of the game to captivate an unfamiliar audience at least as well as StarCraft was able to do would ensure years and years of loyalty from a dynamic group of eyes and hands, watching and playing.

"I think StarCraft has awesome e-sports potential," said Liquid`Drone, a Norwegian random player. "We are going to see so much diversity in terms of unit groups that have different abilities that the potential for stunningly great non-replicable micro is awesome.

"The problem, however, is that I am not sure that the action will be as immediately understandable to observers. I'm afraid this is going to be more like Counter-Strike, where observing for the uninitiated is boring as hell because you don't understand the subtleties without having played a lot and big battles just end up having way too many details in them for a casual observer to understand them

all.

"In StarCraft 1, everyone understands that if Hydralisks get stormed, they die. They understand that Reaver Scarabs blow everything up, they understand that Stasis makes units unable to move or do anything. A casual observer won't understand exactly how the Gravitation Shield works, how Fungal Growth works and even Psi-Storm doesn't immediately kill like it does in Brood War. So I think for actual players of the game, StarCraft 2 can become StarCraft 1's equal in terms of entertainment. But there might just be too much flashiness on the screen for it to hit a non-playing audience."

Blizzard is investing more and more money into e-sports, going so far as to employ a dedicated team in an attempt blaze a trail in the arena. Sponsors are hoping that more and more eyes are put on competitive games and, further down the road, more asses are put in the seats of live events. The future of competitive gaming is not necessarily relegated to a few niche websites and, relatively speaking, a handful of fans.

In all seriousness, hopefulness and pragmatism, the future of e-sports may be in arenas, board rooms and living rooms and not quarantined to bedrooms and computer rooms. If StarCraft 2 can drop jaws to the floor instead of locking jaws up, it can be the game that goes further than any other to reach that uncharted territory. We can be the players who reach the greatest heights, the ones for whom a million necks crane, a million eyes focus and strain. But not if Blizzard is holding our hands while we ascend. Or are they only benignly pointing the way up? Time will tell.

On March 4, 2010, about 2 weeks into beta, I had a chance to speak with TeamLiquid.net founder and ex-professional gamer Liquid`Nazgul about his thoughts on the game.



The Modern Age: Nazgul.

For a minute, let's throw a bit of nostalgia into the wind and see what comes back and hits us in the gut.

There was BroodWar.com and ~NoHunters and Legacy, Guillaume and X17 before it was *that* X17 which you roll your eyes at. Testie was a pariah for his hacks and not just his hair. There were battle reports and then there was *BattleReports*. GG## reigned and three thousand clans copied the tag. Bertrand GrosPELLier played with a mouse and keyboard, not a king and an ace. Elky dressed in an AMD uniform and not a maniac's uniform. There existed a culture of abuse, hero worship and the seeds of a decade long competition.

StarCraft has a crowded history, one that you can be mostly pleased to be a part of. Outside of the twists and turns of the game itself, there have been countless personalities looming large over the stubborn community at any given moment. A decade ago, when a friend of a friend handed me a blank CD with vanilla StarCraft on it, I took the plunge not knowing that the people would, on occasion, be as engrossing as the game itself. Unsuspecting, I had my first taste of the demo at a neighbor's house and have been jonesing and keeping one eye on the game and its loyalists ever since.

Somewhere in the Tsunamis of Iszards and Blizzards, Team Liquid came into being during those early days. From a simple desire to do better for themselves, the community and the game, it rose to become the premiere English language StarCraft site, serving for many years the role of e-sports beacon and community ban factory. It's the subject of ire and affection, it's on the receiving end of

accusations of elitism and compliments of expertise. For all of its faults and strengths, one thing is obvious:

Team Liquid is the face of non-Korean StarCraft. And with all due apologies and many thanks to co-founder Joy Hoogeveen (Liquid`Meat), Liquid`Nazgul has long been the face of Team Liquid. Like many old faces, poker and real life pulled him away from playing StarCraft. But as a major force within the community, he never did truly leave – he’s been one of several guiding hands within Team Liquid since its inception.

Although he had his foot out the door as a player, StarCraft 2 has pulled Nazgul right back in.

In fact, his choppy stream was the first one you saw if you happened to be one of the thousands frantically refreshing Team Liquid on the day the beta launched. Nazgul has already played hundreds of games of StarCraft 2 but has it lived up to his expectations?

“It’s just the beta,” says the 26 year-old Dutch Protoss user. “It would be strange if it lived up to my expectations. The game is good and will give people lots of years of enjoyment. Its probably going to be the second best RTS after Brood War.”

Much of his criticisms seem to echo Inka’s worries about a lower skill ceiling in the sequel and run directly contrary to players like Day[9] and Liquid`Drone.

“It’s hard to describe but I feel that the game evens good players too much. There’s too few things to make a difference. If everyone plays perfectly, games can be decided on coin-flip like things such as build orders. I fear a few years from now that might be the case.

“I’m having fun with the challenge of a new game. Being a gamer first with StarCraft and then with poker, I love to find a new game that’s worthwhile to explore. StarCraft 2 definitely is that game right now but it’s hard to look into the future.”

The rift of opinion is widespread in the community but, for now, it does not run deep. Criticisms put aside, most players quickly make the jump to the sequel given the chance. Gamers like Louder and Inka play either for personal success or thanks to patience, hoping that during the beta, the game will improve.

The specter of a lower skill ceiling brings out the fear of all prospective players: that StarCraft 2’s lifespan will run considerably shorter than its famously persistent predecessor.

“With micro the way it is, the game isn’t going to be as good as it can be,” wrote Nazgul in response to Louder’s criticisms. “That’s unfortunate for the future of e-sports. The future needs a game suitable for non-gamer viewers to be in awe over moves done by top players without understanding the strategy behind the builds.

“There is so little difference possible between two players when they’re attacking each other that the games just play out as build order vs. build order. Once you’re ahead it’s really hard to give away your advantage because even if your units get caught off guard they will still do the right thing in battle. Zergling surround and worker micro is something that was so important to the early game of Brood War, that decided games based on how you performed it. That element is completely gone now. If you have enough Zerglings you’ll just kill your opponent almost regardless of what he does.”

The StarCraft community is not unique for these worries. Before it, the competitive communities of Counter-Strike and Smash Brothers complained that game developers insisted on an easier game for the sake of popularity at the expense of competitive gaming. Is this sort of dumbing down inevitable? Can any company, Blizzard included, go out of their way to create a game that is purposefully difficult?

“I thought that company was Blizzard,” says Nazgul. “They have built a reputation of delivering highly competitive, balanced games that last forever and that you can play for the next 10 years after you buy it. These last few years, they seem to go with the general mood on a lot of things instead of choosing their own path.

“I won’t say that either way is the most successful one for them as a company, but it does worry me a lot that the one company that was into competitive gaming moreso than others now tries to find a tricky balance between the competitive scene and the casual scene. Of course I would have preferred, and many StarCraft fans with me, that they had aimed it much more to become the flag carrier of e-sports and less a noob friendly game.

“It’s a rather simple solution: these companies will do whatever is best for their profits, be it long term or short term. If competitive gaming raises their profits then they will do so and if it doesn’t, they won’t. It is perfectly reasonable to make these decisions.

“Companies insist on making games easier for the sake of popularity. There’s really no denying this at all.”

In his opinion, it is not any one unit or map that mark the most significant change in the sequel. It is the dumbing down of A.I. (or ‘improved A.I.’, depending on which camp you land in) which will have the most resounding consequences.

“I’ve lived in Korea and I have shared an apartment with Koreans that had little experience with the game just like many other Koreans,” says Nazgul, talking about the ease of micromanagement, “but they still watch it on TV like a national sport and were able to admire the things that were going on.

“My opinion is obviously based not on what will have millions play better but it’s based on is what will make this game suitable for professional gaming. With that, I don’t just mean if people can play it on a high level but can people who have little experience with the game also watch it on TV and have appreciation for the moves that are going on? My answer to that is no.

“StarCraft 2 seems very much aimed at the casual player, not the longevity or the spectator.”

It’s important to note that, in fact, Nazgul stresses that he likes the game a lot. He’s played hundreds of matches – it’s no challenge to find him complimenting the sequel in between his climb up the ladder. As with many of StarCraft 2’s critics, it is only in comparison to Brood War that it falls short. Many players agree that the StarCraft 2 beta is already more polished than most games ever become. It is only the incredibly high bar set by its predecessor that magnifies the games problems a thousandfold.

“I don’t want StarCraft 2 to be Brood War,” says Nazgul, sensing that his critique may be misinterpreted, “but there are some good concepts from the earlier game that made it so suitable for watching it on TV in Korea.”

So while his optimism seems at best tempered, he does see a vibrant competition forming for at least a few years. And during that time, he says that non-Koreans can once again challenge their long superior counterparts.

“[Foreigners] have a good shot now. It’s likely the A-team Koreans are continuing to play StarCraft 1 as that’s what they are good at and receive high salaries for. That means competition will come from Korean B-teamers, whom foreigners can definitely beat this early in the game. The best Koreans will probably be new faces but as long as they are not in professional teams, they shouldn’t be that far ahead of the foreigners in terms of environment to practice in.

“I’m not particularly impressed with the understanding of the game from Korean B-teamers and the edge of mechanics they had is pretty much gone. It will be interesting to see foreigners face off with Koreans on even grounds. We will see winners from both scenes is my guess.”

There is no doubt in Nazgul’s mind about whether or not the game will be a success, only whether it will reach the heights franchise fans have long sought.

“I do think this game will blow e-sports up in the gamer scene,” he says. “I just don’t think it will do what StarCraft: Brood War did in Korea. ”

The question of what will come to pass will provide more than enough intrigue for the scene going forward and, with a lot of luck, the new game will bring to light new personalities, legacies and cutthroat competition.

But a new Nazgul? Unless I see ‘em going head to head with the new Boxer, it just seems doubtful.

On July 27, 2010, StarCraft 2: Wings of Liberty was released into the world. To say a massive competitive scene was already surrounding it would be a gross understatement.

Across the planet, tournaments were being planned and players were dissecting every pixel of the game. Major League Gaming (MLG) planned to work across North America, eventually landing in Raleigh, Washington D.C. and Dallas on their 2010 circuit. The most successful players at MLG have been the Canadian Protoss Chris Loranger “**HuK**”, the American Zerg Greg Fields “**IdrA**” and the Swedish Terran Jonathan Walsh “**Jinro**”, all winning the \$7,000 first place prize and, in HuK and IdrA’s cases, even more. All three of these players are currently living in South Korea, playing StarCraft as professionals.

E-Sports League (ESL), a European-based organization, picked up StarCraft 2 during beta and added it to its worldwide tour. When the game was released in July, ESL’s Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) series boasted the first major tournament, the Global Challenge in Cologne, Germany at the Gamescom trade fair. The Swedish Terran Stefan Andersson “**MorroW**” defeated IdrA with the training help of another Zerg and third place finisher, the Ukranian Dmytro Filipchuk “**Dimaga**”.

Morrow’s victory made use of a Reaper in what was deemed an almost unstoppable rush and served as the impetus for Blizzard’s later weakening of the unit through patches.

Combined with sweeping in-game trends seen in the weeks following retail release, IdrA’s defeat would bring to prominence the idea of Zerg inferiority and Terran superiority. The perceived strengths of Terran over the other two races - powerful Marauders, lightning quick Reapers, overwhelming Marines and a laundry list otherwise - ruled the conversation. Zergs were seen as irrevocably weak, seemingly incapable of winning a major tournament since 1.0 hit the tubes and even beyond.

Tournaments such as MLG and IEM and the hype surrounding them helped the ascension of StarCraft 2 as a competitive game, lending it legitimacy and making it one of the most played competitive games around the world.

As Europe and North America adopted the new game, only one question remained: What would become of South Korea, the mecca of professional gaming?

Before and during StarCraft 2's beta phase, the Western world was abuzz. Websites such as Team Liquid grew many times over, it seemed as though a thousand new users arrived every night (as of this writing, the total number of registered members at Team Liquid is 132,091 with considerably more unregistered users to speak of). Major gaming sites such as IGN delivered as much StarCraft 2 content as seemed possible. There was a tangible hunger for it and our appetites were contagious.

In South Korea, the response seemed underwhelming. Major Korean websites whispered that their StarCraft 2 sections were surprisingly underpopulated. The firmly entrenched Brood War culture was just that: more than a game, a culture. The superstars involved, celebrities such as Jaedong and Flash, commanded cults of personality that would not easily be moved.

Many fans worried that if giants of the game, such as the aforementioned rivals, did not make a move to the sequel, South Korea would never adopt the new game.

On August 5, 2010, nearly a full two months before the release of StarCraft 2, Blizzard and Korean broadcaster GOMtv announced the GSL: The Global StarCraft 2 League. In just three tournaments in 2010 alone, they planned to dole out \$500,000 in prizes, the largest prize pool in e-sports history. 2011 looks to be even more packed with tournaments as a major Blizzard competition is planned for every single month of the year, to say nothing of independent tournaments such as MLG and IEM.

The fact of the matter is, with the sort of prize pool that Blizzard was offering, it would be damn near impossible to not stir up some serious excitement in every corner of the developed world.

Team Liquid, once a major competitive force in Western StarCraft, declared its intention to move its new roster of players to compete in the unprecedented new league. Non-Koreans would have their most solid representation in Korea since Grrrr... and Pillars made the trip a decade before them. By the end of 2010, Team Liquid consisted of many of the most recognizable superstars of the non-Korean scene: the Canadian Protoss Huk, the Dutch Protoss Nazgul, the Dutch Zerg Ret, the German Terran and Zerg Dario Wunsch "**TheLittleOne**", the American Protoss Tyler Wasieleski "**Nony**" (who now goes by his first name), the Swedish Terran Jinro and the Swedish Zerg Hayder Hussein "**HayprO**".

Major Korean teams began forming during the beta and picked up the pace as

the potential for riches became obvious. Old Generations (oGs) held a stable of about 16 top Korean players including StarCraft 1 great, NaDa. Most of the rest of the team were less notable but still supremely gifted professionals in Brood War. Jang Min Chul “**MC**” in particular has risen to prominence due to his consistently good performance, consistence being a rather slippery trait to grasp for most players during the young life of StarCraft 2.

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The first GSL kicked off on August 28, a day and a month after StarCraft 2’s release, with much fanfare. Fans from around the world wondered which of the players would distinguish themselves - it had been years, if not an entire decade, since the greatest tournament in all the land was filled with so many question marks.

These questions demanded answering. Dan “Artosis” Stemkosi and Nick “Tasteless” Plott were at the microphones when the games began.

Idra, one of the best players in the world based on his performance during the beta, entered the tournament with high expectations. He was seeded first overall but was defeated in just the second round.

TheLittleOne, a fan favorite around the world, played with great creativity but lacked consistency. Like Idra, he fell in the second round. His defeat marked the end of the non-Korean hope in the first GSL.



The Terran Kim Sung Je “**Rainbow**” (also known as HopeTorture and IntoTheRainbow) won the silver medal during season one along with a \$25,700 prize. Rainbow was formerly a Brood War professional, regarded as one of the

great unsung heroes of the StarCraft 1 scene, one of the most beloved players to never win a major individual championship. In GSL Season 1, his devastating and clever micromanagement and aggression led him to five series victories before meeting the eventual champion in the finals. He performed well again in the Season 2, reaching the semi-finals before being defeated by one of the best Terrans on the planet as of late 2010, MarineKing.

His consistently excellent play has made him one of the top performers overall in GSL, garnering the fourth most points according to GSL's ranking system with 6799 points, behind only the three champions.



In the first season, Rainbow would be defeated 4-1 in the championship match by the Zerg Kim Won Gi “**FruitDealer**” (also known as Cool). FruitDealer, so named because he left behind his professional Brood War career to work at his mother's fruit stand, is consistently ranked as one of the best Zergs in the world. His increasingly solid, overwhelming style and superior play has won him the respect of his peers - even the notoriously cynical Idra deferred to him as possibly the best in the world - as well as the top ranking player over the course of three GSLs with a total of 8850 points.

The championship match was a god damn spectacle and you loved every minute of it. It could not hope to compare to recent OSL and MSL finals for Brood War, events with unparalleled excitement, high attendance and a decade-old fan base around the world, but it was a electric and encouraging scene for a young e-sport.

FruitDealer and Rainbow ascended to the stage as booming music played, fans cheered and smoke machines worked overtime. It was an *event*, just exciting and a

great first step.

FruitDealer's victory, his bold defiance of the idea of Zerg inferiority won him widespread praise and a place in the history books. In every single round (save the final, of course), Zerg had the least representation. In the face of loud cries of imbalance, he stood atop StarCraft 2.

However, one tournament victory is not the sort of thing that gets you compared to the greatest gamers of all time, not in the mecca of e-sports. For that, you need to show dominance over extended periods. We entered the second GSL wondering if FruitDealer - or if anyone - would be the first Bonjwa.

As if they felt a ripple in the force as soon as the word was mentioned, two of the greatest Brood War players of all time declared their intention to take part in the second GSL. Boxer, the most famous e-sports competitor of all time and his successor Nada, the genius Terran, entered into the competition.

The foreign presence in the round of 64 consisted of TheLittleOne (defeated 2-1 in the first round), Idra (defeated 2-0 in the third round) and Loner, a Chinese Terran (defeated 2-0 in the third round by Boxer).

Boxer and Nada both played exceptionally well, eventually meeting in the round of eight for one of the most highly anticipated matches in the tournament. Boxer defeated his fellow Bonjwa 3-1.



FruitDealer, the first season's champion, fell in the second round to Lee Jung Hoon "**MarineKing**". MarineKing's unprecedented Marine play (act surprised) shot him through the tournament. His preferred style of rushing and ceaselessly applying pressure was vastly influential. Terrans everywhere took up a style of hyper-aggressive play, a movement which he seemed to be at the forefront of. In the semi-finals, he managed to defeat season 1's second place finisher as well,

Rainbow.



In the finals, he would meet one of the most powerful Zergs on the planet, Lim Jae Duk “**NesTea**”. NesTea’s style contrasted starkly with MarineKing’s. NesTea was viewed as rush-proof, a player whose solid macromanagement can win a contest at any point.

The second season’s finals were even better than the first: the flash, the roar of the crowd, the glittering of the trophy. The entire experience was a step up, a step in the right direction.

MarineKing opened the series by playing to his strength with powerful and early Marine pressure, the likes of which had struck down both of last season’s finalists. He won the first game on that aggression and then yet another, this time capitalizing on a few consequential moments of poor micro for the Zerg.

However, NesTea was able to adjust and take advantage of MarineKing’s immodestly ambitious style. Climbing up from a 2-0 hole, the Zerg’s stellar play eventually won him the series and, above all, the championship 4-3.

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Two seasons of GSL and two Zerg champions. Two tournaments, and the StarCraft 2 e-sport seems to feel more and more *right*.

Outside of Korea, the torrent of moneyed tournaments continue on a daily basis, a top tier of foreigners solidified, a significant chunk of them with the very realistic ambition of competing in South Korea one day soon. The wealth of tournaments was a strange change for many players, especially those used to the poverty of Brood War.

It feels strange, said a chorus of top foreigners, to actually have to plan your

tournaments because there are so many opportunities.

The non-Korean circuit is so hot as of late 2010 that it is able to produce a number of players capable of competing in South Korea. This has not been true for a decade.

While several foreigners failed to qualify for the final 64-man tournament of the third season of GSL, four did just that: the Zerg Idra, the Zerg Liquid`Haypro, the Terran Liquid`Jinro and the Zerg Liquid`Ret. This was the largest foreign invasion force that Korean StarCraft 2 had yet seen.

Haypro was eliminated first, soundly falling to Korean Kim Nam Kyu “**BitByBit**”, a player famous and much maligned for his off-balance, aggressive play.

Ret, after an extremely impressive and promising showing in the opening round, fell to his second opponent. Idra, who was one of the select elite to have successfully qualified for all three seasons of GSL thus far, fell in the second round.

It was Swedish Terran Jonathan Walsh “**Jinro**” from Team Liquid who truly came into his own during this tournament. After failing to qualify for either previous GSL, Jinro advanced to the semi-finals in this tournament, falling only to the Protoss Jang Min Chul “**MC**”, his housemate, training partner and friend.



Jinro gained an enormous legion of fans based not only on his novelty (any successful non-Korean will, by default, have a large fan base), but because of his style of play. In a time when hyper-aggressive Terran play dominated (think

Bunker and SCV rushes), Jinro's careful and calculated games were loved. The talent and skill he demonstrated as he won them only earned him a larger following.

As if that weren't enough, Jinro had been a major part of the non-Korean Brood War scene for a decade. He amassed over 30,000 posts on Team Liquid forums as FrozenArbiter and was a strong player even then, slipping under the radar of most because he preferred to play in Korean company. His deep roots in the Western foreign community was just another reason that so many fans rallied to the side of "The Sophisticated Gorilla Terran".

Another major addition for the third tournament was the fourth Brood War Bonjwa, JulyZerg. July's impressive play led him into the fourth round where he came up against the stone wall that is MC.

MC, the Protoss who defeated Jinro, July and season two's finalist MarineKing, did so in a terribly convincing way, almost never leaving his superiority to doubt. MC's Protoss came after two seasons of floundering Protoss ambition, talk of a weak race somewhat reminiscent of the state of Zerg before the first season. He carries on his shoulders the hopes of all Protoss, the chance to become the first champion of his race.

NesTea, season two's champion, was downed in the fourth round by the man who would become the most hated Terran in the world: Park Seo Yong "**Rain**". To the eyes of many viewers, Rain's style seems limited to powerful early game pushes involving pulled SCVs and offensive Bunkers. His mid-game has been shown to be lacking against strong opponents. As one might expect, he played to his strengths during the GSL, especially in the latter stages, defeating the defending champion with a series of devastating rushes.

Apparently, they did *not* expect this in Korea. There, and around the world, a great chorus of boos and complaints rained down on Rain after he defeated NesTea. He played short games, games ostensibly without skill or tact or beauty. He was hated.

"You can have the honor," said Nick Plott "**Tasteless**", channeling Rain, "I'll keep the cash."

In the days following his victory, it seemed that the anger directed at him became too much. He apologized on a public Korean forum for his play, saying that he should give the fans what they wanted: long, pleasant games.

In the semi-finals, Rain went on to face Ahn Hong Wook "**HongUn**", one of the

more respected Protoss players in Korea. The series opened with Rain seemingly sticking to his promise: he played a relatively long game. His inferiority showed, HongUn took the game in dominant style, thoroughly outclassing Rain. Rain sweat his embarrassment away with the defeat and, once again, played to his strength. Taking advantage of HongUn's self-defeating mistakes, Rain convincingly beat HongUn.

The GSL Season 3 finals saw the vast favorite MC defeat Rain 4-1. MC's charisma, confidence and even arrogance paired with his extremely solid play meant a great fan base for the Protoss hero.

"Terrans are still below me," he said during the post-game interview - Terrans and, for now, the rest of the StarCraft world.

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As GSL seasons have progressed, the level of play has naturally improved. During the the first season, viewers were witness to an overall erratic level of play, mostly tending toward mistake prone rather than refined. It was alternately fun and frustrating to watch competitors pick up speed and occasionally trip and fall.

However, as is wont to happen in StarCraft, a progression is taking place. The tripped competitors picked themselves up. The level of play is rising, the caliber of minds (from experience, sharpening and the continuing influx of new blood) is ascendant.

Many fans would no doubt take issue with that statement. At the highest levels, the game has veered in several significant ways, toward what some call 'rushcraft' - short, strategically shallow matches that leave most involved unsatisfied.

Perhaps it is the optimist in me or the hopelessly hopeful StarCraft fan that can see past this. To my eyes, these quick games are just a moment in a long progression, a moment which will give way to another due to strategic changes or balance changes in one form or another (new maps *please*, new units, new players, new ideas, new expansions, new patches, etc). Things will improve.

StarCraft is not static. It moves, changes and warps. It falls into the rabbit hole and exits as something fresh, familiar but with new ideas attached to it like metal to a magnet.

- The Book of the Future

"Create the future."

J. Michael Straczynski.



Gaming is in its adolescence. As an art and an industry, its childhood is past. It is now a gawky teenager casting a long shadow, commanding the gaze of hundreds of millions and not always knowing what to do with all the attention. It's growing and, like most adolescents, does something stupid on a regular basis. However, there is more than just a hint of promise, there are occasional bursts of brilliance. The future is bright for this one even if some acne, arrogance and idiocy are guaranteed as well.

The idea of video games as art is maturing. The argument itself (are video games art?) already seems stale and old to me but the actual appreciation of games as art is progressing, becoming much easier to understand. Video game creators are increasingly credited as artists: Shigeru Miyamoto (Mario, Donkey Kong, Zelda, Pikmin), Sid Meier (Civilization) and Hideo Kojima (Metal Gear) among others are some widely known and respected directors, gaming's versions of an auteur. Below them, more than in film or most any other industry or creative work, exists a large team of artists working together to create the most technically complex

creative works on the market.

If gaming is in its adolescence, professional gaming seems to be reaching the end of its childhood and becoming a more mature entity as well.

The hype and release of StarCraft 2 has helped propel the e-sports industry to a new place. Around the world, more and more money is coalescing around the expanding industry. A quickly increasing number of entrepreneurs are shooting up everywhere you look: players, casters, managers, writers (oh, hello), startups and more exist in the hundreds, perhaps the thousands. Millions of dollars are being invested in organizations such as Major League Gaming. In many places in the e-sports universe, the atmosphere is becoming more businesslike and less casual.

With good reason, gamers are viewed by many as more immature and abrasive than average. Names like Idra conjure up images of curses and insults. Games such as Halo and Counter-Strike evoke memories of entire communities regularly engaged in racist, homophobic and misogynistic taunts (among other sorts). As money and the suit-wearing folks who wield it approach e-sports, this image is sure to be on their radar.

In December 2010, Liquid`HuK was streaming a practice session live to his fans on Team Liquid's website. After a long session, he ended up threatening to kill an opponent in front of almost 2,500 live viewers. Those numbers rose considerably as the incident gained exposure throughout the community.

In the past, this would have been dismissed and forgotten about within the day by most. Threats and insults are par for the course in most circles of online gaming, this would be viewed as just another breakdown from a notable player.

However, as more and more money and notable sponsors are becoming involved, behavior such as this is beginning to get second glances. Nazgul, Liquid's manager, took note of the incident and publicly stated that he would speak with and reprimand Huk. Such actions, once just part of the landscape, are now being treated as serious problems. Players are not just responsible for themselves. More and more, the players are reflections of their team and the brands they represent.

It is important to remember that professional gaming is still young and growing, much like the competitors involved. It is guaranteed to change in the future. When the dollars inevitably flow in, we must not watch them passively and without criticism. When formative events, the memorable moments and the milestones occur, e-sports will benefit from our holding it up to scrutiny - whether it be

positive or negative.

As with anything as young and unpredictable as professional gaming is, there are many questions about its past, present and future yet to be answered but worth asking.

He's not a businessman, he's a business, man: *Fenix*.

Around the world, especially in the West, professional gaming is looking more and more professional and less like *just* a game. Major and minor tournaments are offering more prize money and top tier competitors are able to jet set around the world to compete full time. Players and managers are businessmen with plans to administer and images to handle. For those of us who remember Brood War, this is a stark contrast from many of the hardcore players of old who competed with little hope of making significant money.

As if we could forget, this is not Brood War. This is StarCraft 2, the richest e-sport on the planet. Many players (at the top tier and below) now have an entrepreneurial mindset, wondering how they can gain the most from the suddenly moneyed competitive scene. Websites, blogs, commentators and coaches have popped up in the hundreds over the last year to take advantage of every opportunity one can imagine.

Of this new breed of entrepreneurial players, Jian Carlos Joan “fenix” Morayra Alejo stands out.

Living in Peru, he is a rare breed: a globally successful player from Latin America, a region not known for producing world class StarCraft players. The 18 year old finished high school a year ago and is now playing StarCraft 2 full time for Fnatic, one of the most financially successful e-sports teams in existence today.

Fenix describes his time in Fnatic as quite happy. He was used to false promises, he says, and organizations that did not hold up their end of the bargain. Although he declined to go into more detail, it is clear that he views Fnatic as a model for the future of e-sports in the West.

Fenix's competitive gaming career began in earnest almost four years ago with Brood War. He made a name for himself with outstanding performances across the board, especially in 2008 and 2009.

He loved to play, he said, because he felt disciplined when he did. Like a competitive sport, he saw this game as a way to build dedication, the ability to adapt, enhance his decision making and quicken his intellectual reaction speed under any circumstance. He loved the competitive aspect of it most of all.

His plan was to quit Brood War for college by the time StarCraft 2 came out. He didn't enjoy the game initially and planned on studying finance, where he could engage in the fast-paced, risk-heavy world of high money and stocks using skilled he'd sharpened on Battle.net.

But as the money poured into the StarCraft 2 scene, his competitive fire was lit anew.

He views the game as an opportunity. Like Idra, he says, who complains but plays and competes all the time. He likes the game a bit – the words ‘eh-eh’ were muttered – but enjoys the competitive atmosphere more. It took Brood War years to be balanced, says Fenix, and it will take StarCraft 2 even longer. It will surprise no one to hear that Fenix is playing, above all, to win.

Just listening to Fenix describe his daily schedule, one gets a clear sense of the stamina and dedication the Peruvian Terran possesses.

At least two hours of every morning are taken up by what Fenix calls “trial and error”, his replay review and analysis time. He looks for holes in his game and ways to fix them, all the while generating new ideas to exploit an opponent’s play.

After lunch, says Fenix through his translator exia, a solid seven hours are dedicated to practice. Although the aggressive Terran gained some notoriety when he became the first player in the world to break 2000 on the ladder, he says that ladder is unimportant to him. Like most top players, he much prefers sparring partners of high quality such as his teammate TT1, the Canadian Protoss who placed second to an ascendant Jinro in MLG Dallas.

The young Peruvian Terran has seen serious success during StarCraft 2’s young life. He won the IEM American Champship in October over a field including QXC, Huk and Drewbie.

Less than a month ago, he claimed third place and \$3,000 by defeating Korean Terran oGsTOP. He claims this victory as his one of his most influential as his solid play helped give the lie to the myth of Korean invincibility.

The end of Korean invincibility has meant more opportunities for players from around the world to compete and make money off of their e-sport. There is a more diverse competition now, a more level playing field and many more chances to succeed.

Fenix’s plan to continue his competitive and financial success has numerous steps.

GosuCoaching, which has become emblematic of the StarCraft player-entrepreneur, took the Latin American on board in November. The GosuCoaching outfit faced turbulence several months ago as many dissatisfied customers caused the bloated business to shut down and strip away what Geoff “Incontrol” Robinson called “the middle man.”

It has returned since then, sans founder and former webmaster Louder, and with new marquee names such as Fenix and Idra. The organization complements Fenix's income and has given him the opportunity, he says, to continue playing and teaching the game as a full time job.

2011 is shaping up to be Fenix's busiest year yet. In March, he will travel to Cologne, Germany to compete at the Intel Extreme Masters. In April, he says he plans to play in a Major League Gaming event.

The summer is when his ambition will be put to the test. "If all goes well," he says, he'll be going to South Korea to compete in the GSL for the largest prize in e-sports.

All the while, he'll be teaching and competing in the dozens of online tournaments running every week for StarCraft 2. In 2011, Fenix will be adding a considerable amount to the thousands of dollars he's already earned from his play – the only question is, how much?

The entrepreneurial spirit continues to grow and the feeling of business grows with it.

"We want people to know the real fenix," says translator exia.

Never before has image control been so important in the StarCraft world. For Fenix and many players of his caliber, it's suddenly become a serious concern. People think he's cocky and we'd like to change his image, says exia, his friend and translator. We want people to know the real Fenix, the young player from South America out to conquer the world. He's done incredible things, exia continues, when a lot of Latin American players have little or no opportunity to compete on the world stage. Oh, and we want to change his image because we want more students of course!

Public relations is one step to improve his image.

But if Fenix keeps placing so high in these major tournaments, if he shows up in South Korea this summer as a man on a mission, he'll likely never have to worry about publicity again.

Open till midnight: Marcus 'djWHEAT' Graham

There is a common trope in American movies and television called the indie record store. It's the independent music store: a bulwark against the perceived monolithic evil of mainstream music, occupied by its (anti-)heroic employees and a mixed bag of patrons. Perhaps you've read or seen *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby or the movie *Empire Records*. It's there, trust me.

In these stores, there's always a pretentious asshole or two who probably knows his shit about good independent music but who can't spread the wealth because he's too tortured to talk to. There's the sad, older dude who can't quite move on but desperately wants to. There's a whole gang of characters plagued and gifted with insanity. There are personages, deeply flawed, sometimes lovable and always terrible salesmen.

Then, there's the one who can actually sell the music, the one who makes the idea that this is a business plausible. He's friendly, he's charismatic, he knows how to talk to someone about something new without speaking down to them. He has personality and is interesting but is not overwhelming. He looks the part, clothes and face and all. He spreads the gospel like an apostle, gains a following and becomes iconic, even if just to the local scene. He's the man, cursed to do what he loves and to do it with love.

Is it weird that this is the character that djWHEAT reminds me of?

It's not the indie music scene in which he's an icon, it's e-sports. Maybe it's not as cool to you but, hey, it's young, vibrant, full of creative people and has always wondered what best to do with a handful of cash.

He wasn't a roadie for Radiohead and he won't be mesmerizing you with stories of being a sound engineer for Elliott Smith or whichever indie hero you worship.

Instead, he's got his own arsenal of legends. Check out the evidence:

It was 2002 and the World Cyber Games invited Wheat to the finals event to broadcast Quake 3 and Counter-Strike. For many years, he was known as the voice of Quake and worked almost exclusively within the FPS world.

This was his first international event and Wheat was "bursting at the seams from anticipation and excitement."

"We were staying at the campus which was built to house the FIFA World Cup

players a few years before,” said Wheat. “This was *totally amazing*. I got to Korea a few days early because they wanted me to meet with the people in charge of the production, people who were also working closely with OnGameNet.

“We met at their offices and went over some finer details about what I would be doing while the event was going on. Once the meeting was over, my translator said, ‘We have big surprise for you.’ We loaded up in a van and began traveling.”

“After a good 30-minute drive through the city, we arrived at a restaurant to eat. I noticed another ‘WCG’ van parked while we walked in. I also took note that even though it was lunch time, the restaurant was empty. And I don’t mean only a few people eating there, I was just the employees and our party.

“We went upstairs to an eating area which had an amazing view of the city. It was then I was introduced to our lunch companions. The first, an older man and one of the main commentators for OnGameNet, greeted me with a smile and some broken English, ‘I hear many good thing about you.’

“It was explained to me that ‘this was a Korean game broadcaster’ and only then I began to learn just how huge pro gaming was in Korea. I was beside myself knowing that I would have the opportunity to talk with him about something which was an extreme passion to me.”

This was 2002. Like many gamers, Wheat was well aware that Korea was the “Mecca of e-sports” and that it had grown to massive levels but, in the grand scheme of things, he says he was still rather uneducated on the culture.

“Let’s just say I was young and dumb,” said Wheat, with a smile.

Then, Wheat was introduced to another person.

“This is a hard thing for me to describe because, at the time, I didn’t realize just how important this person was to pro gaming. I had heard of him and knew he was a big deal but I didn’t know that millions of people would have given their left arm to be in the position I was in. The person was none other than Lim Yo Hwan. SlayerS_BoxeR.

“We had an amazing lunch and over the course of two hours I learned a great deal about e-sports in Korea, their difficulties in growth and about these two incredible individuals. It would end up being two of the most important hours of my e-sports career and a time I will never forget.”

Already elated, Wheat got up to leave. He noticed some rabid Korean discussion amongst the drivers before being directed by his translator. That is when the confusion set in.

“We head down the stairs and instead of going out through the front doors where we came in, we were led through the kitchen and out the back of the restaurant. I had absolutely *no* idea what was going on.

“When we hit the back door, we were quickly packed into a van which sat in the tight back alley. We began to drive down the alley and turned out onto a street. I looked over to the front of the restaurant where we had just ate and there was a mob. A giant mob of 50 to 100 crazy fans clawing at the doors or peeking through the windows. They were there because SlayerS_BoxeR was there.

“It was an eye opening experience which I vividly remember to this day. It was also one of the defining moments of my career and something I draw motivation from in hopes that one day pro gamers around the globe will reach that status. It was an amazing moment for me.”

So, you see what I mean?

It’s like the dude at the record store met Thom Yorke, wasn’t sure of the breadth of his brilliance and came out of it with a new sense of immensity and purpose. Wheat went in only having heard of Boxer and left knowing intimately what a pro gaming celebrity really was.

Wheat is full of history, of character. He’s an institution in Western e-sports and has connections around the world.

Wheat started gaming at a very young age with an Atari 2600 and a Commodore VIC20. Yes, that’s the one that *preceded* the Commodore 64.

He says that gaming has been the focal point of his life since he was four years old.

“Growing up I got a job just so I could support my video game habit,” said Wheat, “spending most of my hard earned money in arcades or carts for home. I took a job at a video store just so I could play their epic library of video games. During that time I also go heavily involved in PC gaming and the BBS Scene. Which eventually lead me to DWANGO and other services that let you play Deathmatch games.

“It’s funny really. When I used to get in trouble my parents would ground me from video games and my computer and FORCE me to go outside or hang with friends. It actually worked out pretty good for me.”

A brief list of some of his favorite games along with Wheat’s descriptions: Star Control (an old PC Space Fighter), Rogue (a text based, player killing MUD on the

internet), Barren Realms Elite (old BBS door), Wasteland (an old EA RPG), Final Fantasy 8, Ultimate Online (the best MMO ever made, no one will ever dethrone it!), Twisted Metal 2, Quake 3 and StarCraft 2.

His love for video games started early but it was his love for competition which brought him to prominence.

From 1999 to 2001, Quake 3 was the center of Wheat's life. He played in and led Clan 519, a team that boasted classic Quake names such as ZeRo4, Socrates, CZM, bitchslayer, JFW and destrukt. The team won several tournaments with their impressive lineup.

In 2001, Wheat's new job ("a REAL job, I hated it!") mean that he had less time for Quake. He could feel his skill level dropping.

"During this time I began coaching the team a bit more," said Wheat, "and to help them out I would watch replays and record my 'notes' to them. They would then re-watch the replays and listen to the recordings at the same time. After doing about three or four of them, a member approached me and said, 'Hey, you should do this live, like a sports cast' and that's pretty much when djWHEAT was born."

In late 2001, he joined the Team Sportscast Network, the largest game broadcasting network online at the time. From 2001 to 2004, he covered events such as QuakeCon, WCG USA, WCG Grand Finals, ESWC, LAN Arena and more. Additionally, he casted over 1,000 hours from over 100 online competitions.

In 2002, Wheat worked on his first live event: QuakeCon. He describes it as a breeze because, unlike in subsequent events, he was simply a talker and had nothing to do with the more labor intensive production side of things.

He was becoming an institution and it was in 2004 that he first became aware of it. He personally credits an ESEA article titled "Ten of the best: North American esports figures" for opening his eyes. When he made the list of honorable mentions, Wheat realized that he was having an impact on e-sports.

Allow me to quote the article, originally written by Duncan "Thorin" Shields for ESEA on March 3, 2004.

djWHEAT, better known as Marcus Graham, is one of the few people to make this list without it being as a result of their gaming success. While he does play as styles519 for that famed North American TDM clan, he has become more famous to esports fans worldwide as the voice of esports. While people like Warwitch might have the same degree of smoothness suited in a voice for radio, I think

nobody can match Wheat when it comes to personality and expression. While other commentators for the most part just tell you what is going on and keep you updated with the minute details of the game, Wheat realises fans don't want to listen to an audio scorebot, they want to be entertained. He isn't afraid to let his personality and years of gaming experience shine through into his shoutcasting and his enthusiasm enables the listener to forget for a minute we're still just playing games and imagine it were a real sport.

Wheat pretty much made TSN in my opinion and not the other way around. Without him I know I and multitudes of other esports fanatics would never have even spent the time clicking the stream link. Along with his commentary of events like LAN Arena and WCG he accomplished the in no way small feat of constantly being able to incorporate humor into his shows and make the listener feel like they are a part of what is going on. I'm a pretty cynical guy when it comes to pipe dreams like mainstream pro gaming, I need proof before I'm convinced of the likelihood of that sort of thing, Wheat is one of the few people who actually makes me believe this kind of thing is possible. If gaming were a televised sport, with events on each month at a reasonable time and Wheat was commentating I'd certainly tune in each week in the same way as I used to avidly follow football as a child. There aren't too many people I can say that for or say that they make pro gaming real for me. Wheat is one though and for that he was close to breaking into my top 10 North American esports figures.

In late 2004, he left TSN to start iTG (Inside the Game) when his casting philosophy came to differ significantly from TSN's. iTG saw several notable names rise to prominence including GSL's own Tasteless.

iTG became a GGL property around 2005. From there, Wheat covered events such as WCG, ESWC, BlizzCon, Blizzard's WorldWide Invitational and several events in China. He also gained television experience which would serve him in the next phase of his career.

In 2005, Wheat and his team discovered Stickam.com.

Before this, Wheat had attempted live video streaming but the solutions were expensive and closed. Wheat tells stories of having actually lost money casting competitions because casters had to pay for bandwidth themselves, which was counter-productive and cost prohibitive to say the least.

Wheat describes Stickam at the time as “nothing more than horny old guys trying to hit on younger girls” but he immediately saw potential.

Wheat began broadcasting *Epileptic Gaming* on a daily basis there. Eventually, Wheat moved to UStream due to the freedom it allowed them and the IRC chat they used. To this day, UStream remains one of, if not the single most important streaming solution in Western e-sports. But it started on Stickam.

From 2007 to 2009, Wheat worked with Championship Gaming Series (CGS), an organization funded by DirecTV and SkyTV. During this period, Wheat filmed over 300 episodes of a three hour live shows.

“Live television is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do in my life!”

CGS did not last, however, and the next phase of Wheat’s career is the one we find him in now: back to his roots, spreading the gospel and expanding his following with shows such as *Epileptic Gaming*, *Live on Three* and *Weapon of Choice* in addition to numerous tournaments and competitions. If Day9 is the e-sports ambassador, Wheat is the e-sports apostle.

Trust me, I wrote the Bible. I’m allowed to hand out titles like that.

As Wheat’s e-sports career proceeds and he continues to provide great personality and depth to the games and communities he touches, his foundation remains his family.

His wife, his son and their stable of cats (Neko, Kiku and Sashi because I know you were wondering what they were named) have provided support to Graham, allowing him to travel and work hard at his passion. He does not work in e-sports full time - he works in Data Vaulting for banks where he compresses, encrypts and vaults data in a safe, remote location - but the hours are demanding nonetheless. It seems that without a family as supportive as his, following his passion and being happy to do it would be a much harder task.

I hope you now understand what I meant. Wheat is the guy who will be telling *your* grandchildren about the legends like Boxer who was ten feet tall and breathed fire; or about Tasteless, how Wheat encouraged Tasteless to rise to the top of the commentating game years and years ago and how, inexplicably, Nick Plott was also ten feet tall.

Like new, experimental music or some novel and crazy art, e-sports were not always (and perhaps never have been) a sure thing. In the past decade, organizations have risen and fallen, expanded and collapsed. Individuals have arrived, reigned and fled or slunk away.

It's in this sort of a volatile environment that blood red passion rises to the top, real creativity and unique personalities stand out and take everyone at least one big, scary step forward.

Whether it's art, music, movies, books or e-sports, the apostles, the prophets, the messengers exist.

Marcus Graham has earned a place in gaming's hallowed halls of fame and renown but won't rest to occupy that space until he thinks his work is done. Judging by his pace and stamina, that won't be for a good while yet.

The Pursuit of Happiness

By Patrick Howell O'Neill

Imagine a person standing five feet in front of you. It's a woman and she's staring straight forward, looking into your eyes. There is no sign of distraction, no checking of her watch and no calls on her cell phone. She is fully present in the moment, right here and right now. She is smiling.

Now turn around. Imagine another person standing five feet from you. It's a man. He's staring straight forward at you for a moment, to his wristwatch in the next, his cell phone for a second, then the sky, the floor, your feet perhaps, your chest maybe and then the sky again. It seems as though he is being pulled apart by horses, never fully in one place at one time. There is no mistaking it: he is not smiling.

Better yet, picture two reflections of yourself. One is focused on the present, the other's mind is drifting, fractured and a million miles away. Which you is happier?

Being fully present in the moment leads to happiness - a truism as old as religion and one being echoed by science lately, specifically, Harvard University research. The lesson seems to be this: let your mind wander at the risk of your happiness.

"A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind," Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert write, nonchalantly dropping rather grim existential implications there. "The ability to think about what isn't happening is a significant cognitive achievement, but one that comes at an emotional cost."

"Mind-wandering is an excellent predictor of people's happiness," Killingsworth continued. "In fact, how often our minds leave the present, and where they tend to go, is a better predictor of our happiness than the activities in which we are engaged."

"People were less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were not. This was true during all activities, including the least enjoyable."

Instead of allowing your mind to wander, wrote Erik Hayden in *The Atlantic*, you have to be "attentive, goal-driven and conversationally substantive while constantly having a smile plastered on your face. Or, at the very least, you must make more money than your co-workers."

A snarky but apparently not at all inaccurate map to happiness.

Where do video games fit in to this?

To many gamers, video games serve as a great distraction and, in countless cases, occupy the same place as many products preceding it: they allow extreme short-term relief, a moment away from reality.

To an increasing number of gamers, video games are more than that. Games are not the distraction, they are the main event. Games bring focus and passion to these gamers, a way to better themselves in such a diverse set of ways that it is going to take a book (or a two hour Sean Plott video) to come close to explaining the impact gaming can have on a person.

These two groups are not mutually exclusive and I've belonged to both of them.

Because games can take up hundreds of hours of life, cut into grades and replace sleep, it ought to be no surprise that video games, a medium whose gravity is difficult to escape, can affect one's happiness or trigger any other string of your emotional spectrum.

In my life, video games have been many things: a constructive learning device, a competitive outlet, a community backbone. The list goes on and I have no doubt that somewhere on the list, at one time or another, games were 'a complete and utter distraction.' When I needed another world, games were there to take my mind off of a stressful situation in 'the real world'. It's simply the nature of the beast that, to many people at any given time, games will always be a device to allow a mind to wander.

In this way, wondering about video games' effects on happiness will always leave us with questions.

I feel nervous writing that last sentence because it can be easily misconstrued as the sort of blind attack on games that you'd expect out of a middle aged loudmouth with no gaming experience. Instead, it is meant as an acknowledgement that gaming, like any number of things before it, can be extraordinarily positive but, simultaneously, hold seriously ugly and negative potential as well. How it affects a person's life depends on any number of factors, the largest factor being the people themselves and not the games.

Of course, I may be a fool misunderstanding the science and forcing it to fit with my own experience. It seems sort of bleak for distraction junkies. It feels perfectly suited for the beginning of a dystopian story where men are torn apart by their smart phones, women devoured by their gadgets. Software (e.g. a video game) gives the ravenous beast personality and vulnerabilities. I'd read that.

This essay is, in one way, a look in the mirror. As someone who has spent countless hours playing games, I readily admit that I've asked myself: Am I wasting my time? Is this making me happy? The answers vary like the days (and sometimes I wake up not knowing which day it is).

When I think of my personal gaming history and what affect it has had on me, I think of any number of things. Adrenaline and anxiety, bright lights and darkened houses, loud screams and muted speakers.

Today, I think of the fact that I often have trouble falling asleep. The sun is not yet up as I write this.

My sleeping problems probably stem from the fact that I can't stop staring directly into the bright lights surrounding me. Skyscrapers, police sirens, street lights, porch lights, headlights, televisions.

Et tu, Computer?

Yes, of course, idiot.

Light is powerful - our bodies, complex and weird things that they are, exploit natural cycles of light in order to control our sleeping patterns.

Knowing this, it's no wonder that New York is the city that never sleeps. Perhaps we ought to get some advice from Paris, which is apparently both the city of light and content sleepers. Parisians, let's talk.

More over, children and young adults (and to varying degrees, the entire adult population) who spend an increasing amount of their days and nights staring into brightly lit screens are exposed to the side effects these things pose. They can knock us off balance if not approached with care. I can't speak for anyone else but I personally am an irresponsible asshole and I tend to treat these bright lights like toys - probably because that is partly what they are and certainly what they are marketed as.

I've missed many days because I couldn't or wouldn't sleep through the night. I am not of one mind about this but then it is hard to stay focused when you are short on sleep.

I know that I'm not the only one whose blood can flow faster at night, who can feel more alive when the light is artificial, who maybe goes a little bit crazy with and for his nocturnal habits. It's a profoundly solitary experience to go through a long period when your ability to sleep in normal ways disappears. This has its draw backs and, for a certain set of people, its enormous advantages as well.

There is nothing like a solitary time to get your heart pumping and mind racing or, conversely, to stop it cold. It all depends on the nature of the time. It's a solitary thing to be nocturnal but that is not all that defines it.

Similarly, it can be a profoundly solitary thing to be a gamer but there's much, much more to it than that.

"The Book of Basketball" by Bill Simmons, probably the most celebrated sports writer in America, opens with the story of how Simmons' dad came by chance to buy cheap season tickets for the Boston Celtics when Bill was 4 years-old and, on the strength of sold out games, roaring crowds and brilliant basketball, made his son a sports lover, a fan for life.

I can't thank my father for my introduction to e-sports and I don't know many who can (though they do exist). I don't know anyone who was able to share their excitement for an e-sports championship with an entire city. For much of my career as an e-sports fan, it was rare that I shared the experience with many people. Despite the growth of a true community around it, e-sports has remained a relatively solitary endeavor for many involved in the West.

My introduction to e-sports came around 2000, in the lunch room of my junior high school. A friend of a friend slipped me a burned copy of StarCraft. By that afternoon, I was playing in my room against the computer with speed cheats such as *Operation CWAL* and whichever other cheats I could remember (*Black sheep wall* always and forever, amen). Soon, I was searching online for more cheats which led me to fan sites which led me to news sites (SCLegacy.com, BroodWar.com, BattleReports.com). They turned me onto Guillaume Patry, to the forums, to the community and to e-sports. It's stuck with me for 10 years so far and shows no sign of wearing off.

Bill Simmons celebrated championships in the streets with a family of thousands of drinking, screaming fans. On the other hand, I fervently refreshed forums in my bedroom, slowly downloaded replays and, later in life, watched with a few buddies in college over drinks. As a young kid, I spent many late, late nights in my room with the lights off (to fool my parents past bed time), dialing up to connect to Battle.net and play. Was it solitary? That depended on the day but much of the time, the experience wasn't far from it.

I realize now what I'm making this sound like and let me just go ahead and say, this isn't exactly analogous to a big, bad nefarious drug problem. I swear. I haven't been floating around e-sports for a decade because *I just have to have it*, my skin

doesn't itch when I go without it and, frankly, I can stop any time I want. In fact, I've had plenty of breaks and I lead an entire existence, have a whole life outside of video games. Please, believe me!

I know what you're thinking: Patrick, that sounds *exactly* like what a drug addict would say. Stick with me here.

I'm not coming back to a negative activity because I need it, I'm coming back to a myriad of activities (the game, the community, the writing, the spectating, the learning, etc.) because I sincerely believe that it makes me happier. Who knows, maybe I need rehab? They've got camps for that, you know.

Just stick with me.

As you grow old enough to become more aware not just of your physical and present surroundings but of your past and future, one of many natural questions to be asked is, 'Where do I go from here?'

This question can be asked in any number of contexts. You can ask yourself this while smiling, reading your college acceptance letter or a contract for a new job. Perhaps you've just been married and can't decide if you should cry, laugh or do both. You may be asking this to yourself pensively while at that college or job, wondering if there is more for you. Maybe, you've asked yourself this question in a fit of panic, hating that college or aching to quit that job, fearing that this *is* it, that there is nothing else for you.

Over the immeasurable hours that I've spent staring into a brightly lit screens, I've found myself wondering where I was going more often than I can say. Sometimes I ask idly, sometimes hopefully and still other times in a panic, worried that this bright screen is some supernatural siren, singing and sucking the life out of me, running out the clock on my potential (I enjoy mixing metaphors).

I'm convinced that that danger exists to some extent. It is extremely easy for a young person to be attracted to this world of gaming and e-sports where the gravity is so strong. Young people are always on the look out for an escape and gaming is an exceedingly easy way to temporarily avoid 'real life'. If you learn this young, it can be easy to let that effortless avenue of escape spiral out of your control as you age and then there you are, gaming instead of meeting your goals or even confronting reality.

However, there's more to it. You can tell all the overbearing, video game hating parents and friends you've ever known that I opened this essay heavy on negativity, including a few problems they may not have even considered.

You should know that I am not feeling negative at all as I write this, but rather reflective, curious. I asked myself a question ('Is this making me happy?') and I'm doing my best to explore, to find an answer.

Allow me to shed some light on the positives.

When gaming is just an escape for me, a goalless time sink that allows me, first and foremost, to shrink away from other parts of my life, it is mostly making me unhappy. It seems obvious upon writing it but it felt like an epiphany when it dawned on me.

When gaming is the focus, when I have goals and real passion and am using the game and its community to further myself and to become better within the game and without, it is making me happy.

At this very moment, I'm using gaming to meet my goals. First among those goals is to write. With all due respect to gaming, there is nothing I love more than writing. Seeing tens of thousands of people read, having reactions deep in their gut and beginning an enthusiastic conversation - there's no better feeling in the world for me. E-sports and its passionate community have given me the platform and the nerves to practice writing, to improve and to be seen by an excited audience, a knowledgeable, passionate crowd of people who simply want the entire experience to be as great as it can be.

I do love StarCraft - I am a gamer - but it's the community and all the incredible things it enables its members to do that wows me the most, keeps me electrified and is the greatest reason for never straying too far away.

As the community of passionate young people has risen over the course of more than a decade, it has lifted its members with it.

The obvious examples, people who have been able to make a living while doing what they love, are cited every day: Nick and Sean Plott (Tasteless and Day9), Dan "Artosis" Stemkoski, a growing group of professional gamers and a few community figures such as Victor "Nazgul" Goossens. Their Korean counterparts - commentators, players, managers, production teams, writers, etc. - have the passion of the community to thank as well.

In much the same way that betting on playing in the NBA is not the smartest wager in life, it is rare for a person to dedicate themselves to e-sports and make a living in the way that the aforementioned people have. If that was all, if giving a few dozen notables a job was the extent of the community's ability to pay back its population, I would have drifted away long ago. The entire scene may have

dissipated without consequence.

There is more to it than that.

Team Liquid alone, the largest StarCraft community, is a community consisting of many thousands of participating members and attracts the eyes of well over a million unique visitors a month. We spend hours there daily. Every day, relationships happen and progress, communication is stressed and a great number of people interact with each other in a (purposefully, surprisingly) civilized way that ought to be the envy of a million incomprehensible blogs and forums around the web, be they focused on gaming, politics, art, science, a diverse set of ideas or anything else.

The standard portrait of a gaming community includes slurs, poor spelling, immaturity and anonymity leading directly to the birth of assholes. It's a somewhat accurate picture, too, because those "communities" are all over the place.

However, this does not apply to every community on the web and it does not apply to this one. In the hope of maintaining one's sanity (a difficult task in many corners of the web), expanding one's horizons and, increasingly, for its commercial benefits, this little corner of the web serving StarCraft fans genuinely strives for community as opposed to crowd or, worse, mob.

At the risk of sounding like it is a side show (although there is a whole book on the topic preceding this), let me bring the game itself into the equation for a moment.

Increased problem solving abilities. Practice in creating and articulating a thorough plan. Respect for a level playing field. Encouraging creativity. Decisiveness. Raised self-esteem. Building friendships. Reading more. Teaching the art of writing (no one will listen to you if you can't write a clear thought). Team building. Entrepreneurship. Community. Being taught that there is nothing cooler than being passionate about what you love. If you're lucky, gaming can be a real step toward happiness.

In a way that is nearly impossible to fully articulate (again, see Sean Plott's "Day[9] Daily #100" for the best attempt so far), this is a game which serves the brain, the heart and the veins. It serves as the stage for ongoing intellectual and personal dramatics while you serve as witness to a seemingly endless stream of diverse characters: innovators, upstarts, villains, heroes and, when you're lucky, something close to genius.

The list goes on and on and is best summed up in this way: At its best, gaming

and its community can be that catalyst for personal growth which everyone searches for. The sort of growth experienced depends on any number of variables but, in the end, the opportunity is there, it's waiting and it's enormous.

However, as with anything with intimate access to your brain, heart and veins, the possibility exists that it will harm you in any number of ways. It can be an avenue to happiness or an obstacle blocking the way.

'Is this making me happy?'

Having been 'here' for 10 years, the truth is that I can think about and answer that question in a number of ways. Personally and presently, the answer is a yes for reasons I hope this book articulates. Yes because it gives me an outlet to do what I love. Yes because I get to try *really* hard at any number of things and not be embarrassed in the slightest if I fail - just the opposite, actually. Yes because it's a puzzle that we'll never solve and there's never enough of those. Yes because of the countless people involved.

But it is not black and white and maybe the answer will not remain 'yes' forever - it was not always yes in the past. It's a question I have to keep revisiting because, annoying as it seems, happiness is a challenge not unlike gaming itself.

Happiness is a challenge. That sounds like a terrible self-help book title and, simultaneously, a bit of a revelation. Or maybe it's just a simple truth that I finally figured out.

I don't know. So it goes.

Exploring a Blind Spot: Forum Culture

by Patrick Howell O'Neill 'chobopeon'

I don't often think about it but the fact is that I am one of those *things* you sometimes read about in the news.

I'm the type of human being that does not know life without the net. My first personal account came at eight years old on America Online. I remember this because my password was 'pat8'. My username was Patru41970 (tragically, Pat Rules was not available). This account was preceded by at least a short time of using my family's accounts and computers. I can't pinpoint in my mind the earliest

computer my family ever owned except to say that it was noisy, probably ran MS-Dos and its preferred font was orange, pixelated, ugly and charming.

It was 1996 when first I signed onto the net with my own account. I hit the ground running. In a short period of time, I found active message boards and communities in the little corner of AOL devoted to video games. ANTagonist Gaming was the umbrella name for these message boards, where thousands of people gathered to talk about the industry and about games. In a move that will surprise very few people, I found a home in one of the most pretentious and productive areas of these sub-forums: WaSP Gaming.

As I recall it, WaSP was elitist, quick to shun or ban newbies and produced by far the highest quality content (game reviews, previews and self-important essays on the console wars all tinted with rose-colored glasses no doubt) that that part of the net had to offer. From age 8 to about age 12, I carefully bullshitted my way through this club of 16-30 year olds, people I honestly looked up to. They seemed to be talking about something important - the booming video game industry - and they were articulate and passionate. People listened.

Since then, I've always had at least one internet forum which has served as my home on the net.

The internet forum is a unique beast, something talked about often and loudly but just as often and loudly misunderstood. Analogies help: forums are like city-states. They vary in a number of ways - size, organization, population, language and on and on - but they are a community bound by rules (or a lack thereof), a culture and, more often than not, a discernible focus.

In America, the most famous forum is 4chan, viewed by many as an "evil empire" of sorts. 4chan is large, anonymous and most notoriously supportive of, shall we say, provocative behavior. It is also enormously influential. Whether you're aware of it or not - whether you like it or not - you have heard or read countless memes which can be traced right back to 4chan. In fact, you've probably said or written a few yourself.

4chan was founded in 2003. As it grew, I had heard of it and visited it a few times but quickly decided it was not my scene. The first time I knowingly came into contact with a 4chaner was in college. 4chan had been a regular topic in the media for some time - one in a long line of cultural scapegoats - and, after reading an article about it, I found myself trying to visit the site. Clicking a link from Wikipedia, I found that I was banned for posting child porn.

My eyes narrowed and I said to myself, ‘What the fuck?’ My housemate was the main suspect. I shook my head and kept quiet about it for a while.

Laughing, he explained to me later that he had not actually posted child porn. A likely story. Our IP was banned, yes, but the child porn accusation was just more provocative bullshit (lovingly referred to as trolling) from the 4chan community. 4chan is notorious for trolling and this story was easier for me to believe than the alternative, so I told myself that the story fit.

Throughout college, I came into contact with a surprising number of 4channers. One, a friendly, large, made up and pierced girl told the whole class about how she had asked moot - the founder and face of 4chan - to marry her on camera. She was denied. Moot’s distaste for women above a certain weight has since become a meme on 4chan and, thanks to continued curiosity with 4chan, has even made it into major media outlets. Strange? In a word, yes.

Moot’s taste in women is not the only way he has reached the media. Thanks to manipulation and voting by his fans, he ended up on 2009 TIME 100 list of influential people. He gave a great talk at the TED Conference about his site being something of a bulwark of anonymity against the growing tide of persistent identity washing over the rest of the web. Watching him speak in an articulate, intelligent and honest way is all one needs to hear to know that *all* the horror stories you hear about 4chan are not true. Still, some of them are.

Watching older people report on 4chan has been an interesting experience. It’s been said (and repeated and repeated) by reporters that 4chan is a cultural force. This is true to an extent but, even more so, 4chan is the *face* of a major cultural force. Internet forums are an increasingly large part of people’s lives, young and old, affecting the way they speak, write and think. 4chan is one of the largest and most talked about but, as will surprise no one, the reporting on internet forum culture has been a mile long and an inch deep. Looked at in its entirety, the phenomenon really is fascinating and is as deep as the Mariana Trench - or the depths of hell, depending on how you view it and which ditch you step into.

The city-state to forum analogy seems to suffer from more than a few holes. Most glaringly, people can choose their forum, not so easily the case with city-state. But it is not that simple. Despite the possible fluidity, the ease of movement that the web provides, floating from one forum to another is not done quite as often as one might imagine. After all, it takes time to set down roots,

form relationships and communicate in a meaningful way with other forum members. There are a finite number of forums that a person will find attractive and stimulating (this is getting dirty). People do not leave a forum at the first sign of discomfort - often, they'll already be personally invested in some way in the forum community. This leads to drama and fights but it also leads to long term relationships, serious communication and the formation of a community that is honest-to-god important to its population.

It seems that a club, a party, a clique or, perhaps best of all, a neighborhood would also work as analogies. People interact with online communities in a myriad of ways and no doubt these descriptions would fit a number of communities and people. But they're less awesome than thinking of Ancient Greece and where's the fun in that?

Organization is a big variable for forums. The spectrum runs from anonymous free-for-alls compared to the wild west all the way to, on the other side, tightly controlled communities with strict rules and a clear hierarchy.

The latter, where one identity is used and valued (and thus threatened if you break the rules), finds more personal relationships developed quicker. When a user has a single identity (as opposed to practically none, you being mostly anonymous), personal communication occurs quickly and lasts longer.

On anonymous forums, personal communication tends to be limited to single discussion threads. Until members spill over into another place (whether it be another website, an instant messenger, a chat room or 'real life'), you're not likely to know exactly who it is you're speaking with. That being the case, you tend to grab the nearest microphone and speak to the masses.

Christopher 'moot' Poole, the founder of 4chan, has spoken about how the internet is moving toward one persistent identity and that 4chan's brand of anonymity is an important alternative to this. While I am not personally attracted to most forums of this nature, I (and many others) completely agree with Mr. Poole. In this era where the future of internet privacy is a series of nervous, unanswered questions, his board is part of an interesting alternative worth exploring.

If you had the time and inclination, you could draw up a map of Internet forums and it would get quite a few hits. In the same way that maps of music exist (drawn based on common sounds and fans), a forum map would be connected based on common users, focuses and cultures. It would be useful and fun to look at, resembling a map of the Star Wars galaxy or Ancient Greece or whatever spin you

put on it. And, hey, it works to extend the comparison to city-states, so that's cool.

Forum focus is an obvious variable. Gaming forums, political forums, techie forums, Trekkie forums: if you can imagine it, if someone somewhere is passionate about it, there is a forum for it. Much like pornography, the diversity of forums is frankly impressive even if it makes you dry heave sometimes.

Focus is the way in which forums relate to each other. An anonymous forum with a lawless culture that focuses on a certain TV show can be considered an immediate sibling to a registered forum with a culture defined by strict rules as long as they share that TV show in common. They'll probably share users and ideas and, in the end, that's what is most important.

Is it strange that I'm going so far in depth to this subject? I admit it, it feels a little strange, especially now that I seem to be defining forum families, whatever the hell that means.

But a few weird detours notwithstanding, this is an interesting and important topic for a lot of people, relevant to more people than are aware. It just isn't always discussed as though it is.

Don't believe me? Forums (which, you have by now realized, is practically interchangeable with 'internet communities') have consequences beyond their population. If they harbor the fan base to a video game, comic book, television show, movie, novel - whatever, name your product - they affect business decisions. A business has to be idiotic, paralyzed or both to ignore such a large gathering of their more devoted customers. In fact, even multi-billion dollar companies now keep a keen eye or two on forums (as they do on blogs). Customer feedback has never been so immediate, so thorough and so constant. And since the customers can feel the eyes of the companies on them or even engage in an actual discussion with them, thus making the idea of customer feedback feel less like a thankless hellscape and more like a worthwhile few minutes, smarter and better ideas come through forums than through older avenues.

You'll notice that through this all, I haven't definitively made a declaration about whether forums are good or not. They're tools and their use depends entirely on their users, sure, but I am of the opinion that they are decidedly good for us all.

An old stand-by rings true: "The solution to bad speech is not limits but more speech." Forums, like all other media, have been used for good and bad speech but they tend to promote more speech (and occasionally, speech with some effort behind it), giving nearly everyone who is willing an effective voice, the ability to

communicate with a large audience.

For people my age, we who have always had the web, it is easy to underestimate the democratizing impact that it has had and thus its future potential. And for older people, those who generally have not had such an extensive experience with Internet communities, it is easy to underestimate the breadth of what is taking place on forums all over the web.

At the risk of understating it all, it's potentially world changing.

What makes all of this relevant to this book: a forum is an incubator for passion. It is a persistent and diverse world of people with your same interest(s). Wake up in the middle of the night and shoot the shit about your favorite game, author, musician, director, television host, artist, character or anything else. Create content centered around it, participate in a community focused on it and feel the wheels spin and the passion well up inside of you.

Understanding all of this, to one extent or another, will become increasingly important as the years pass and the web's influence grows.

In the microcosm that is the StarCraft community, the wheel has been spinning for over a decade. The passion has been rising, the community at once growing and becoming more tight knit and, of most significance, the community has become more and more important to a greater number of people as each day has passed.

If you are going to understand the passion surrounding video games, if you are going to understand the culture of bright lights and pixel fights, you must understand this.

The following was originally written as a blog on TeamLiquid.net and has been republished with the express consent and encouragement of the author. It has also been more than doubled in length and content and clarity for that extra nutritious goodness.

Memory – Its all in the mind.

by emythreal

Many people have heard and likely used the term 'muscle memory' during the course of their life. It is commonly used to describe the process through which people perform repetitive tasks with great speed or accuracy. While this is the outcome of developing muscle memory, a better way to describe it is as 'unconscious memory'. I am a musician and vocal coach, I have been playing music since the age of five, first learning guitar and then branching out to play Piano, Saxophone, Violin and a host of other instruments that I can play, thought some, not particularly well. I have over the intervening years developed both muscle and unconscious memory for playing these instruments and for singing, in turn I have taught others how to play these instruments and they have also developed their muscle and unconscious memory. I am not a biologist, or psychologist. I am a physicist at heart, but many years of study unfortunately fail me in this particular area. I speak from personal experience, kindly shared wisdoms and knowledge passed on to me by my teachers.

There are a few misconceptions about muscle memory, in particular - the term itself is a misnomer. The memory is stored in the same way as any other memory, in the mind. Muscle memory is much like speaking, over time it develops on its own and for the most part is achieved without much conscious thought. The biggest misconception is that muscle memory is how people actually perform tasks, it is not. They perform tasks with either conscious thought or unconscious memory. To illustrate this, if you were to ask a sufficiently skilled guitarist to play an E chord on the fifth fret of their guitar, without looking, they would immediately play the chord. They can do this because they remember how playing an E chord on the fifth fret feels. If you then asked how they did it they would likely respond “muscle memory”, playing a single chord or note is the only time

at which they are using solely muscle memory. If you asked them to play an E chord and then an A chord, one after the other then they begin to use unconscious memory as well.

Unconscious memory is developed by the same process and is always used in combination with muscle memory to perform actions. The feel of playing the chord itself is muscle memory, however transitioning from one to the other is performed by unconscious memory. You do not remember how it 'feels' to move from one to the other, there are too many combinations and possibilities to do this, instead over many hours of practice your mind learns how to transition from one shape to another, or from one part of the fret board to another without you being consciously aware of how you do it. The actual muscle memory is only used to verify that your hand is in the correct shape and your arm is in the correct place, and it is also partially conscious.

If you asked a guitarist to hold their hand in the shape of an open E chord without the guitar in their hand they will be able to form the basic shape, but if you were then to put the guitar into this they will often not be in the correct shape. This is because part of the stimulus for muscle memory is the guitar itself, without it the muscles do not have a reference for correction, therefore what feels right without the guitar is rarely correct with it. However, if you ask them to move their hand from an open E chord to an open A chord or vice versa, they will be far more likely to get the shapes correct, this is because the part of the brain that stores the information for transitioning from one chord to another does not rely on the stimulus of the guitar, it is, unlike muscle memory, a completely unconscious process. The only conscious thought used is the initial request of moving from an E chord to an A chord, and subsequent commands to change shape, the actual action of changing shape is handled by memory alone. The reason why making the shape of an E chord is hard without the guitar is that you cannot consciously verify that your hand is in the correct place.

So you may be asking yourself, what does all this waffle have to do with gaming? Well, simply put, everything you do has to do with muscle and unconscious memory. Nearly every action you perform uses some combination of them, whether it be where your tongue needs to be placed in your mouth to create sounds when speaking or walking up the stairs to your bedroom. Any action that is repeated often will eventually lead to the development of muscle and unconscious memory. Musicians have a much more intimate relationship with

these memories than most, they are more aware of the development and the results as it is something talked about a lot by their teachers and musician friends. Gamers often do not recognise that they are using these memories to play their games, day9 refers to what I would call unconscious memory when he talks about remembering to make probes and pylons. Most pro-gamers do not have to remind themselves, they have developed unconscious memory that performs this process for them, freeing up their conscious mind to do other things.

A few weeks ago I was giving a guitar lesson and my student and I got on to the subject of gaming, and it turned out we both play SC2. After much “what league are you in?” and “wanna play some 2v2?”, he asked if I could give him any tips on how to develop muscle memory for SC2 hotkeys and other actions. I essentially gave him a twenty minute version of the previous five paragraphs to illustrate that he already had the muscle memory needed, now he needed to develop unconscious memory and that the only way to do that is practice. I am not a pro-gamer, I would say I am a good gamer though. One reason I would say this is that I have very good hand coordination because of years playing a guitar, my hands do things essentially on their own leaving my mind to focus on other things.

One thing I would never do is try to teach better players about mechanics, macro or micro, etc. They know more about that stuff than I do, however I can talk with authority about how to learn to do many of those things unconsciously, leaving their mind free to think about tactics and strategy. With that said, I will now attempt to pass on some of my wisdom. Please, if you think what I write hereafter or have written hither to is useless, wrong, incomplete, unclear, brilliant, or otherwise, feel free to say so. However, if you have nothing useful, correct, succinct, respectful, legible, logical, constructive, creative, or worthwhile to say, please, for the love of all things Blizzard: keep it to yourself, you shall merely be an inconvenience that I skip past as I scroll down the screen. I would ask everyone who has something worthwhile to contribute, even those who disagree with me, to not feed the trolls.

What most people do not realise is that if you can hit any requested key on a keyboard without looking, you have developed all the muscle memory you will ever develop for playing any PC game. Again, muscle memory is simply the memory of how pressing that key feels. Simply put, if you can touch type, you have fully developed your muscle memory for a keyboard. You have also developed the unconscious memory of how to touch type. So now you just need

to learn the unconscious memory for playing which ever game you play. For the purposes of this article, I will directly refer to SC2, but you can apply the principles to any game.

So, first off. There are ways to accelerate the learning process, they are simple and you can use them when you are not even playing the game. I will talk about simple techniques for developing muscle and unconscious memory. Lets start with keyboard muscle memory.

Before I go further, even if you can perfectly touch type already, try these exercises or better yet, just start doing it one handed right away.

Open up a text editor, any will do, but if you want to be flash use Microshaft or OpenOffice. Type this sentence ***The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.*** The sentence is a Pangram (it uses every letter of the Latin alphabet) Repeat it over and over for about a minute, making sure to hit enter at the end of the sentence, you can look at your hands as you type if you need to. You will end up with a screen like this:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Now turn off your monitor, look directly at the screen (do not ever look at your keyboard) and repeat the process for about a minute. Do not attempt to correct yourself or worry if you mess up, perfection can only be achieved through practice. If you perform this exercise once or twice every day you will see improvement within a matter of weeks. The more you practice each day, the more benefit you will see, but once or twice a day is fine. It is vitally important that you do it both with the monitor on and off, and also when you do it with the monitor off that you do not look at the keyboard. If you do this exercise correctly you will learn to touch type and at the same time teach yourself a vital skill for gaming, the ability to use the keyboard without looking at it and the ability to keep your eyes on the screen at all times. Honestly you would be surprised by the amount of people who can 'touch type' but only with the monitor turned on, you would also probably be surprised by the amount of pro-gamers who can't touch type!

You can use similar exercises to teach yourself exactly where each key on the keyboard is number exercises aren't so important, you will learn those while doing

a later exercise. The key is being able to find them without the need to verify it visually. In fact, while looking directly at the screen, you should be able to see where your hands are anyway, looking down at them to verify you have the correct key is what you need to eliminate. The “*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog*” exercise is a direct analogy to an exercise I did as child while learning to play the guitar, twenty some years later I can literally play a guitar blindfolded. Don't worry, learning the technique to type blindfolded won't take that long! Once you can do this exercise with some degree of accuracy, start doing it only using your keyboard hand, and put your mouse hand actually on your mouse.

The next exercise is to help your memory develop faster, you will again have no need to be in game, though you can practice it in a Vs Very Easy AI if you wish to practice mouse co-ordination etc. This one can also be directly related to music, if I were talking about a guitar the exercise would be playing scales. In SC2, it is performing action sequences. As Day9 would say, gotta make probes, gotta make pylons. To help learn hotkeys and combinations of them, open your text editor.

I will use Protoss and Terran as my examples, since I have only played Zerg twice (and failed miserably). I also have no self-respect and play Terran as my main race (no flames please and don't feed the trolls).

Practice the combination for making a probe using only hotkeys. In my case it would be 8e. If you were a Zerg I believe it would be 8sd, substitute in whichever number you control group your Hatchery/CC/Nexus to. Again, simply practice repeating the action with the monitor off or even just without a text editor up. The key is to have your mouse hand on the mouse, and your eyes on the screen, but to have no direct visual verification. You can practice this at work, school, wherever. Practice all your most frequently used hotkey combinations, when you have those down.. do all the rest. Even practice things like clicking your mouse then hitting the hotkey for an upgrade (Forge/Ebay/Evo should probably be assigned to a control group, things like Tech Labs probably won't be). Practice these things outside of the game, so that you don't have to think directly about them in game. Being able to look at your supply and think “need to build a Pylon” and your hand immediately just does it, without you telling it to, that is the goal. One you can achieve without ever playing the game itself.

The final technique is one that Day9 talks about a lot in his dailies. It is action by association, mainly in the form of “oh I'm at 22 food, time to build another gateway” or “my third stalker is out, time to get blink.”

Action by association. This is the process by which musicians learn pieces of music to play from memory. It has quite an interesting quirk when applied to a band, the singer knows what to sing because he/she has learnt to associate the lyrics with what the music is doing. If you suddenly can't remember whether you are on the second or third verse of a song, something like a guitar lick or a particular chord strum can spark your memory and you suddenly remember where in the song you are. Meanwhile the band are usually taking their queues from what the singer is singing. I once completely messed up the lyrics to one of my own songs and the band completely lost it, the song lasted two minutes longer than usual. You may be wondering why I shared that bit of information, its because the effect of singing the wrong line had the same effect on my band as forgetting to drop a pylon can have on you winning a game. My mind didn't make the right association because a really hot girl in the front row had one of her breasts fall out of her bra literally six foot in front of me - I got a little thrown. A bit like if a massive army suddenly descends on your base and you forget to drop a Pylon for twenty seconds.

This is all by way of saying that you need to develop associations about actions so that you just perform them, even when under pressure or something catches you off guard. The song I messed up was one we had written about two days before, and I barely knew anyway, having a breast suddenly appear right in my eye line just shoved the tentative associations I had made out the window for about twenty seconds. I have found that is about the average length of time that my thought process freezes for when something unexpected happens, things that I do on auto pilot continue but things which don't just stop. For instance, during the twenty seconds or so I was unable to remember the correct lyrics and subsequently sung the wrong ones, I continued playing the guitar perfectly. I had stolen the chords from a song I wrote when I was 14, so they were deeply ingrained. Its basically like players moving from SC1 to SC2, there are a lot of similar things which they just do automatically, and new things which they need to work on. In that sense, they have a great advantage over new players, however if things like hotkeys for the same unit are different in each game, their unconscious memory can be a hindrance.

Unfortunately I couldn't think of any really direct ways to translate how I learn pieces of music or lyrics, or how to translate how I teach people that skill into

specific gaming terms. The only things I could say would be plagiarised from Day9 so I would simply suggest you watch the Day9 dailies. I'm sure you can find the thread on TL.net with the archives, watch all the noobie tuesdays, even if you don't play SC2, the techniques for association he talks about can be applied to other games.

Hopefully, all of this has made some sense and will have removed some of the mystery about how people can have 400apm or play an insanely fast guitar solo. Hopefully some will find it instructive, if it has enlightened you in any way then I have achieved my aim. I had great fun writing this, especially the bit where I role-played the troll. I hope you had fun reading it, and if you didn't I hope you found it useful, if you didn't find it useful then I hope you won't hold it against me... I am a nice guy, just trying to pass on some information and trying to entertain people. If you do hold it against me, then remember this..... I can learn, you will always be a jackass!

My name is Emy, and I approve this message.

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That was my original blog post on Muscle Memory, completely unaltered (*despite my strong urge to do so*). Since then discussion within the blog replies and subsequent conversations with friends and students I decided to append my article for this book. I felt like I didn't get to say everything I wanted to in the blog in order to keep it as short as possible. An unfortunate fact about being a writer is having to know your audience and how long you can hold their attention. I decided that, in blog form at least, I couldn't get too in depth about my meaning. After submitting the article for this book, I felt that I could include more in depth notions and also it was a good time to integrate some of my replies from the blog.

Many people will read this and think “this won't help anyone. They can just practice key bindings in-game” or something similar. Being that I teach these techniques to people and get paid well to do so, I can tell you that you are making the same mistake many people do: undervaluing drills and exercises. You may well know every key binding in your head, but if I asked you where on a keyboard the G key is, without looking, how long would it take you to answer? The correct answer is 3rd row, 6th column. What keys surround it? T,Y,H,F,V,G. How is this knowledge useful? Knowing your keyboard by heart makes hitting binds easier, if you need to look to know where G is and what surrounds it then you will waste precious time when trying to use that key.

I would also disagree that what I have written doesn't help anyone. Maybe for you it won't help, but it likely will for many others. If you are one of the people who thinks there is no value to my techniques I ask only that you try them out, hopefully you will be pleasantly surprised. Most people simply don't understand how things like muscle memory develop, let alone know techniques to help them learn it. Basically, what most people do is learn to play a single game, this article is about learning things that are universal to all PC games and to learning any other skill that requires muscle memory.

In music lessons, kids always want to play songs. When my students first start they are always saying "Can you teach me this song?" I always say no, "*I do not teach how to play songs, I teach how to play guitar. There is a big difference.*" I give exercises to be done that don't require actually having your guitar with you, so that you can practice any time you like instead of only when a guitar is available. I have always applied these techniques to everything I do. My intent with this article is to give people a base to work from that can be universally applied to all things PC whether it be typing an essay or playing a game.

I was, in my younger days, very competitive in many sports, Snowboarding in particular. It's hard to practice Snowboarding since you need a ski slope but you can practice getting your body into the correct positions for grabs and spins without one and so I did. I practiced using the same techniques I learnt for music, and I improved much faster than the guys I rode with.

There are many people out there, pro and noob alike, who simply do not realise how important things like touch typing are if you want to be a good gamer. They also fall into the the trap of thinking the only way to practice is to be in game. While playing 8 hours a day is a great way to get better, for some it's simply not possible. I have outlined techniques that would allow you to practice while at school or work, you will notice that when it came to memory by association, I talk about what it is, but not specific ways to develop it. I did that because I am not a pro-gamer and because there are too many things to cover. Association is something that can only be learnt in game, with hours of practice.

Expanding on what I just wrote, a little: If you read and took in the article, you should hopefully have understood that the whole point was to do things out of game, so that when you are in game they just happen on their own. No matter how much you focus on things like not looking at your keyboard, or always looking at

the screen, if you try to learn these skills while playing, the learning process will take much longer, as there is so much going on. You cannot possibly efficiently learn to touch type, focus on the screen only, build Pylons and Probes, micro and macro all at the same time. You need to focus on one at a time.

Learning is about isolating things and then practising them until they just come naturally. You can not do this in game and if you do, you will lose. While losing is a good tool for learning, if you use your game time to work on actual game mechanics like macro and micro, associations, etc., and use your time out of game working on touch typing, repetition of key bindings etc. you will improve much faster. I guarantee it. Plus, being able to touch type one handed is a skill that will impress your friends.

Many of you will likely be thinking that pro's must surely have already developed these skills and thus my article is moot. You aren't wrong in what you are saying. For pro gamers, who already do these things without thinking about them, the exercises aren't going to help them do anything they can't already do. However, that doesn't make doing it worthless.

For instance, any good musician will sit at/with their instrument and practice scales. Not because they need to learn them but because it keeps the memories fresh. I have been playing guitar for 22 years and still practice scales nearly every day, if I don't, then after a while I get bad at them again. Like I said before, if you have 8 hours a day to play SC2 then that's great, but most simply don't. I also play my own songs a lot just sat at home, so that I don't forget them. What I'm trying to get across is that even the worlds best players or bands all need practice. It's how you use the time available to practice that is important. If you only have an hour a day to play SC2 but you are sat in front of a computer all day at work, then why not spend some free time at work just practising key binding combos?

Will it improve your game in the sense of making you a better strategic player? No. Will it improve your game in the sense that when you give your hands a command they can do it fast and without effort? Yes.

The reasoning behind constantly practising these boring, repetitive actions in an environment that is non stressful is that most people's minds can't handle stress very well. Whenever someone is under pressure to perform, any task that isn't completely automated is at risk of being forgotten or you will make mistakes. Lets take HuK for example, when he hit the 'air weapons 1' upgrade instead of Warp gates. He was under pressure (playing IdrA for a laptop in front of 13,000

people) and either clicked or used the wrong keybind. These things happen to everyone, but they happen less to people like HuK and IdrA because their hands just know where to go, but this didn't happen on its own. They *do* play all day, it is their *job*, therefore they don't need to use other methods of practice.

Some people have a natural gift for using their hands but I was not one of these people. I had to work very hard to learn guitar. When I was 16 I met the guy who became lead guitarist in my band, I had been playing for almost 12 years, he for only 2, he was already better than me. Technique wise, I had him beat hands down. But for speed and skill at actually playing solo's and licks, I couldn't even compete. He had a natural gift for guitar, I had one for singing. I have been a professional singer since the age of 10, but I still took singing lessons, even though I didn't need to. It didn't improve my singing all that much, but I learnt techniques that make singing easier and that's the key point of what I'm trying to get across.

There are easy ways to improve your hand co-ordination and muscle memory that do not require ever playing a single game. I am not a pro-gamer but I am a professional musician, music teacher and singer. The principles for developing muscle memory are universal, its only the actual exercises or use of those techniques which differ. Most people who play games have already developed the ability to touch type, usually not particularly well, but they can do it. These techniques which I have spoken of will help those people to develop their keyboard use further, for people who have barely ever played a PC game however, or don't work with computers apart from for using AIM, facebook and the like, will benefit from them a lot more and not just for gaming - that's the best part of the way I teach music. My guitar students could sit at a piano and be quite competent at playing it, without any practice because they have been drilled to think in a particular way about music.

I have been playing games for years, I know where all the keys are. I don't need to look, what I need to do is apply them in the game itself. However, I still regularly use a program that teaches typing to drill because its part of how I tick. I can't walk past my guitar without picking it up and playing some scales, its just that ingrained into my damn head. I have quite a large collection of guitars, so you can see how this could take up much of my day!

I was picking my son up from school when I thought of a really interesting analogy about the mindset of people who excel at whatever it is they do. Here it is:

A professional football (soccer) player can play keepie-uppy (keeping the ball in the air) very, very well. Most could keep the ball up for at least 50-100 touches. This skill has very little practical use as a professional player, you don't often see them do it in a real game. Why then do they practice the skill? It is because it helps improve their touch, in a real game the ball won't always come right to your feet along the floor, it will come from over your head or from weird angles. Keepie-uppy teaches you how to control the ball when it is coming at your body from a strange angle, so that when that awkward ball comes to you, you can just bring it under control or volley it into the back of the net.

Also you will often see football players pretending to have the ball at their feet and doing moves, taking shots etc. I have a basketball court near my house and I will often stop by to mess about, I don't have a basketball right now (it got run over by a 4x4 but that's another article!) but I still can practice my jump shot or lay ups without it. How is that any different from practising key bindings outside of game? To me, its not; the idea is to go through the motions to keep them fresh and to improve your precision.

I know for a fact these techniques work because they were taught to me by people who are professionals at what they do. I know they work because I teach them to other people and they come back and tell me how much it helped them improve. I learnt to touch type in under a week, I had no teacher and no program to teach me, I simply put into action the principles I had learnt while learning to play instruments and singing. For most it will take much longer than a week, I had the advantage of playing an instrument and the skills transfer quite well.

What I would say to anyone who looks at this and thinks "It won't help me, I can use a keyboard perfectly" to turn off their monitor and type a paragraph with their eyes fixed on the screen. If you manage to type it perfectly, without taking a sneaky look at your hands, then no, you won't benefit from them all that much. If you made spelling mistakes or grammatical errors, missed punctuation etc. then you will benefit from them.

I'll end with a quote I live by, from a Basketball player in the 50's:

"When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet them they will win."

Ed Macauley.

Xxio, one of Team Liquid's best staff writers, has done me the favor of highlighting and analyzing one of Brood War's most interesting ascendant stars, the Protoss Jang Yoon Chul “**By.Snow**”. This is an analytical look into the present and possible future of the indefatigable Brood War.

The Rise of By.Snow: An Analysis of the Breakout Performance

by Spencer Wightman

Snow burst into 2010 with the momentum of a three game win streak and took his first four games of the New Year. He then lost two games and won two games before going on his longest win streak with 8 victories in the February MST Offline Preliminaries. It was at this point that Snow set himself apart from the multitude of B-teamers and made it clear he was above opponents like Casy and n.Die_SoO, whose defeats had fuelled his rise. CJ coaches took notice and two days later Snow was sitting in a Winners Booth across from The Ultimate Weapon, Flash. Though he lost, Snow had gained the trust of his coaches and the invaluable experience of facing the best Terran in the world.

After his stellar performance in the preliminaries and going undefeated in Dream League, Snow became an integral part of CJ Entus and began to represent his team against the strongest players he'd ever faced, tying up his head-to-head records with Kal and Leta and going 1-0 over Light, Sea, and Really. Evidently, he'd been putting incredible effort into practising his Terran matchup. During this time his formerly best matchup, PvP, steadily improved. However, he seemed to have hit a wall in PvZ. With a 60% win rate against half competent Zergs by the end of May, players nowhere near the level of his Protoss and Terran opponents, PvZ was showing to clearly not be Snow's top priority as he began to build his reputation in Proleague.

Of all matchups, Snow had the least amount of experience in PvP, with a measly 29 games under his belt by the end of the first quarter of 2010. Yet even still, Snow's 2010 PvP record as of June 3rd was 8-3, four of those wins in preliminaries against B-teamers and two against notable players Kal and Jaehoon. These aren't the most amazing statistics, so let's compare the rising Snow to top Protoss players Kal, Stork, and Pure.

Unsurprisingly, as good Protoss are rare, all of these players had about the same

number of PvPPs as Snow, albeit against much better players. Stork was 4-5 in his PvP, which, unfortunately, is worse than it sounds. Though he performed well at the end of 2009, the four games he won in the first 6 months of 2010 were against Violet and PerfectMan, his losses against Protoss one would think he'd be even with skill wise. At the time, Pure also had a disappointing record (3-4) and Kal was up one game at 6-5.

While Kal, Pure, and Stork were playing better PvP than Snow, they definitely had their own unfortunate losses. Three of Kal's losses were to Jaehoon, Horang2, and SangHo, the fourth to Snow. One could argue that this was because Kal opted to practice for games against better opponents, like Movie, Pure, and Free, all of whom he beat, but I highly doubt this. Pure on the other hand was both winning and losing against good players, as was Stork. Funnily enough, all three players were 1-0 against Horang2, but this snipe show was riding on an all-time PvP win rate of 70%. Snow's padded statistics, even when evened out, become somewhat comparable to Pure's, Kal's, and certainly to Stork's.

By June, Kal had played 76 more PvPPs than Snow and was the only one between Pure, Stork, and himself with more wins than losses. Jaehoon had played 22 more PvPPs and was on a four game win streak, beating Kal and Shuttle before losing to Snow in February. The players with around the same number of PvPPs under their belt as Snow, such as Stats and Spear, were still consistently losing to good players. The only exception was Shuttle, who was 6-2 against good Protoss. However, it was also his best matchup at the time.

Snow had, unequivocally, the best PvT of Q1 2010. It was his PvT that drove his rise and made him a household name at Team Liquid. 19-5 by June, the only Protoss who had played more PvTs than Snow were Free and Kal, yet even they, each with over 100 more PvTs in their progaming careers, were 13-13 and 17-8 against players of lower calibre.

Snow's skill versus Terran began to show itself as early as February. Three days after losing to Flash on the 7th, Snow won four PvTs in a row against UpMaGiC, Light, Minam, and Go.go, starting a PvT streak, that, if not broken by Leta, would have tied with Pure, JangBi, Stats, and Nal_rA's for the longest in StarCraft history.

After losing a very short, disappointing game to Leta, Snow crushed SungEun and Classic in Dream League, and RuBy, Leta, Really, Sea, Flash, and HiyA in Proleague. Losing to a Terran on May 27th for the first time in two months and

coming off a 9 game win streak against the very best TvP players, Snow was building up a crushing momentum that was showing no sign of slowing down. Flying and Stats, two players many compare to Snow, were left in the dust, at the time not even close to emulating the strategies Snow was using to take down big names. Though Stats went on a 12 game PvT win streak in early 2010, it was by picking on the likes of NaDa, ToSsGirL, and horrible TvPers. As soon as he played Leta and Sea, his streak was broken. Snow was shaping up to have the best PvT in the world. Indeed, there was no Terran, except, perhaps, Lee Young Ho who could confidently out-class him. By June 2010 Snow had lost five PvTs, only two of which were televised.

In PvT, Snow is a huge bluffer. What I mean by this is that Snow has the ability to appear to be preparing one strategy, when in fact he is doing another. When his opponent falls into his pace of game, Snow then exploits all the weakness of an immobile Terran and wins with a combination of straight-up macro and genius strategy. Snow is a macro beast who loves tricking players into engaging him in a management game. Once that happens, he methodically creates and exploits weaknesses in his opponent, picking them apart. Every decision made by Snow has a distinct goal, each move flowing into the next, a gear in his grand design.

While no one could hold a candle to his PvT, Snow was showing very little growth in his Zerg matchup. Like Action's ZvP, 90% of the Zergs Snow played in his 13-6 record were either "unknown" in the Team Liquid database or on SKT1. CJ was continuing to test out Snow's PvZ in Proleague about once a month, but there was little improvement. In prelims, Snow could beat Neo.G_SoulKey, n.Die_soO, and rOo, and while they were close to Snow's ELO, it was frustrating to see the lack of brilliant strategy that was being executed so well to beat the best Protoss and Terran players in the world.

From a different perspective, Neo.G_Soulkey, n.Die_soO, and even RorO, all started playing StarCraft professionally around the same time as Snow. When looking at it in terms of experience and ELO, Snow's PvZ was actually better than average; if it was Flying or GuemChi, Snow's results would simply be considered normal. The thing is, because Snow could beat the best Protoss players and was phenomenal at PvT, many people, including myself, had very high expectations.

In each matchup Snow would start out very aggressive, usually the first player to pressure. Then Snow would typically quickly take his third and move out with a very small army while climbing the tech tree. In PvT, he would use this aggression

primarily to delay the Terran and safely build an economic advantage, following up by clipping at his opponent's army, exploiting it's immobility and lack of early map control. Unlike so many Protoss players, such as Kal, who tried in vain to butt heads with a 200/200 mech army, Snow used well timed expansions and scant, purposeful recalls to delay the Terran until his expansions were saturated and he was prepared to engage.

Snow's macro is clearly top notch, as is his multitask, but based on his responses to drops and general harass, his reaction time might be a bit lacking. His record against Terran is phenomenal and quite obviously better than his PvP and PvZ. However, according to Snow he is equally skilled in all matchups, stating that it is his televised matches that make him look good only in PvT. Snow's win streaks and style of play were incredibly impressive for his level of experience. It is no surprise that he received the Best Newcomer award; his crisp, organized play both exciting and extremely effective. Today, Snow is the best Protoss player on Hite Entus and widely considered to be one of the top four in the PvT matchup.

- Big thanks to the Team Liquid Player Database. Without it this article would never have happened.

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A Legacy of Distinction

by Arrian

"They envy the distinction I have won; let them therefore, envy my toils, my honesty, and the methods by which I gained it". -Sallust

A legacy is an enduring presence, a lasting and unquestionable attribution to a relevant discipline which revolutionizes that discipline. A legacy is emulated because it defines the discipline it is a part of, sets important precedents, and fundamentally alters that discipline. Legacies can come in all forms, and in all disciplines. The paper "Syntactic Structures" by Noam Chomsky defined the future of the scientific study of language. The organization of the Roman republic continues to influence governments and political theory, nearly two millennia after its passing. J. S. Bach, called "the father of all music" influenced Western musical composition and theory, from rock to classical, even to this day. In science, politics, and art, legacies are omnipresent parts of their pursuit.

Eleven--and Counting



In gaming, however, there are few legacies. The atmosphere changes with each generation of consoles and the maturation of developers. Thematic continuity in genres and occasionally in titles provides some looks at what a legacy could be, but because the focus in gaming is always on the newer, the glossier, and the more powerful, there are few legacies—only nostalgia.

A legacy in gaming would require that a game transcend the lusty sheen of higher polygon counts or 3D graphics acceleration; it would require that a game be so profoundly deep that innovation would be its golden rule, skill its cardinal virtue, and victory its only pursuit. It would require the harmonic convergence of nearly flawless gameplay and epic competition. There has been only one such game to ever combine these fortuitous properties, and it was released on March 31st, 1998.

At the time that StarCraft hit shelves, it was common knowledge that the PC market was dead—consoles were the only place for gaming. Defying all the analysts, StarCraft, and its subsequent expansion, quickly became one of the best-selling PC games of all time, having sold over 9 million copies since its release. With its expansion, StarCraft was lauded across the gaming world, with numerous accolades and awards—5 Game of the Year awards, a star on the Walk of Game, and an acknowledgment in GameSpot's Greatest Games of All Time—and praise from reviewers and personalities, expressing what would be its legacy:

With its excellent campaign, elegantly designed factions, and simple to learn but deep, strategic gameplay, Starcraft is the defining game of its genre. It is the standard by which all real-time strategy games are judged. -GameSpot

StarCraft is hands down one of the best, if not the best, real-time strategy games ever created. With three distinct races, both in terms of gameplay and style
Blizzard's masterpiece contains some of the most balanced and yet widely-varied units in the genre. -IGN

This game is one of the best in the genre and should be a part of all strategy gamer's libraries. You'll find yourself coming back to StarCraft again and again. -The Gamers Temple

The hype from Blizzard is that this is the best real-time strategy game ever created. And as a complete package, you'd have to make a pretty good argument to punch holes in the veracity of that statement...StarCraft may not be the next

generation of the genre but it is easily the current pinnacle of how good it can be.

-The Electric Playground

It truly revolutionizes and sets a new standard for real-time strategy games on the PC. -All Game Guide

Starcraft showed how games could express our imagination and help us experience it in an exciting way. -Lim Yo-Hwan, from Crazy As Me

Starcraft was a landmark in online gaming, and put RTS on the map as a competitive, incredibly fun genre. -Tom “Zileas” Cadwell

The game is incredibly balanced which is almost nonexistent with other RTS games...The depth of the game on the competitive level rewards hard work and creativity where as other games have been 'figured out' fairly quickly resulting in a stagnant metagame. -Nick “Tasteless” Plott



But this is not enough. The true question worth examining is—why? What is it about StarCraft that has made this legacy? Last season, ICCup hosted over 2 million games. Every day, tens of thousands of people still log on to Battle.net to experience a game that is over a decade old. This is unparalleled in gaming. Truly, very few games are able even to cultivate a dedicated player base, much less for 11 years. The answer to why, in a general sense, is that there are qualities intrinsic to a game that allows for its success or failure. An artist or scientist without vision, intelligence, or talent will not leave a legacy, and neither will a game without equivalent properties.

True Virtue



What are these equivalent properties? Gaming can be considered like a painting: when it is beheld, its art is experienced; when a game is played, its gameplay is experienced. A painting must have a vision for what that experience should be, as must a game. For a game, that experience is competition, and that competition must be unadulterated and unmolested. A painting must have some complexity, in any manner of speaking, whether it be abstract or concrete complexity (of meaning or graphic detail), and so must a game have some level of complexity, either, but preferably both, in strategy and gameplay. For a painting, when vision and complexity are combined, it is said to be art. When a game combines competition and complexity, it is said to have a metagame.

A game that is pure is one that has at its core the essence of strategy. Undoubtedly, there is no way for a real-time strategy game to be purely strategy; some technical component must accompany and complement the strategic one. But the physical component should not be considered irrelevant to competitive purity—competitive purity stresses strategic advantages over technical prowess, but technical ability is also a major factor. The prevailing idea behind a purity of competition is that, in the end, the better player must be the one to win, whether or not the play of the victor is defined by technical rather than strategic prowess.

The favoring of strategy over technical ability is not a slight to the value of technical play, but rather it is meant to disqualify a game that permits the player who button-crunches faster and harder to always be the victor.



Technical ability and strategic execution are very different functions for a player, as different as the functions of the parts of the brain that control these activities. Without technical ability, the execution of a strategy will inevitably fail. Without a strategy, technical ability is useless. This is to point out that these two must act together; they must be completely and consciously coordinated. It is difficult to quantify or investigate which of these skills is more important to the outcome of a game, and it ought not be a concern for the player. In StarCraft, as in other competitive games, it is the fundamentals of strategy and technical ability that prove most important. Flashy hand motions or micro gimmicks are superficial and irrelevant to game outcome if the fundamentals of strategy and technique are not in place.

StarCraft at its highest levels requires dozens of strategically complex decisions to be made in just seconds. The richness of this complexity is what makes the game so interesting and powerful. With the literally hundreds of ways to tech between the races, each game is a unique struggle and no two games are completely alike. Thousands of games are played every day, most opening with the same handful of refined build orders, and nearly each one, at the very least, ends uniquely for the player.

StarCraft is not a march to the biggest unit or biggest gun, it is not the unidirectional march to the highest perch on the tech tree for the weapons that

overpower all enemies. Its design is far more complex than that—as GameSpot’s review elaborated: “Even more remarkable is that the game's early combat units, like the lowly Zerglings and Marines, maintained their usefulness all the way to the end of the longest matches. Units higher up on the technology tree did not make earlier units obsolete--they only added to the array of strategic options available to the player. Impressively, the Brood War expansion pack threw even more units into the mix without breaking the game's delicate balance.”



Complexity does not imply the existence of balanced and prevalent metagame. A hypothetical game with five races instead of StarCraft’s three would prove incredibly, perhaps impossibly, difficult to balance. A hypothetical fighting game with sixty playable characters will not have all of these characters viable in competitive play. In this sense, overly complex and overly simple games share the same damning principle that fails them: they cannot completely support a metagame. Overly simple games, because of their lack of innovation or even distinct variance, prevent a metagame from even being possible. Overly complex games, because of the problem of balance, cannot support a metagame.

StarCraft splits this appropriately down the middle. It is not a perfectly balanced game; such a feat is impossible, but it is balanced enough that it is pure. StarCraft has developed a fascinating metagame; the strategic innovations over the years and the interplay of older builds and concepts with newer builds and concepts is a salient example of what makes StarCraft unique, and what enables

legacy. The history of StarCraft metagame is not the irreversible march to the single most optimal strategy for each (one could argue, non-mirror) matchup. There are safe builds, economic builds, aggressive builds, cheese builds, all-in builds—but all have harmonious advantages and disadvantages, which are suited to a player using them per situations and per a personal style. It is not possible to imagine that the entire history of StarCraft strategy was mapped out and balanced during playtesting. This is either a lucky accident, a one in a thousand chance that StarCraft in its most competitive forms would be so harmoniously complementary, or the deliberate and impressive foresight of the developers, that the metagame has proven to be appropriately malleable to allow for depth in innovation, but also that it is not infinitely malleable.

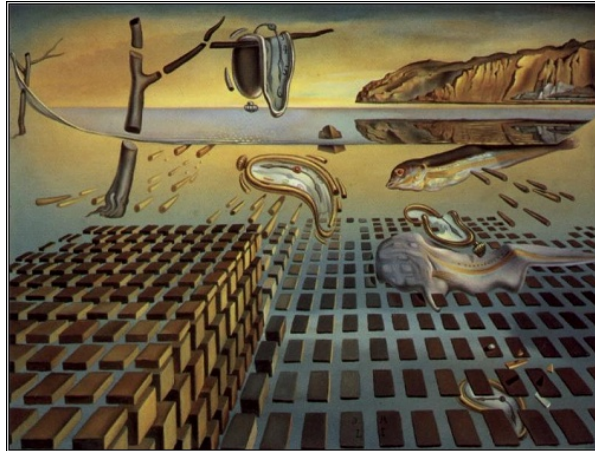
Curtain Call



StarCraft's real innovation over the years has been the gameplay itself. The innovation was the potential of the game for boundless outcomes, but even more that these outcomes are almost exclusively a function of player skill. The innovation in gameplay was this: the player's mind, and the player's hands, against another's mind, and another's hands. The function of all the complexity and purity in the game is this simplistic result.

In personal correspondence with Zileas on this very topic, he raised an

important spectre: StarCraft 2. Zileas is an important old-schooler who playtested StarCraft in its infancy, and who himself is responsible in some way for the legacy of this game. Doubtless, StarCraft 2 will be judged by the same properties that were responsible for the success of its predecessor: purity, complexity, and metagame. It stands to reason that if these of the sequel fall short in quality as compared with the original, the game will not prove as successful in the long term. As the reviews come out, and awards come in, there will be a clear and objective measure of how well the legacy of StarCraft has been succeeded. It is impossible to predict, at this point, what the result will be, but there is some optimism from Zileas on the matter: "Starcraft 2 is going to be an incredible game -- I know the team from my time at Blizzard working on the RTS team and I know that the product they are going to deliver is going to be a huge milestone in gaming just like the first."



So, as StarCraft 2 looms just over the horizon, this may be the appropriate time for reflection on the legacy of this game, what has made it so great, and what the game has meant to the RTS genre and gaming as an industry. If StarCraft 2 does supplant its predecessor, then all that will be left in the end, after serious competition has moved on and left impoverished this unadulterated art of war, is its legacy: the legacy of the greatest game ever made.

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To you, for buying the book. Every dollar spent on this means that more of my time can be spent covering StarCraft instead of boozing and womanizing and partying. Okay, maybe I take that thanks back.

Sorry to the many people and games that were not mentioned here though they've had a big impact in one way or another. Whether by my mistake (I’m positive I’ve made them) or by choice, there are a few omissions in this book made for various reasons. There is often more awesome and related stuff than can be written about in a single book.

I apologize if the formatting in your book was in any way botched. I’ve never done this before and although I’ve done my best, it may very well be a storm of crap. I welcome your feedback.

Sorry to the people who I offended over the course of this book, whether in writing it or in gathering resources. I do not apologize for what I did or what I wrote but I am sorry that it strained things the way it did.

Every written piece in this book that I did not write was used with the explicit permission of the author. The author retains ownership of the piece: all credit and all free drinks should go to him or her!

EVERYONE:

Let's keep it all in perspective. After all, it is just a game . . . but what a game.

Phew.

The Vastness of Space

by Nathan Smolin "Captain Peabody"

Men speak of the vastness of space, of the emptiness of the Void; but in doing so they blaspheme, speaking foolishly of what they do not know. For the heavens are not empty, the Void is not without substance; it is full, teeming with life such that there is hardly room to move, or to breathe.

The stars and galaxies are packed so tightly together that from any one vantage point, they cannot even be distinguished individually; and around them, the planets flock together in strange dances and races, moving and spinning at speeds far beyond human comprehension. On them, a thousand thousand lands open up, lands larger and more various than a man could think of in a thousand lifetimes.

Men speak of "dead worlds," worlds without life. But here, too, they speak falsely; for even a world without living things is alive, filled with strange rocks and minerals and objects, gases and liquids, that no man has seen or discovered, all in constant motion through the eternal heavens. And the worlds on which naught but plants grow—the mind of man, dull as he is, has never felt the constancy and the holy fear of a thousand living spears standing silently beneath the stars, and *growing*. And the lands upon which beasts and birds walk, but not man or those like him—the life, the vitality of such places is beyond recount.

The galaxy teems with such worlds, spinning and moving and growing as do all things; and so does the Koprulu Sector. But on one such world, a world of little value as men judge value, and with little life, as men judge life, more than beasts and birds had come from beyond the sky to claim the world as their own. On this planet—as men would tell it, a wasteland of brown desert, wilting grass, and lumbering herds of wild beasts—there was a valley, a hill-land near the equator. On one of the highest promontories of the place, a great monument stood, a colossal pyramid of gold and brass that looked a thousand years old at least, but had in fact been on this planet only seconds. At its peak, a great crystal of deepest blue shone and sparkled in the dim light of the world's sun; and deep within its heart a thousand voices spoke and intertwined their voices, all whispering with a single voice: *He has come*.

For he had come; the one they called the Commander, the Bird of the Empire;

the one the Terrans, irreverent as always, called the Dinosaur. Syong Byong Goo, the Stork, Protoss executor of the seventh fleet, had come to claim this world for his people.

Deep within the heart of the great pyramid, he sat alone in a darkened chamber; his glowing eyes, blue as amethyst, were closed now in meditation, but his face was as tense as it had ever been, and bore the scars of a hundred campaigns, a hundred defeats. The most recent wound, a long gash on his cheek, he had received at the hand of the Dark Templar traitor, the one they called Bisu, the Dagger; but his enemy's warp blade, dismantled and dirt-covered, hung now on the wall of the chamber, a trophy of the Commander's victory. A severed Protoss arm, the only remnants of Bisu's upstart apprentice, hung beside it, as did many other trophies from many battlefields throughout the Koprulu Sector.

But the Dinosaur had known defeats as well as victories: his face and hands bore the marks of his encounters with the rogue Cerebrate Jaedong, and the upstart young Terran military genius, the Flash, had claimed for his own the Protoss's own right hand. It was now replaced by a life-like prosthetic, indistinguishable from flesh; but the humiliation of the loss still remained. Though perhaps the greatest warrior the Protoss had ever known, he had always been the victim of his own weakness, his own self-doubt; and it had cost him dearly on many occasions.

Now, though, he had reached once again the pinnacle of his strength and the strength of the Protoss Imperium; in this latest campaign, all had fallen before his forces, and now but one opponent remained to challenge his unquestioned dominance of the Koprulu Sector.

Away from the Protoss forces and their commander, on another promontory not far away, a great technological behemoth had made its shaky landing, crashing down onto its metal landing gear before a long line of crystalline formations. Inside it, in front of a great computer array with monitors and computer keyboards, sat a tall, lanky Terran with long black hair, a cigarette, and a dangerous gleam in his eyes. This was the one they called the Terrorist, the bastard son of the Emperor himself, an unscrupulous raider and military genius that had blasted his way through hundreds of battlefields, leaving nothing but terror and destruction in his wake. The Terrorist was known most of all for fast and bloody raids on military and civilian targets alike with vulture bikes packed full of dangerous explosives and mines, raids that had left the most brilliant tacticians and military leaders flat-footed and unable to fight back. Though young, his dirty uniform was already

pinned with medals, the trophies of his victories over many threats to the rule of the Terran Dominion, including the rogue cerebrate Kim Jung Yoon; but he was young indeed, and thirsted above all to prove himself. If he were to defeat the Dinosaur, the most feared of all the Protoss executors, then his military dominance over the sector would be undisputed...for a time, at least.

Now, though, his cigarette shifted impatiently in his mouth, his hands flying over the controls in front of him, checking all the comm systems, preparing them for the battle ahead.

These two, the Dinosaur and the Terrorist, have battled across many worlds now; four times they have met in combat, and each time one has proven the victor, driving the other temporarily back. Now, though, on this barren planet, so far as men reckon it from any help or any safe haven for either combatant, there can be no escape for either side; whichever one is the victor, is the victor forever. And he who is the defeated; who can say if in death he remains the defeated, or goes on to greater glory?

Then, suddenly, a loud klaxon sounded, and one of the monitors before him sprung to life, displaying a set of orders from the Dominion High Command; authorization to begin the battle. The Terrorist did not even look at it; his eyes were already fixed on the monitors all around him, showing multiple camera views of everything within sight of his units; his hands flew across the controls, issuing orders to his troops. They obeyed instantly, secure in the genius of their young commander; secure in the knowledge that he would lead them to riches and glory.

Outside the Command Center, the SCVs, lumbering industrial machines, set to work on the crystalline mineral formations, using their laser drills to cut off giant shards of it and then depositing it back into the Command Center. Already, they began unfolding a large pre-fabricated building, preparing it to receive supplies from orbit.

Across the plateau, within the Protoss Nexus, the Stork's eyes snapped open suddenly as he felt the change in the Terran's psionic signature; they had decided to make a fight of it. Immediately, his mind reached out, making psionic contact with every single one of his troops in orbit or on the surface, linking their minds to his own. He sees through their eyes; and they will all obey every one of his orders, his commands, as simply and as efficiently as if they were parts of his own body. Thus does the Khala give advantage in war as well as in peace.

Outside the Nexus, the tiny bobbing worker probes set to work, slicing into the

mineral formations and bringing them back into the warp rift at the center of the Nexus, necessary components for the creation of other rifts on the planet itself. And there, one of the probes laid down a small beacon, setting the coordinates for the immensely complex warp reaction that would bring a pre-fabricated building from afar to this world. A moment, and the warp rift—self-sustaining, glowing with the energy of a star—flickered into life, a moment later resolving into a massive crystalline structure, that floated a few meters over the surface of the planet, sending off strange flickers of energy on all sides.

But the Dinosaur had more in mind for his young Terran opponent—for before the beacon was laid, one of the small probes had already peeled off from its tasks and headed down the slope, towards the psionic signatures echoing through the Khala from the Terran forces. Its purpose is twofold: to scout the enemy base, show the Dinosaur but more, much more than this.

By the time the worker reaches the base, floating along a few meters above the ground and beeping softly to itself in some strange robot song or speech, the supply depot is still unfinished, a scaffolding-covered artifice being worked on by a lone SCV. As the probe enters the base, the Terrorist sees it from within the Command Center, and his cigarette drops from his jaw in fear. For a probe to find him so quickly means it has been busy already, laying warp beacons somewhere close to his base camp. He needs Marines, and he needs them quickly. All this passed through the young Terran's mind in an instant, and before it has finished doing so his fingers again were flying across his controls, ordering one of his SCVs from mining detail to attack the probe and drive it from his base, and another to lay down the necessary Barracks structure to allow him to train and bring in troops from orbit.

The SCVs acknowledged his command with a quick “Aye, sir,” and moved to their tasks, one bringing his laser drill to scorch a line of burning plasma across the probe's upper shell. The probe's shields flickered angrily at this assault, but it continued onward as if it had never taken place, heading up towards the great geyser that sits not far from the base. Inside the SCV, the harried mechanic, his face and hands drenched in a pungent mixture of oil and sweat, cursed softly to himself. “Come back here, you little varmint! You're not gettin' away with—“ But before he could finish his sentence, the probe had reached the geyser and laid down the tiny warp beacon. “DAMN IT!” The SCV driver slammed his hand into the controls, sending his machine's arms jerking back and forth in a bizarre fashion.

“Commander's not gonna be happy about this...”

The probe, his task completed, spun back around and headed down towards the beginnings of the Barracks down below, its tiny graviton beam warming up in preparation.

“Oh, no you don't!” By the time the order from his superior came in to pursue and destroy the probe, the first SCV was already halfway there, a dangerous gleam in his eyes. The probe peeled away from his target, dancing around the base just ahead of the furious SCV, beeping loudly in an exaggerated, gloating fashion.

For a moment, all was forgotten for the two as they continued their dance across the field, the SCV pilot's ears growing redder by the moment as he muttered a string of curse words and hammered the accelerator with all his might and main. The probe, still beeping rudely, peeled away and headed behind the lines of mining SCVs and crystal formations, causing the pursuing SCV to get caught unexpectedly in traffic. That moment was all the probe needed as it paused for a long moment, its small laser cutting a piece of minerals off of the minerals and pulling it to itself as by an invisible hand. A moment later, the SCV again reached it, sending another jet of burning plasma into the Probe's shields. The probe skidded away again just out of reach of the SCV, continuing the chase once more.

Within the Command Center, the Terrorist saw the gesture and gritted his teeth in anger; so the old Dinosaur thought he could play games with him? Well, he'd shown him before, and he would show him again, now. More important, though, was the assimilator the probe had warped in on top of the Vespene geyser; without a ready source of Vespene, a powerful gas used as a fuel for Terran war machines, he would have to either find a new source, or spend valuable time and resources destroying the building.

In answer to his orders, a number of SCVs, including the angered one from earlier, peeled off and began attacking the assimilator with their welders, attempting to overload its shielding system and break it into pieces. As if in answer to this challenge, the probe swam back into view, entering the assimilator and emerging with a canister of Vespene gas, as if in silent taunt. At the sight of his old enemy, the SCV who had earlier pursued it peeled off from the others attacking the assimilator and continued the chase, scoring several hits on the probe's retreating frame.

After the chase had gone on a while longer, though, blinking orders from the Terrorist sent it off towards the Protoss base to scout the enemy. Meanwhile, the

Barracks had finished its construction, and the first Marine was finally suited up and sent off into the field, emerging onto the battlefield to find several SCVs busy burning down a Protoss building, while a probe darted merrily around just out of their range. "Alright, ladies; I think it's time I took over..." Hefting his rifle, he headed out after the Probe, 8 mm spikes shooting out at hypersonic speeds towards it. The probe, seeing it was at last outmatched, retreated, still beeping and with a canister of vespene securely in its grip, even as the Assimilator went up in flames behind it.

A moment after the probe had exited the base, SCVs headed down the slope towards another area of minerals and vespene, unfolding pre-fabricated machinery and supplies that would in minutes become a Command Center, and a bunker, while a Factory began production within the base proper. The Terran war machine was on the march.

Back within the Nexus, the Dinosaur's eyes glinted in satisfaction. So far, everything was going according to plan...

In the Protoss base, several massive structures had appeared seemingly out of nowhere, drawn from locales worlds away; a massive pyramidal structure with a shimmering Gateway within, and a strange cylindrical structure whose innards were filled with cybernetic machinery. Already, the first Protoss warrior had arrived through the portal; a cybernetic warrior three times the size of a man, which appeared out of the portal and immediately headed downwards towards the enemy base. After its journey, it took up a position just out of the base, where a bunker filled with Marines oversaw a second command center in construction. Within the cybernetic shell of a Dragoon, a wounded Protoss warrior glowered, feeling the thoughts of his executor and responding to his commands with eager obedience.

The portal shimmered constantly now, bringing in warrior after warrior to the battlefield. In the Terran base, the second Command Center had finished construction, and SCVs now mined the local mineral formations in addition to the ones at the main base. The probe, the stolen vespene still held proudly in front of him, returned to the base to once more view the surroundings; but now, he was met with a hail of bullets that overrode his shielding and smashed his metal casing into atoms in an instant.

The gathering of Protoss warriors in front of the Terran base had grown larger; it now consisted of three Dragoon warriors and a Zealot, a hulking nine-foot Protoss

warrior with dual psi blades and a furious disposition. At the gentle command of their commander, one of the Dragoons opened fire, sending brilliant orbs of fiery energy flying through the air to slam into the armored shell of the bunker, from just out of sight of the marines within. Before more than a few shots had been fired, the Terrorist had already sent SCVs forward, using their in-built welders and fire-suppression systems to keep the Bunker in one piece even as the other two Dragoons too moved into position and opened fire.

For a long moment, the two forces—one destroying, the other averting destruction—silently vied with each other for dominance. Then, the first Terran Siege Tank, constructed and fueled at the nearby factory, moved its way confidently alongside the Bunker, hitting one of the Dragoons with two 80 mm shells straight across its bow, sending it scrambling backwards. Confident, the Tank began to move forwards; but immediately, the three Dragoons and the Zealot leaped forward, pounding away on the Tank's armored hull as one. Suddenly finding itself outmatched, the Tank retreated backwards, still firing; but a succession of brilliant white orbs blasted into its hull, setting off chain reactions that came together in one glorious orange explosion.

Satisfied with their work, the Protoss warriors retreated back out of sight, disappearing as quickly as they had appeared.

Within the first Nexus, the Dinosaur glowered silently in satisfaction; but his mind was focused elsewhere, as his probes opened warp rifts to bring in two additional Nexus at two additional veins of minerals and vespene, preparing to amass a superior economy to the embattled Terrorist.

The Terrorist himself sweated in worry; with his first Tank destroyed before it could do any damage, his army production would be set back significantly. It would be some time before he could move out to attack the Protoss en masse.

As the three Dragoons continued their long-range assault on the Bunker, though, a rumble from the nearby cliff signified the deployment of an additional Siege Tank, and the massive explosion of an Arclite Shock Cannon struck them like lightning, sending the Protoss warriors retreating back towards the rest of their forces in the central plain between the two bases. The Terran war machine was beginning to unfold.

But the Protoss advantage was beginning to strengthen; already, the two new Nexus, golden pyramids in the desolate brown landscape of the unknown planet, had appeared in front of rich nodes of minerals, and probes were mining out of

both locations. In the center of the map, the Protoss army swelled with each passing minute, waiting for the proper moment to bring the fight to the enemy.

The two sides had each set themselves up for combat; now the true moves of the game would take place.

The Terrorist chuckled to himself as two Vulture bikes, fast, deadly hoverbikes of dubious safety and morality, headed out onto the field, searching for vulnerable targets. Across the map, though, invisible Protoss drones hovered like immobile insects, the invisible eyes and ears of the Birdtoss. Even now they skirted the enemy base, seeing all that was necessary to see. The Dinosaur saw through their eyes, just as he saw through the eyes of all his forces; and he was troubled by the great Factories, belching black smoke and spitting forth war machines of all descriptions, that he saw there.

Meanwhile, the Vulture bikes arrived to find their assault stymied by two massive crystalline Pylons, blocking the approaches into the Protoss's most far-flung Nexus. In frustration, they began to attack the massive structures, sending grenade charges to explode harmlessly into the shields surrounding the Pylons. In response, several Dragoons split off from the main force, heading to defend their forces. Invisible, deadly mines—one of the Terrorist's signatures, which had taken countless lives—blocked their path. But the Dinosaur was well prepared for such childish traps; with the help of all-seeing Observers and their scans, the Dragoons shelled the mines from range, causing them explode harmlessly. The Vultures moved to escape, with one of them went up in flames before it could pass.

But these Vultures were not the only ones present; already, more and more flooded out onto the battlefield, everywhere laying down tiny, robotic mines that skittered and beeped as they burrowed deep into the ground, sensors constantly scanning for any nearby threats.

At their commander's orders, a platoon of tanks moved out as well, joining up with the Vulture bikes in a low, easily-defensible valley. As the tanks arrived, massive arms slid out to brace the Arclite cannon's recoil, temporarily immobilizing the tanks. SCVs, too, came forward, laying down pre-fabricated Missile Turrets to guard against assaults from the sky; Vultures mined every approach into the valley.

The Dinosaur viewed all this with concern, as an invisible Drone directly above the Terran army fed images of it directly into his mind. His army, dozens of Dragoons and Zealots, with more pouring in every moment from the dozens of

golden Gateways now sitting in his base, was restless, furious, eager to engage; their minds silently urged him to attack now. But he was cautious, and his will overrode theirs, keeping them from combat. It was not yet the proper time.

Meanwhile, the Terran factories too shone with activity, belching forth war machine after war machine onto the battlefield. A Protoss shuttle skirted uneasily along the edge of the Terran line, looking for a way through.

And then, suddenly—it was time. As one, the Protoss forces paused, collected themselves, and then plunged down upon the enemy in a rush, hulking warriors brandishing psi blades and shouting strange alien war cries, massive cybernetic warriors skittering forward on four legs and spitting fire at the enemy; a truly horrifying sight to any enemy. The Terran tanks fired as one, shells spitting up gouts of molten fire on every side, blasting Dragoons into bluish goo, sending Zealots up in gouts of blue fire.

But the Protoss forces had closed to range, and already psi blades sliced into armored hulls like knives through butter, while orbs of psionic energy caused Tanks and Vulture bikes to explode in massive orange fireballs. The Protoss commander burned with as much fury as his troops, his eyes glowing white-hot with rage as his troops sliced their way across the battlefield, leaving nothing but fragments of metal and burning grass in their wake.

And even as the assault was pressed hardest from the front, the Protoss shuttle arrived from the back, dropping Protoss warriors down into the midst of the Terran's tanks, leading automated fire to burn away at the Terran's own forces.

For a long moment, the fury of the battle burned brightly on either side, sending dozens to their death in a moment; and then, steadily but surely, the battle began to wind down, as one fact became more and more clear: the Terrans were outmatched.

Within moments, the Protoss had cut their way through the entire valley, the Terran forces, rag-tag and defeated, fleeing in abject terror before them. After a moment, the Terrans reached the plain in front of their base camp, fortifying it in an attempt to hold it and push back; the Protoss forces followed them, holding a nearby plateau.

The Terrorist spat in frustration; but he knew it was not yet over by any stretch. Even as his forces slowly pushed back up onto the plateau, using the Siege Tank's superior range to shell the Protoss forces from a great distance, a lone SCV headed far away to a remote valley far from here, and began setting up an additional

Command Center in front of a particularly rich vein of minerals. If he could hold it—if he could use its additional resources to construct a larger army...there might be a chance of victory after all. The Protoss executor, his mind focused on the battle in front of him, saw or felt nothing.

Meanwhile, the Terran forces in the plain pushed forward suddenly, Vulture bikes dropping explosive mines directly on top of Dragoons and Zealots, Tanks shelling all from range; but they had overstretched themselves at last. A new wave of Protoss forces swept in from the portals above, eager for battle; for a long moment, the battle burned white-hot, Dragoons on every side resolved into their elements, Vulture pilots turned into bone-white skeletons, tanks reduced to piles of ashes. Both commanders pushed their men to the limit, the Commander's white-hot rage and singular purpose inspiring his troops to great feats indeed, and the Terrorist's shouted exhortations giving purpose to the battles of his men. But after a long moment, once again the ascendancy belonged to the Protoss; the Terrans retreated back once again towards their base and the first bunker that had been built, as the Protoss once more fortified their hill, containing the Terrans completely—or so the Dinosaur thought. For the Terran's hidden base was still out there, and even now it was bringing in minerals, a hidden threat outside the view of the Protoss executor.

And there—the Terrorist slipped three Vulture bikes past the Protoss fortifications, making for one of the vulnerable Protoss bases. But it was too late—as if to add insult to injury, the shuttle moved in once again, bearing within it two deadly and invisible Dark Templar assassins. Flying above the remnants of the Terran army, the first leaped out of the shuttle, landing in front of the assembled tanks. Detecting an enemy, a nearby spider mine leaped up out of the ground and headed towards the assassin, even as he disappeared back into the shuttle. Instead, the mine struck a tank, blowing it sky-high. A moment later, the two assassins leaped down again into combat; the ensuing friendly fire and combat sent several more tanks and vulture bikes up in flames.

And then, at the Commander's silent command, the Protoss army moved in as one, leaping down upon their helpless enemy, tearing through the remaining forces with ease. The old bunker went up in flames, the marines inside burned alive; but there were tanks on the cliff again, and after a moment the furious Protoss commander ordered his forces to pull back and regroup for the final assault.

Meanwhile, the three vulture bikes had reached their targets, blowing one of

the pylons designed to block off approaches sky high and moving in to attack the defenseless probes; but at the same moment, the Protoss forces returned to the Terran base, armored Protoss warriors sprinting up the cliffs in tank fire to stab their blades into the heart of the Siege tanks there. But reinforcements still spilled from the Factories there; and after a moment of combat and the death of many on both sides, the Protoss attackers pulled back once again.

Meanwhile, the three Vulture bikes were having their way with the probes at one of the outward Nexus, laughing loudly as they sent grenades whizzing forward to blast the probes into small pieces. In response, the probes began laying down warp beacons, summoning automated cannons to defend themselves. As the cannons arrived on the scene, they blasted the Vultures with balls of white fire, blowing the smug bearded faces of the Vulture pilots straight to kingdom come.

For a long moment, the battlefield was quiet, as both sides regrouped, factories and gateways churning out unit after unit to join the battle. The Commander for the first time felt the pangs of self-doubt in him again; how was the Terran able to muster so many forces with no sources of minerals available? Could he still, in fact, lose this conflict after all, as he had lost so many others? The rage and confidence of his troops, their trust in him, rising from so many minds, calmed him, focused his mind for the task ahead, as he prepared his troops for the final, terrible assault.

The Terrorist, meanwhile, sweated profusely as he scrambled to keep his army going, sending out orders to all to keep the factories running, get into position, prepare for the inevitable onslaught... Victory was still possible; he told himself that. If he lost now, there would be no escape, no second chance; he would fight till the bitter end. When the Protoss assault came, his forces would hold; they *had* to.

A platoon of Vultures moved across the map, swooping across the field like their eponymous scavenger birds, looking for prey. Pursued by Protoss Zealots, they moved into a mineral line, scattering probes on every side; but in a moment, the psi blades found them as well.

The Protoss army still assembled, waiting for the command to fight. In the Protoss base, probes laid down Stargates, preparing to bring in ships of the Protoss Fleet to finish the job. Vulture bikes moved around everywhere, looking for whatever angle they could to get through the Protoss lines to do damage to the vulnerable probes. The hidden Terran base, undiscovered still, brought in

minerals, fueling the Terran war machine. Still—both sides waited for the final assault.

More vultures found their way through, scattering the probes at a new, undefended Nexus, before they too were chased down by the overwhelming Protoss army and destroyed. At the Terran base, the army gathered, preparing to move out one last time.

But the observers overhead saw this as well; and as the Terran army moved out cautiously to claim the plain in front of their base, the Commander, seated in his meditation chamber far away, saw, and gave the command to all his troops: *Now*.

As one, the Protoss army moved in, Zealots igniting their psi blades, slicing apart Tanks and Vultures alike, Dragoons firing again and again...

The Terran army was strong now, stronger than it should have been; but now, strange, lithe figures floated above the battlefield, clad in gold from head to toe, trailing bluish projections. The High Templar, the greatest warriors of the Protoss people, had arrived. At their executor's command, they let loose, their minds summoning great electrical storms above the Terran army, lightning bolts stabbing down and into Tanks and Vultures, sending them up in flames. Under this strange new assault, the Terran forces underneath the storms burned away in an instant, scattering ash and dust across the landscape and leaving behind nothing but a few forces for the triumphant Protoss army to mop up.

In his Command Center, sweat dripped from the Terrorist's brow as on his monitors he watched the Protoss army move in on his base. The last few forces poured forth, trying to hold back the tide; but it was to no avail. Slowly, steadily, the Protoss forced their way in. The last few Vultures tried in vain to drop their payloads of explosives; but dozens of blue bolts homed in on them almost before they had time to move.

As the High Templar oversaw the battlefield, the Protoss forces blasted down the second Terran Command Center and the buildings nearby. More forces streamed up the hill into the original base, within site of the Command Center containing the Terran commander. Sweat pouring from his brow now, the Terrorist ordered his SCVs forward, pushing them to attack the Protoss army. Some did so, still trusting their commander to the last; others, seeing that there was no escape now and not wanting to give their lives vainly, tried to run. But there was no escape for any of them. They burst and exploded like so many fireworks, as Protoss forces continued to stream in from all directions, and the strange shape

of an Arbiter, chosen craft of the Judicators, floated gently overhead, cloaking all Protoss forces beneath it. It arrived in the base, floating overhead, viewing the remains of the Terran base as the Protoss forces razed it to the ground. Within, the Judicator nodded in satisfaction, mentally expressing his satisfaction at the Commander for a job well done. A few tanks and vultures headed out from the factories, and the Judicator froze one of them in place with a thought. The others moved to attack; but the battle was clearly hopeless.

Inside his Command Center, with images of Protoss units filling all his monitors, the Terrorist slumped back into his chair, closed his eyes, and opened his comm channel to the Protoss, signaling unconditional surrender. There was no point fighting anymore.

His head snapped up, his eyes open; he was still the son of the Emperor. He would die with his eyes open. Standing up, he pulled an antique sword to himself and strapped it onto his belt, then headed to the elevator. The Adjutant watched him go silently, her computerized face showing as much sorrow as an android was able to show. Then the elevator doors closed, and he saw only blackness.

A moment later, the doors of the elevator opened, and he stepped out into the sunlight once more. The land around him was bloodstained, covered in ashes, and burnt down to the bare rock; but he could still see, here and there, patches of hardy grass that had survived. Above him, the sky stretched out beyond sight, a small echo of infinity. Before him, the plateau where his base had been was filled with Protoss forces, who watched him warily, poised to attack. And there...in front of the army, his enemy, the Bird Protoss, the Dinosaur, stood, the lines of his face stark and filled with relief. At last, he had conquered; his doubt had not held him back. Now, he could rest once more...

The Terrorist stepped forward slowly, opening his hands to show that he meant no harm. Then, he slowly took the sword of his belt, keeping it sheathed, and laid it down before the feet of the Protoss executor. The executor looked at it slowly; and then a voice inside his mind spoke, in a quiet, strong voice.

"I believe I understand." The Protoss looked up, and his eyes locked with the Terran's. "You fought well, and bravely this day, as did your forces. You will be remembered with honor."

The Terrorist nodded. "As did you. What now will become of my men?"

The Executor's tone was almost conversational. "They will be allowed to leave here, return to your people; we do not kill without need."

“I understand. And what of me?”

The Executor did not flinch. “You will die here, in payment for your crimes against my people. Justice demands it.”

The Terrorist nodded again. “I understand.” He looked around again, taking in his surroundings, breathing deeply of the air, drawing strength from his surroundings. Above him, a single star blazed in the daylight. It was, he thought, a beautiful place after all. He would not be sorry to die here. A soft breeze blew across the plateau, ruffling his hair; it felt good on his sweat-soaked skin, and he closed his eyes and breathed in deeply once again.

He opened his eyes. “I’m ready. “

The Executor nodded and stepped forward. He paused. “I will grant you a warrior’s death, a death worthy of your deeds.”

One of the High Templar floated forward, and his voice rang through their minds, high, imperious. “No, Executor Goo. He is not one of us; it is not proper.”

“I will take the responsibility. Be silent, Jangbi.”

The High Templar bowed his head in submission and returned to his place.

The executor glared down at the young Terran, his expression unreadable. “Behold; I grant you a place among my brethren.” He placed his hands upon the Terran’s head, one on either side, and blue energy crackled between them. “Feel the Khala, young Terran; feel the light of Aiur.”

For a moment, the Terrorist sat there, unfeeling; and then, for a moment, he felt a glorious light burst forth all around him, filling his mind and his heart. And in it, he felt minds, voices, spirits; the voices of the Protoss people, both those who were alive and those who were now gone. For a moment, this knowledge filled his mind...and then, it faded slowly away, and he found himself looking up at the sky, where in the dying light a single star shone forth, calling him onwards and upwards.

The executor’s eyes glowed suddenly, and at once blue energy flowed from his hands onto the Terran’s head, and into his mind; then, Stork withdrew his hands, and the Terrorist fell to the ground, dead.

The Birdtoss turned around slowly, relief etched on his features. It was finished at long last; victory was his. He had overcome his enemies; he had overcome his own self-doubt. The life of the young Terran was over; but he had many more battles, many more victories to claim before the end. He hoped he could face his end with as much courage as the Terran had his.

Turning back to his army, to his comrades, as they rushed towards him, laughter and joy spilling from their minds.

Now was the time to celebrate.