

# Convergence in Digital Games: A Case Study of League of Legends

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## ABSTRACT:

The study deals with content media convergence, i.e. the fragmentation of media into different forms and formats in order to reach new audiences. The main thesis is that this form of convergence, which has been observable in the media segment over the last decades, has in recent years started to be deliberately and purposefully implemented in the digital games segment as well, and game studios are trying to reach audiences that are not players of the original game from which the media content converged through the creation of media content. However, not in order to attract them to play the game, which could be considered a classic marketing strategy, but in order to create a narrative and intermedia universe from which each converged part can have a separate audience, for which it is not necessary to know the whole universe. The study proves this through a case study of the game League of Legends by the game studio Riot Games and on the contents that converged from the game, through a discursive content analysis in the categories of gaming segment, audio-visual contents, music, social networks and other contents. The study concludes that the analysis supports the thesis that League of Legends converges and is able to fully reach non-gamer audiences.

## KEY WORDS:

audience, convergence of digital games, cross-media, digital games, League of Legends, media convergence.

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# Introduction

Convergence is not a new concept for media studies. It has been talked about for 20 years and is associated with the convergence of media – their tendency to converge and then branch out/fragment into multiple media domains.<sup>1</sup> In production, it tends to professionalise as widely as possible – i.e. companies try to buy as many stages of their media's production chain as possible in order to reduce the cost of production, while expanding into different related industries that will allow them to increase their audience reach and keep it with one publisher, whether they choose print, audio-visual, auditory, social media, etc. Effectively, this creates a wide network of one medium that is branched out into everything that brings in potential recipients and profit. M. Latzer categorizes convergence into technological, economic, sub-sectoral and socio-cultural,<sup>2</sup> H. Jenkins into technological, industrial, cultural and social,<sup>3</sup> B. Ip categorizes it in the games industry into technological, content and market convergence.<sup>4</sup> In this study we will focus on cultural or content convergence, which can border on transmedia storytelling – content is created for different media formats, offering different types of content, different processing or storytelling.

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- 1 See: JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY, London : New York University Press, 2006.; DEUZE, M.: *Liquid Life, Convergence Culture, and Media Work*. Bloomington, IN : Indiana University, 2006. [online]. [2022-10-15]. Available at: <<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/33443/Liquid%20Life%20Deuze%202006.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>.
  - 2 LATZER, M.: Media Convergence. In TOWSE, R., HANDKE, Ch. (eds.): *Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy*. Cheltenham, Northampton, MA : Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013, p. 128.
  - 3 JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY, London : New York University Press, 2006, p. 282.
  - 4 IP, B.: Technological, Content and Market Convergence in the Games Industry. In *Games and Culture*, 2008, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 199.

The point is that it is precisely the horizontal convergence of media – the tendency of one medium to be present in all media spheres – that has begun to manifest itself in recent years in digital games and related spheres into which the gaming segment is expanding. In the words of H. Jenkins: “The flow of content across multiple media platforms”.<sup>5</sup> This study is a case study of a specific example that is a prime example of convergence in the digital games sphere and will surely serve as a prime example of a well-managed expansion in the gaming industry for many other digital game developers. This is the convergence of the digital game *League of Legends*<sup>6</sup> by Riot Games.

Before we get into specific analysis, it must be said that *League of Legends* is not the only digital game or game franchise to attempt such a convergence, and it is not even the first to start something like this. The origins or precursors can be found in many titles, be it *Mortal Kombat*<sup>7</sup>, *Street Fighter*<sup>8</sup>, *Tomb Raider*<sup>9</sup>, *Assassin's Creed*<sup>10</sup>, *Warcraft*<sup>11</sup>, *Dungeons and Dragons*, or many others. *Warcraft*, as one of the forerunners of the current convergent trend, has many years back, in addition to releasing the *Warcraft* trilogy itself (*Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*<sup>12</sup>, *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*<sup>13</sup>, *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*<sup>14</sup>, and *Frozen Throne*<sup>15</sup>), followed up with the release of *World of Warcraft*<sup>16</sup> and all of its expansions or subsequent remasters.<sup>17</sup> However, the convergence can be traced mainly in the expansion into the book industry through the release of numerous book publications that branched out the original storyline, narrative, or otherwise supported the original digital game, through the release of the *Warcraft*<sup>18</sup> movie, and through numerous minor activities such as the *Azeroth Choppers*<sup>19</sup> show, etc. Compared to our research material they had a huge disadvantage – many of the activities that could have been successful in convergence and its development ended up as a marketing strategy that only reached a certain segment of the audience. They may have helped the development of the narrative, but they did not always do so successfully, and some of these activities therefore ended up rather on the periphery of history (or mediocre at best).

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- 5 JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY, London : New York University Press, 2006, p. 282.
  - 6 RIOT GAMES: *League of Legends*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2009.
  - 7 MIDWAY GAMES: *Mortal Kombat*. [digital game]. Chicago, IL : Midway Games, 1992.
  - 8 CAPCOM: *Street Fighter*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 1987.
  - 9 CORE DESIGN: *Tomb Raider*. [digital game]. London : Eidos Interactive, 1996.
  - 10 UBISOFT: *Assassin's Creed*. [digital game]. Saint-Mandé : Ubisoft, 2007.
  - 11 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Warcraft (series)*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 1994-2022.
  - 12 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 1994.
  - 13 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT, CYBERLORE: *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 1995.
  - 14 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2002.
  - 15 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2003.
  - 16 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *World of Warcraft*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2004.
  - 17 See also: BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Warcraft III: Reforged*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2020.
  - 18 JONES, D. (Director): *Warcraft*. [DVD]. Universal City, CA : Universal Pictures, 2016.
  - 19 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT (Created by): *Azeroth Choppers (series)*. [TV]. Los Angeles, CA : Endemol USA, 2014. [online]. [2022-10-28]. Available at: <[www.azerothchoppers.com](http://www.azerothchoppers.com)>.

# Convergence

Perhaps the question is now lingering in your mind – are not these convergent contents just a well-chosen marketing ploy to force the audience to find their way to the main – the original medium, in this case the game? Is not it all just part of a strategy to increase player numbers? And it is in the answer to this question that the ‘miraculous’ difference lies. Most game titles and studios use different channels just to raise awareness of the original game or to increase the number of players or any other marketing strategies to reach the audience. However, the convergent content we are talking about can take on a life of its own, without the need to play the original game or without the player even caring about the original game, and still be a full-fledged medium. Poetically speaking, they can ‘live without their parent’. A recipient who encounters such converged content may or may not also be exposed to the original game’s universe, may or may not have any knowledge of it, and yet become a fan of only a particular converged segment. For avid gamers, such converged content will be ideal – they know the setting or characters, can ‘decode’ would-be hidden secrets or Easter eggs, and enjoy their imagined success of understanding the content a bit more than a disinterested audience encountering the universe for the first time. Some authors argue that games are not convergence.<sup>20</sup> If we look at it through the lens of media content, for which games are an expansion, we agree. However, this model is the opposite – in the beginning it was not a movie or a series, but a game. We look through the lens of a digital game, and that changes the point drastically.<sup>21</sup>

The main dividing line between conventional marketing outreach to a potential player and game convergence can be seen as whether such content can survive without the player knowing about the original game from which the content converged, and whether such content will be successful and its tendency replicable to other domains. This is also the main thesis of this study. The research material on which we will attempt to demonstrate this is the game *League of Legends* by the studio Riot Games.

*League of Legends* is no newcomer to the digital gaming market. It was created in 2009 by the game studio Riot as a reaction to the game *Defense of the Ancients*<sup>22</sup> (*DotA*), which originally originated in the game *Warcraft III*, or in its custom maps that players could create. It has a lot in common with *DotA* and *Dota 2*<sup>23</sup> respectively, after all even the strongest neutral objective just carries a reversed name (Roshan in *Dota 2*, Nashor in *League of Legends*), as well as many playable characters carrying similar gameplay mechanics, etc.<sup>24</sup> This type of ‘lagging’ carries over in many other aspects as well, e.g., *Teamfight Tactics*<sup>25</sup> came out only shortly after *Dota Auto Chess*<sup>26</sup> / *Dota Underlords*<sup>27</sup> with almost identical mechanics. We see a similar trend in convergence, which we’ll talk about

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20 For more information, see: O’DONNELL, C.: Games Are Not Convergence: The Lost Promise of Digital Production and Convergence. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2011, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 271-286.

21 Remark by the author: Along with the development of this field only in recent years.

22 VALVE CORPORATION: *Defense of the Ancients (Game Mod for Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos)*. [digital game]. Bellevue, WA : Valve Corporation, 2003.

23 VALVE CORPORATION: *Dota 2*. [digital game]. Bellevue, WA : Valve Corporation, 2013.

24 See also: HILTSCHER, J.: *Dota 2 and League of Legends: Two of the World’s Most Popular Video Games, Their Cultural Aspects, Their Genre and Its Definition*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Bonn : Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2022. [online]. [2022-10-29]. Available at: <<https://bonndoc.ulb.uni-bonn.de/xmlui/handle/20.500.11811/9774>>.

25 RIOT GAMES: *Teamfight Tactics*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2019.

26 DRODO STUDIO: *Dota Auto Chess (Game Mod for Dota2)*. [digital game]. Chengdu : Drodo Studio, 2019.

27 VALVE CORPORATION: *Dota Underlords*. [digital game]. Bellevue, WA : Valve Corporation, 2020.

later. League of Legends released the *Arcane*<sup>28</sup> series on Netflix in 2021, and a *DotA* series called *Dota: Dragon's Blood*<sup>29</sup> was released on the same platform in the same year, which currently has 3 seasons and is animated in an anime/cartoon style. Where Riot Games has really set itself apart from its competitors with League of Legends and begun to pave a sure path in the history of digital game convergence that has brought about change for the industry is by branching out into all areas of media and linking them together into a single universe through the aforementioned convergence.

In the context of the marketing strategies we have already mentioned, League of Legends is not far behind. Merchandising, collaborations with technology companies (which deal with game gear,<sup>30</sup> for example), audiovisual trailers for new champions,<sup>31</sup> cinematics,<sup>32</sup> event marketing,<sup>33</sup> short stories<sup>34</sup> and many others represent a well-chosen mix of tools that the studio is working with. This is nothing surprising or groundbreaking nowadays, and almost all major studios that have been on the market for a few years now work with them. Convergence, as we mentioned, is a unique approach that allows content to create its own audience, which is not necessarily the same as the original audience of the parent game. Effectively, these could be two separate audiences, though in reality they often overlap. Convergence can yield audiences that do not necessarily become players of the original game, but remain only in the fanbase of that converged content, which itself becomes a self-earning activity (if possible).

The main research subject for this case study becomes the game League of Legends and all its converged media content that has a clear and demonstrable link to the original game. The main goal of the study is to identify convergence in League of Legends in gaming and non-gaming sectors and to prove that convergence, as we know it from the media industry, has also been applied in the digital-gaming segment in recent years. The research method is discursive content analysis, and we establish the following convergence research categories to make the results more transparent: other digital games, audiovisual works, music, and social networks among others. Within each category, we will not seek a basic description of features, but rather to grasp the issue of convergence and converged content that is not necessarily intended for the primary target audience of the game, but can live a full media life of its own, and the audience can fully consume the content even without knowing the original game from which the content converged. We deliberately omit in our research categories that are directly linked to the original game and the consumption of which is contingent on knowledge of the game, or those that can be considered explicitly as marketing strategies to reach an audience. It is arguable that some of the content analysed was originally intended as a marketing strategy. However, their final development caused them to break out of this category and converge among other audiences.

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28 YEE, A., LINKE, Ch. (Created by): *Arcane (series)*. [VOD]. Los Gatos, CA : Netflix, 2021.

29 YOUNG, P. S. et al. (Directors): *Dota: Dragon's Blood (series)*. [VOD]. Los Gatos, CA : Netflix, 2021.

30 For example, see: *Play All Out*. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.logitech.com/en-eu/league-of-legends-kda-gear.html>>.

31 For more information, see: *The Hunter's Pride | K'Sante Champion Teaser – League of Legends*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i90x5zUMI6w>>.

32 See also: *Defeat Your Monster | K'Sante Cinematic – League of Legends*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUq89ouObQc>>.

33 See: *Legends Never Die – Opening Ceremony | Finals | 2017 World Championship*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP3fGkpmVM0>>.

34 For example, see: LUO, M.: *Everything We Should Have Said*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <[https://universe.leagueoflegends.com/en\\_US/story/ksante-color-story/](https://universe.leagueoflegends.com/en_US/story/ksante-color-story/)>.

# Analysis: Gaming Segment

The convergence of Riot Games studio and the League of Legends universe can be seen very clearly and distinctly in the digital gaming category. In addition to the original League of Legends itself, Riot Games is releasing / has previously released / plans to release in the near future (Picture 1): *Valorant*<sup>35</sup>, *Teamfight Tactics*<sup>36</sup>, *League of Legends Wild Rift*<sup>37</sup>, *Legends of Runeterra*<sup>38</sup>, *Ruined King*<sup>39</sup>, *Hextech Mayhem*<sup>40</sup>, *Conv/rgence*<sup>41</sup>, *Song of Nunu*<sup>42</sup>, *Tellstones: King's Gambit* (tabletop game), *Mechs vs. Minions* (tabletop game), as well as several other announced games that are still in development or testing, such as *Project L*<sup>43</sup> (fighting game), *Project F*<sup>44</sup> (RPG), and *LoL Esports Manager*<sup>45</sup> (sport/simulation game). There are two interesting aspects to this boom. The first is the variety of genres they cover – from the card game *Legends of Runeterra* (whose principle is the same as classic tabletop card games such as *Magic: The Gathering* or *Yu-Gi-Oh!*), to the FPS *Valorant* (principle similar to *CS:GO*<sup>46</sup>, *Overwatch*<sup>47</sup>), the platform hopping game *Hextech Mayhem* (principle of *Super Mario Bros.*<sup>48</sup> but with elements of a music rhythm game such as *Taiko no Tatsujin*<sup>49</sup>), to of course MOBA games. The distribution platforms have expanded as well, and since the original League of Legends was designed exclusively for PC via its own client, some of the aforementioned have been developed exclusively for smartphones, or some of them are also designed for console play – PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch. Another interesting distribution decision is to leave Riot's own client and provide, for example, *Ruined King* via Steam, Epic Games or GOG.com.<sup>50</sup> However, given the convergence and promotion to audiences other than the primary and the specificity of the genre, this makes sense and was a logical decision.

The other interesting aspect in this category is the development of the universe and narrative through convergence. Some of the aforementioned games still develop the same universe of characters, worlds and interconnections, as in the original *League of Legends*, while others serve as expansions, introduce new characters and personas, or serve to transmedia the narrative – developing a part of the story that has not yet appeared elsewhere.

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35 RIOT GAMES: *Valorant*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2020.

36 RIOT GAMES: *Teamfight Tactics*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2019.

37 RIOT GAMES: *League of Legends: Wild Rift*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2020.

38 RIOT GAMES: *Legends of Runeterra*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2020.

39 RIOT GAMES: *Ruined King: A League of Legends Story*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, Riot Forge, 2021.

40 RIOT GAMES: *Hextech Mayhem: A League of Legends Story*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, Riot Forge, 2021.

41 DOUBLE STALLION GAMES: *CONV/RGENCE: A League of Legends Story*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, Riot Forge, TBA.

42 TEQUILA WORKS: *Song of Nunu: A League of Legends Story*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, Riot Forge, TBA.

43 See: CANNON, T.: *Project L /dev: Finding Our Game*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.riotgames.com/en/news/project-l-dev-finding-our-game>>.

44 See also: *10-Year Anniversary Celebration | Riot Pls: 10th Anniversary Edition – League of Legends*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4FGqymg4k4>>.

45 RIOT GAMES: *LoL Esports Manager (open beta in China)*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2022.

46 VALVE CORPORATION, HIDDEN PATH ENTERTAINMENT: *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*. [digital game]. Bellevue, WA : Valve, 2012.

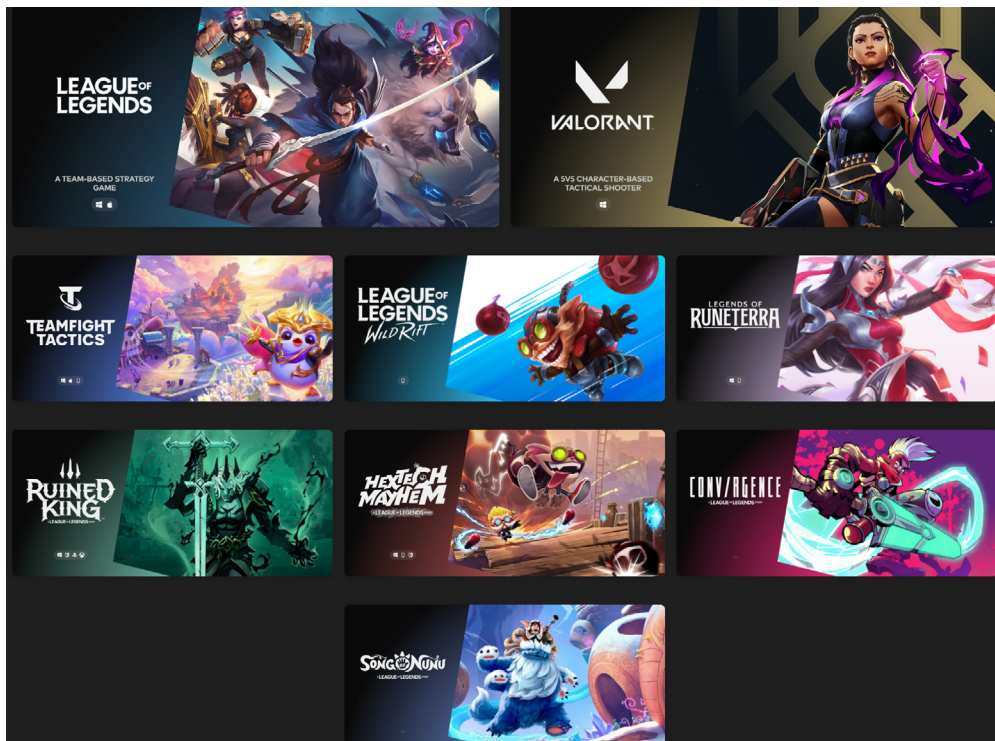
47 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT, IRON GALAXY: *Overwatch*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2016.

48 NINTENDO R&D4: *Super Mario Bros.* [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1985.

49 NAMCO: *Taiko no Tatsujin*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Bandai Namco Entertainment, 2001.

50 *Ruined King: Availability*. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://ruinedking.com/en-us/>>.

For example, *Song of Nunu* (an adventure game) should describe the main character's search for his lost mother, a narrative that has not yet appeared anywhere (it is only mentioned in the character's lore as a motif from the past), while *Conv/rgence* maps out a story that is sufficiently developed through other converged content, but should provide insight into the missing parts of the main character's history. All games that develop a character's narrative carry the subtitle *A League of Legends Story*, a direct reference to the original game and universe, but knowledge of these is not necessary to play the game or to understand the game's narrative, although its absence may affect a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind the characters' actions.<sup>51</sup>



Picture 1: Games from the studio Riot Games

Source: Our games. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://www.riotgames.com/en>>.

## Analysis: Audio-visual Production

It is one of the strongest drivers of the game's convergence, and arguably has the biggest future. We are not talking about cinematics, which are now a common part of games, whether through direct implementation into gameplay or as a marketing tool

51 Remark by the author: It could be argued, that even in the film or series industry there are countless works that function as coherent storylines within individual films, but it is only the interconnectedness and complexity of all of them with each other that offers an authentic insight into the motivations of individual characters (e.g., the *Marvel* universe, the *DC* universe, etc.), which is not to say that a viewer cannot view only some and still have an audiovisual experience.

before a big event or when introducing expansions and DLC. Their goal is obvious – to attract attention, raise awareness or bring back players who have since stopped playing. This form is also used by League of Legends, who release cinematics / music videos for big events such as Worlds,<sup>52</sup> for the release of new champions (Champion Teasers), but also for skin lines (e.g. K/DA,<sup>53</sup> Spirit Blossom,<sup>54</sup> Empyrean,<sup>55</sup> etc.), while the quality and the way they are handled can vary, from in-game footage to separate animated videos).

The higher level is the creation of a stand-alone audiovisual work, such as the *Arcane* series in this case (Picture 2). This develops the narrative of several characters, their childhood and adulthood, their conflict with each other, and also describes the birth of some characters, against the background of others who are not part of the original League of Legends game from which *Arcane* was created. In other words, it contains a mix of characters that are familiar to the player, ones that they only recognize at later stages in their lives (in the game they occur after some sort of transformation, after a departure to evil, but in the series they occur still in the early stages of development or the series describes their birth), but it also introduces completely new characters that the player has not previously known (although some of them may later appear in games converged from the original game, such as Silco from *Arcane* in one set in *Teamfight Tactics*). The League of Legends player is given a certain advantage when watching *Arcane* – they visually recognize the characters and know their names, but it has no significant impact on the narrative development. The story is as new to them as it is to someone who is not a player of the game. The animated series *Arcane* was released in late 2021 through the streaming platform Netflix, has won Best Rated Original Series based on ratings on IMDB,<sup>56</sup> numerous other awards, and at the time of this writing, a second series of the series was in production. Fairly recently, a documentary series *Arcane: Bridging the Rift*<sup>57</sup> was also released via YouTube, offering a behind the scenes making of the first season of *Arcane*. At this point, one could speculate that it is highly likely (especially in the context of the success of the first series) that the series will continue and further develop the story, that perhaps there will be series from other parts of the League of Legends universe, or that they will at some point result in a feature film. Their secondary uses are also interesting – for example, the *Arcane* series motif was also used for the Opening Ceremony at the Worlds 2021 eSports championship<sup>58</sup> (a combination of animation, live-action, music, visuals, etc.), motifs from K/DA music videos were used in the Opening Ceremony at Worlds 2020<sup>59</sup>

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52 For example, see: *RISE (ft. The Glitch Mob, Mako, and The Word Alive) | Worlds 2018 – League of Legends*. Released on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB8TyLTD7EE>>.

53 *K/DA – POP/STARS (ft. Madison Beer, (G)I-DLE, Jaira Burns) | Music Video – League of Legends*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOxkGD8qRB4>>.

54 *Wandering Spirits | Spirit Blossom 2022 Skin Trailer – League of Legends*. Released on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaEH96kB-RY>>.

55 *Fire to the Fuse (Ft. Jackson Wang) | Official Empyrean Cinematic – League of Legends x 88rising*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNkT\\_aZWysA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNkT_aZWysA)>.

56 TASSI, P.: *'Arcane' Is Netflix's Best Rated Original Series Ever, According to IMDB*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2021/11/09/arcane-is-netflix-top-rated-original-series-ever-according-to-imdb/?sh=63a78f28979c>>.

57 *Arcane: Bridging the Rift | Part 1 – I Only Dream in Risky*. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022. [online]. [2022-09-25]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mz4-38d3-AE>>.

58 *Worlds 2021 Show Open Presented by Mastercard: Imagine Dragons, JID, Denzel Curry, Bea Miller, PVRIS*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OzoFq4Q3\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OzoFq4Q3_c)>.

59 *Opening Ceremony Presented by Mastercard | Worlds 2020 Finals*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_hugvOCBh-E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hugvOCBh-E)>.



and 2018,<sup>60</sup> True Damage at the same event in 2019,<sup>61</sup> and a short 'documentary' series *Lil Nas X Takeover*<sup>62</sup> (with a degree of irony and hyperbole) about the studio's new 'director' – singer Lil Nas X, who took over the role of studio head in the staged documentary, and whose theme tied to the release of the new character was later translated into the Opening Ceremony at Worlds 2022.<sup>63</sup> The convergence between audiovisual contents is obvious – on the one hand, the universe is fragmented through different narratives and their elaborations among audiences; on the other hand, it is reunited through eSports events designed predominantly for players of the original game. In this area, the biggest boom is probably yet to come.



Picture 2: Arcane poster

Source: *Arcane: League of Legends*. [online]. [2022-09-29]. Available at: <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11126994/>>.

60 *Opening Ceremony Presented by Mastercard | Finals | 2018 World Championship*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYSJloehGq0>>.

61 *Opening Ceremony Presented by Mastercard | 2019 World Championship Finals*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QDWbKnrRcc>>.

62 *Lil Nas X Takes Over as President of League of Legends | Worlds 2022*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xunjy1no4>>.

63 *Worlds 2022 Finals Opening Ceremony Presented by Mastercard ft. Lil Nas X, Jackson Wang & Edda Hayes*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022. [online]. [2022-11-10]. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/PzRi2JyRlvw?t=543>>.

# Analysis: Music

Music is one of the first dominant components of convergence in League of Legends. The baseline, which in this case does not play any specific role in convergence, could be considered music for the fans and players of the game. These are the various songs or albums released upon the release of a new champion in the game (mostly instrumental, in the past they were also found on the loading screen of the client when logging into the game), upon the release of a series of skins (mostly collectively called *The Music of League of Legends: Season X-Y*<sup>64</sup> or released as standalone singles<sup>65</sup>), when generating interest in the Worlds in a given season (each World has its own anthem, which is also played during the Opening Ceremony, implemented in the game client and also in the opening seconds of the game itself). All of these are commonly available on audio streaming platforms such as Spotify, under the League of Legends banner.

However, the convergence comes at the point of fragmenting specific music projects under their own headers, which even within audio-streaming platforms function as separate artists and can find their specific audience, who may have no knowledge of the original game and only like a given music, band or singer, all of whom are just virtual avatars/artists, persons who do not really exist, but appear as characters in the original game (which is irrelevant for the specific music). Specific examples are the musical groups Pentakill, K/DA, True Damage, and the singer Seraphine, who joins K/DA in her virtual 'career'. Each of these musical projects represents a different genre and in essence composes a tribute, an homage to it and tries to develop it. True Damage is clearly the weakest of these projects in terms of production, with only one song released in 2019<sup>66</sup> in the hip-hop genre, tied to Worlds in that year and to a collaboration with the Louis Vuitton brand (clothing line<sup>67</sup>, Worlds cup case design<sup>68</sup>, prestige LV skin of the in-game character<sup>69</sup>).

Pentakill is a heavy metal genre-focused project that has released three albums – *Smite and Ignite*<sup>70</sup>, *Il: Grasp of the Undying*<sup>71</sup> and *III: Lost Chapter*<sup>72</sup>, with each song on the albums referencing items (and later runes) in the original game, e.g., *Last Whisper*, *Deathfire Grasp*, *Mortal Reminder*, *Frozen Heart*, *Edge of Night*, *Redemption*, etc. To a fan unfamiliar with the original game, the individual song titles, album titles, visuals, and even the band name itself say nothing, even though they carry a direct reference to the game. However, this is ultimately unnecessary.

The K/DA project is a tribute to the k-pop genre (partially linked to the hip-hop and EDM genres) and has been the most successful of all of the aforementioned (based on the current listenership numbers of each artist on audio-streaming platforms and the number of plays of each artist's songs). The initial success of the *POP/STARS*<sup>73</sup> single in 2018 (nearly

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64 For more information, see: LEAGUE OF LEGENDS: *The Music of League of Legends: Season 9 (Original Game Soundtrack)*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2019.

65 See also: LEAGUE OF LEGENDS: *K'Sante, the Pride of Nazumah*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2022.

66 TRUE DAMAGE: *Giants*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2019.

67 DUVAL, A.: *Louis Vuitton x League of Legends: What if You Dressed as Your Favorite Video Game Character?*. Released on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.vogue.fr/fashion/article/league-of-legends-characters-are-now-dressed-by-louis-vuitton-outfits-skins-trophy-case>>.

68 *Louis Vuitton and Riot Games Partner Starting with the 2019 League of Legends World Championship*. 2019. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://nexus.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/2019/09/louis-vuitton-joins-worlds-2019/>>.

69 *True Damage Qiyana Prestige Edition: League of Legends Skin*. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://lolshop.com/product/true-damage-qiyana-prestige-edition/>>.

70 PENTAKILL: *Smite and Ignite*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2014.

71 PENTAKILL: *Il: Grasp of the Undying*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2017.

72 PENTAKILL: *III: Lost Chapter*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2021.

73 K/DA: *POP/STARS*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2018.

280 million plays on Spotify, 533 million views of the song's video on YouTube<sup>74</sup>) was followed by the release of album *ALL OUT*<sup>75</sup> in 2020, which was accompanied by secondary marketing activities such as a limited collaboration with gaming chairs manufacturer Secret Lab<sup>76</sup> (also a longtime Worlds sponsor), with gaming gear manufacturer Logitech<sup>77</sup>, as well as the creation of personal playlists with music from other artists on audio-streaming platforms for individual K/DA characters,<sup>78</sup> as each of them represents a different persona (party/creative/chill/socialist). All the songs from *ALL OUT* album were also given music videos, ranging from concept video,<sup>79</sup> dance video,<sup>80</sup> full animation treatment<sup>81</sup> to lyric video.<sup>82</sup> The band name K/DA is also a reference to the game itself, reflecting the ratio of 'kills-deaths-assists'.

The last musical project mentioned is 2020's *Seraphine*, a tribute to aspiring songwriters and self-producers, a soft pop genre. It is the first musical project that has a narrative created at the same time – the character has a dream since childhood to be part of her favourite band K/DA, she 'produces' music from her childhood room until she later manages to get into the band and debuts with them on the aforementioned album *ALL OUT*. All of her music produced up until then is only available as singles and most of it was covers of other artists' songs.<sup>83</sup>

In all of the above examples, we see a clearly recurring theme – to converge into different musical genres through individual virtual artists who have nothing in common to connect them to the original game. Listeners don't need to be familiar with the game for the full experience, the converged content is clearly separate from marketing strategies and regular in-game music, and League of Legends has been working with this type of content since 2014 and is continually developing it. It also provides a different perspective for players on music projects due to their familiarity with the characters, all of the aforementioned characters also received in-game cosmetic skins corresponding to the music project in question (in the case of Pentakill, even in two lines), and were also the musical and visual themes for the Opening Ceremony on the respective Worlds. They can also stand on their own as converged content, as well as the great recent musical collaborations that have found their way to radio even though they were originally linked directly to the game – namely the song *Enemy*<sup>84</sup> by Imagine Dragons (the theme music in the *Arcane* series and in the Opening Ceremony at Worlds 2021) and the song *Star Walkin*<sup>85</sup> by Lil Nas X (the pseudo-documentary *President of League of Legends Takeover*, Worlds 2022 Anthem).

74 Remark by the author: Numbers valid as of November 8, 2022.; *K/DA – POP/STARS (ft. Madison Beer, (G) I-DLE, Jaira Burns) | Music Video – League of Legends*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOxkGD8qRB4>>.

75 *K/DA: ALL OUT*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2020.

76 TUTING, K.: *Secretlab Has Gone All Out on Its New K/DA Gaming Chair*. Released on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.oneesports.gg/league-of-legends/secretlab-has-gone-all-out-on-its-new-k-da-gaming-chair/>>.

77 *Play All Out*. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.logitechg.com/en-eu/league-of-legends-kda-gear.html>>.

78 For example, see: *K/DA: All Access: Akali (Artist Playlist)*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2020.

79 *K/DA – VILLAIN ft. Madison Beer and Kim Petras (Official Concept Video – Starring Evelyn)*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoWxv2yZXLQ>>.

80 *K/DA – DRUM GO DUM ft. Aluna, Wolfityla, Bekuh BOOM (Official Concept Video – Starring Bailey Sok)*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_PbH5y70Tc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_PbH5y70Tc)>.

81 *K/DA – MORE ft. Madison Beer, (G)I-DLE, Lexie Liu, Jaira Burns, Seraphine (Official Music Video)*. Released on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VTKBuxU4yk>>.

82 *K/DA – THE BADDEST ft. (G)I-DLE, Bea Miller, Wolfityla (Official Lyric Video) | League of Legends*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020. [online]. [2022-10-18]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkID8\\_gnTxw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkID8_gnTxw)>.

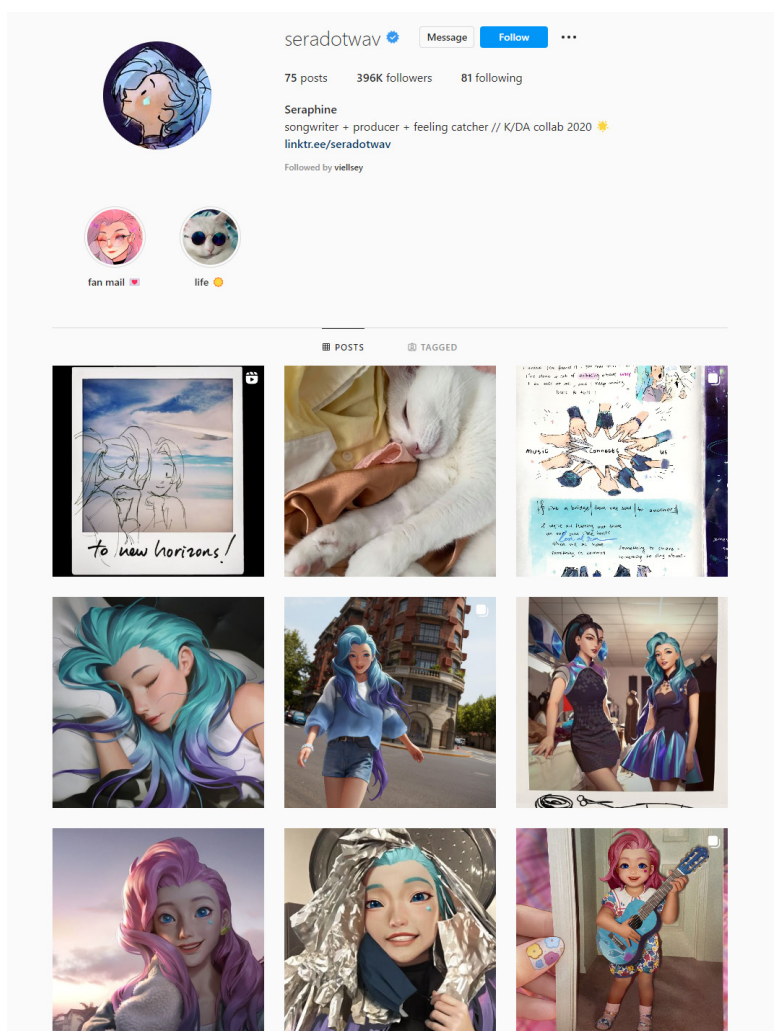
83 See: *SERAPHINE: All the Things She Said*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Los Angeles, CA : Spotify, Riot Games, 2020.

84 *IMAGINE DRAGONS, ARCANÉ, LEAGUE OF LEGENDS: Enemy (from the series Arcane League of Legends)*. [AOD]. Stockholm, Santa Monica CA : Spotify, Interscope Records, 2021.

85 *LIL NAS X: STAR WALKIN' (League of Legends Worlds Anthem)*. [AOD]. Stockholm, New York, NY : Spotify, Columbia Records a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, 2022.

# Analysis: Social Networking and Other Contents

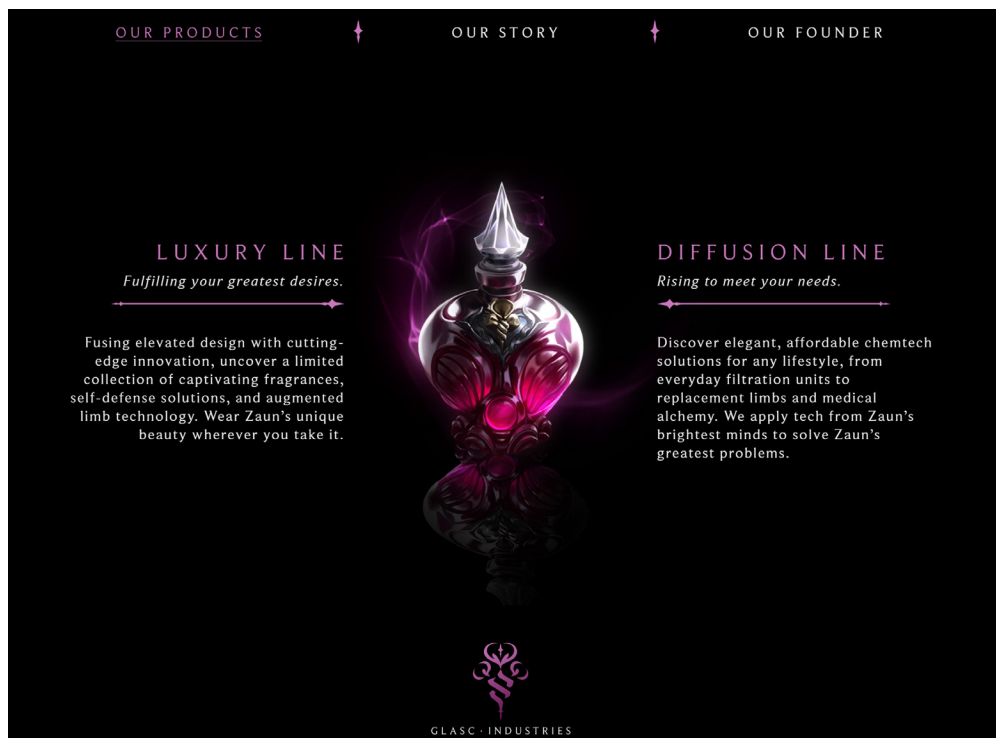
While all previous converged content has been standalone projects with high production value, League of Legends has also converged into areas that are not as dominant and are somewhere on the cusp of convergence and fanservice. A first example would be social media accounts, such as those of the band K/DA, but also the account of the aforementioned Seraphine called @seradotwav on Instagram and Twitter (Picture 3), which was active from June 26, 2020 to November 8, 2020 and imitated the accounts of regular aspiring artists, i.e. it presented a mix of private life, making new music, etc. In the era of V-tubers and other virtual celebrities or influencers, it could easily happen that the accounts gained popularity with the audience without knowing about the characters' affiliation to the game.



Picture 3: Seraphine Instagram profile

Source: Seradotwav (Instagram account). [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/seradotwav/>>.

The same could have been the case in early 2022 with the Glasc Industries website (Picture 4), which at first glance resembles any budding cosmetics project, presenting a bottle resembling a perfume. The non-specific characteristics, categorized as Our Products, Our Story and Our Founder, do contain references to Zaun, Piltover and City of Progress in some of the text, but may not suggest anything to an unknowing audience (while fans of the game know that these are place names from the game's universe). The website was released without any official information from the studio, and was a promotional form for the release of a new character in the game.



Picture 4: Glasc Industries web page

Source: Glasc Industries. [online]. [2022-10-21]. Available at: <<https://www.glascindustries.com/en-gb/>>.

Also noteworthy is the convergence into the book segment through the fantasy book *Ruinat*,<sup>86</sup> subtitled *A League of Legends Novel*, released in September 2022, which develops the narrative of the character, who is also featured in the converged game *Ruined King* and in the original *League of Legends* game as well, as part of the character's lore, as well as older publications such as *Garen: First Shield*<sup>87</sup> and the artwork publication *League of Legends: Realms of Runeterra*,<sup>88</sup> which did not receive as much popularity and attention. Of course, game content also converges with each other. In addition to the aforementioned narrative and other connections between the games and each other, we can also find many small references, such as *Valorant*, *K/DA*, *Ruined King*, *Wild Rift*, and *Legends of Runeterra* arcade game machines in the *Arcade World* locale within the *Star Guardians 2022* visual novel story, the *Cafe Cuties* locale (a series of skins) in the same story, which

86 See: REYNOLDS, A.: *Ruinat: A League of Legends Novel*. London : Orbit, 2022.

87 See also: REYNOLDS, A.: *Garen: First Shield*. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2020.

88 RIOT GAMES: *League of Legends: Realms of Runeterra (Official Companion)*. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2019.

is an ever-evolving mini-narrative in League of Legends within the seasonal events (which is an overall tribute to the anime and manga), and many more. However, given that they are found directly in the games and refer to each other, we do not consider them to be as significant an element of convergence between other audiences as in all of the previous examples.

## Conclusion

In the previous sections, we described and analysed how League of Legends content converges into individual media segments, becomes independent from the original game, and manages to be full-fledged media content for an audience without that audience being a player of the original game. We have defined a boundary that separates marketing strategies to reach players and potential players from the convergence we can observe. In some cases, we can talk about a mix of these characteristics – content is both convergent and serves marketing purposes. This dividing line also presents us with the limitations of our research – we are unable to analyze audiences in an exact way and determine how large each group of audiences are on a scale of: a player of the game who consumes all of the content in question – a disinterested audience member who has never encountered the original game, but is a fan of the converged content. However, we are afraid that it is simply not possible to conduct research that can adequately answer this question. In terms of a systematic approach to the issue under study, we can clearly define that League of Legends converges into different media areas, does so purposefully and intentionally, and is not a random phenomenon. Ultimately, N. Laurent, CEO of Riot Games, describes it in just different words when he says that the fundamental pillars of the new operating model are games, eSport and entertainment and that they do not want to be defined just as a games company, but to provide a complete experience.<sup>89</sup> There is also a noticeable globalisation – from convergence into different game genres through individual games, to convergence into different popular music genres through separate projects, to converged audiovisual creation, whose biggest boom is probably yet to come. Like League of Legends, other digital games are also converging, expanding into the media industry and trying to reach the largest and widest possible audience. It is highly likely that we will see the convergence of many more games whose size and financial budgets allow it, and that this will be the way to stay popular in the future with so many games constantly being created. Ultimately, convergence has been and is the most significant driver of 21<sup>st</sup> century media development.

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89 LAURENT, N.: *Calling the Shot: The Next Five Years at Riot Games.* Released on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022. [online]. [2022-10-20]. Available at: <<https://www.riotgames.com/en/news/calling-the-shot-the-next-five-years-at-riot-games>>.

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