League of Legends Retrospective: One Year Later
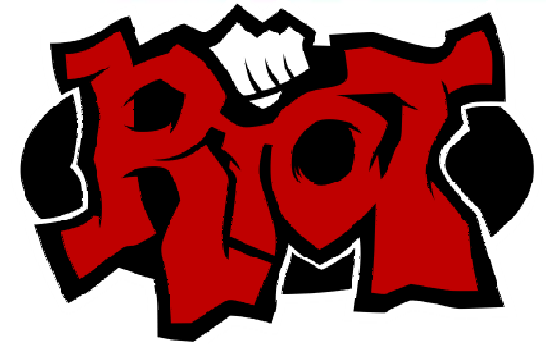
Who am I?

- President & Co-Founder of Riot Games

- Executive Producer of League of Legends

Who is Riot Games?

- > 120 employees
- Offices:
  - Los Angeles
  - Dublin
- World class development team
- Games as a service publishing expertise

Game type: Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)

Platform: PC

Setting: Fantasy

Business model: Free with virtual goods

Development stage: Commercial Service Oct - 2009 (NA, EU)
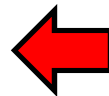
Key features:

- RPG and persistent elements
- Eye catching stylized art
- 60+ distinct champions to choose
- Built-in community features
- Easy to learn
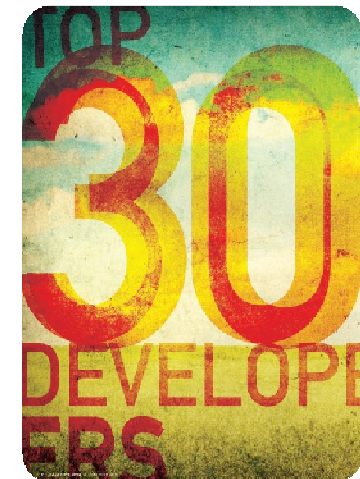- Bi-weekly content and features updates

Awards

Title	Hours	Rank
World of Warcraft	250689	#1
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	159536	#2
League of Legends	89553	#3
Call of Duty 2	84511	#4
StarCraft II	51803	#5
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	49287	#6
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	35595	#7
Aion	25527	#8
The Lord of the Rings Online	17924	#9
Counter-Strike: Source	17637	#10

Selected for WCG 2010

WINNER — READER'S CHOICE — Best Strategy Game — IGN 2009

WINNER — GAMER'S CHOICE — Best PC Game — GAMESPY 2009

WINNER — GAME OF THE YEAR — Best MMO — NEOGAFF 2009

WINNER — E3 — Best Strategy Game — GAMETRAILERS 2009

NOMINEE — Best Debut — GAME DEVELOPERS 2009

WINNER — READER'S CHOICE — Best Multiplayer Game — IGN 2009

WINNER — Best MMO RTS — MMOSite 2009

NOMINEE — GAME OF THE YEAR — Best Strategy Game — GAMETRAILERS 2009

Most nominated title for GDC Online Awards 2010

Retrospective

Biggest Challenges

- Establish credibility with core gamers
- Satisfy the hardcore, while creating a game with broader appeal
- Utilize an unproven business model in the West
- Create a game that would be viable globally
- Build an Games as a Service Platform!
- Had to do it completely ourselves from scratch!

THE HOW - <u>DEVELOPMENT PROCESS</u>

As a business, we value…

- Our customers are everything
  - Keep engagement high to keep them coming back
  - Be highly responsive to their needs
  - Earn their loyalty through delivering the best possible game experience and service

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS –

WHAT WENT RIGHT

People & Culture

- Our most valuable asset is our team
  - Find the best, most motivated and engaged talent
  - Empowered subject matter experts
  - No room for underperformers

Continuous Improvement
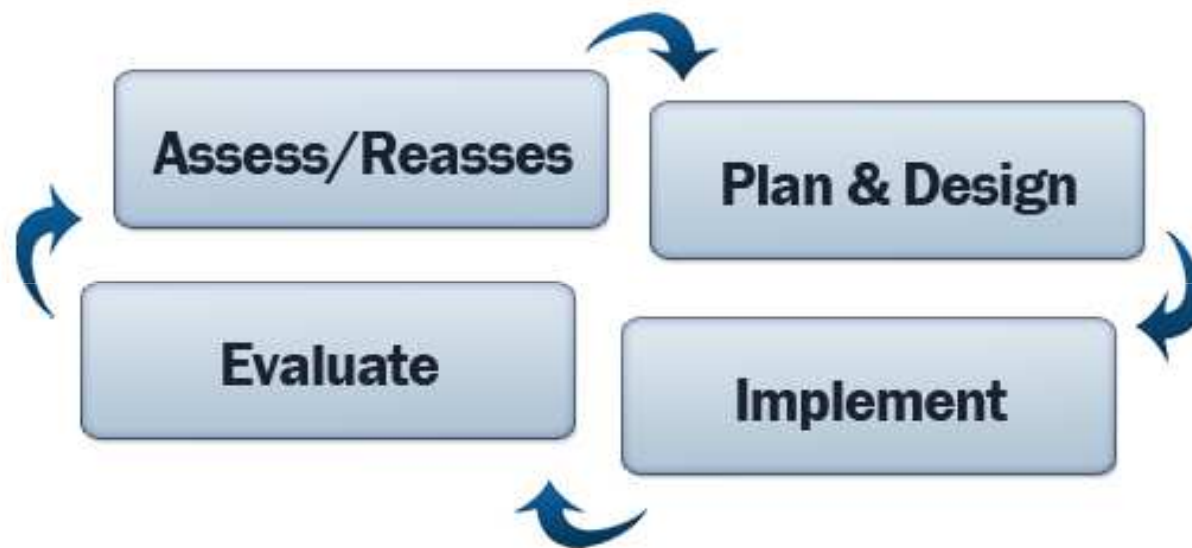
Agile Development
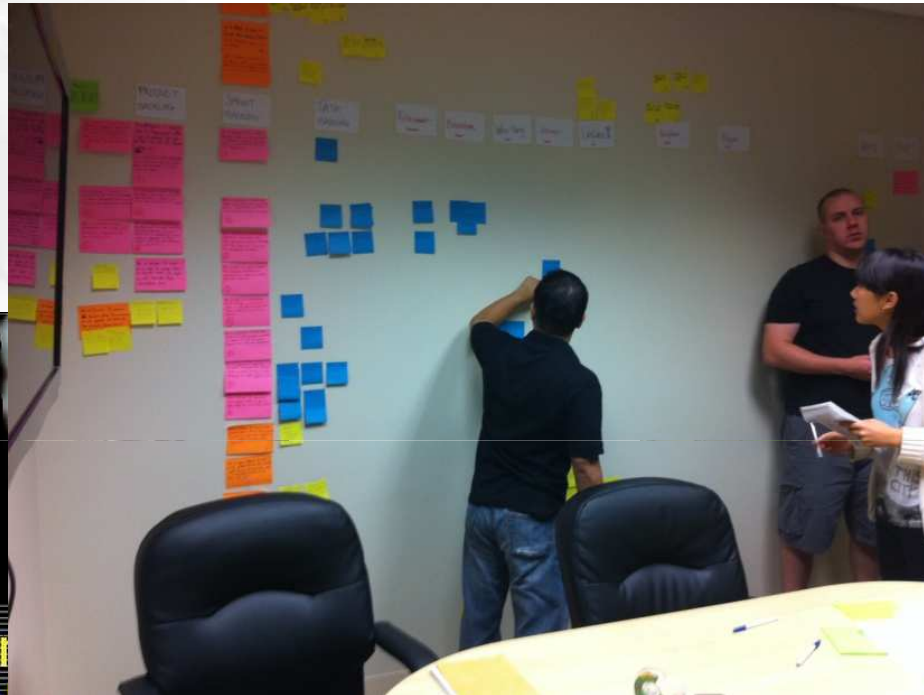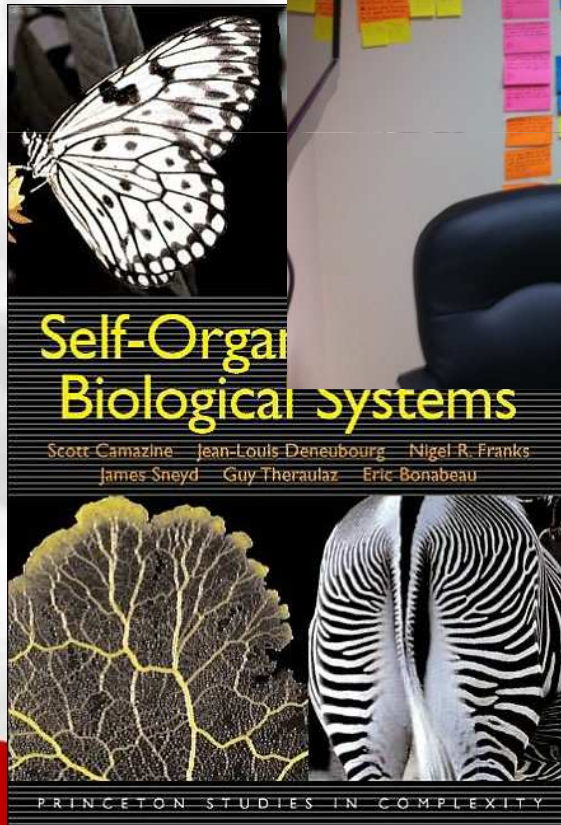
Lean Content Pipeline
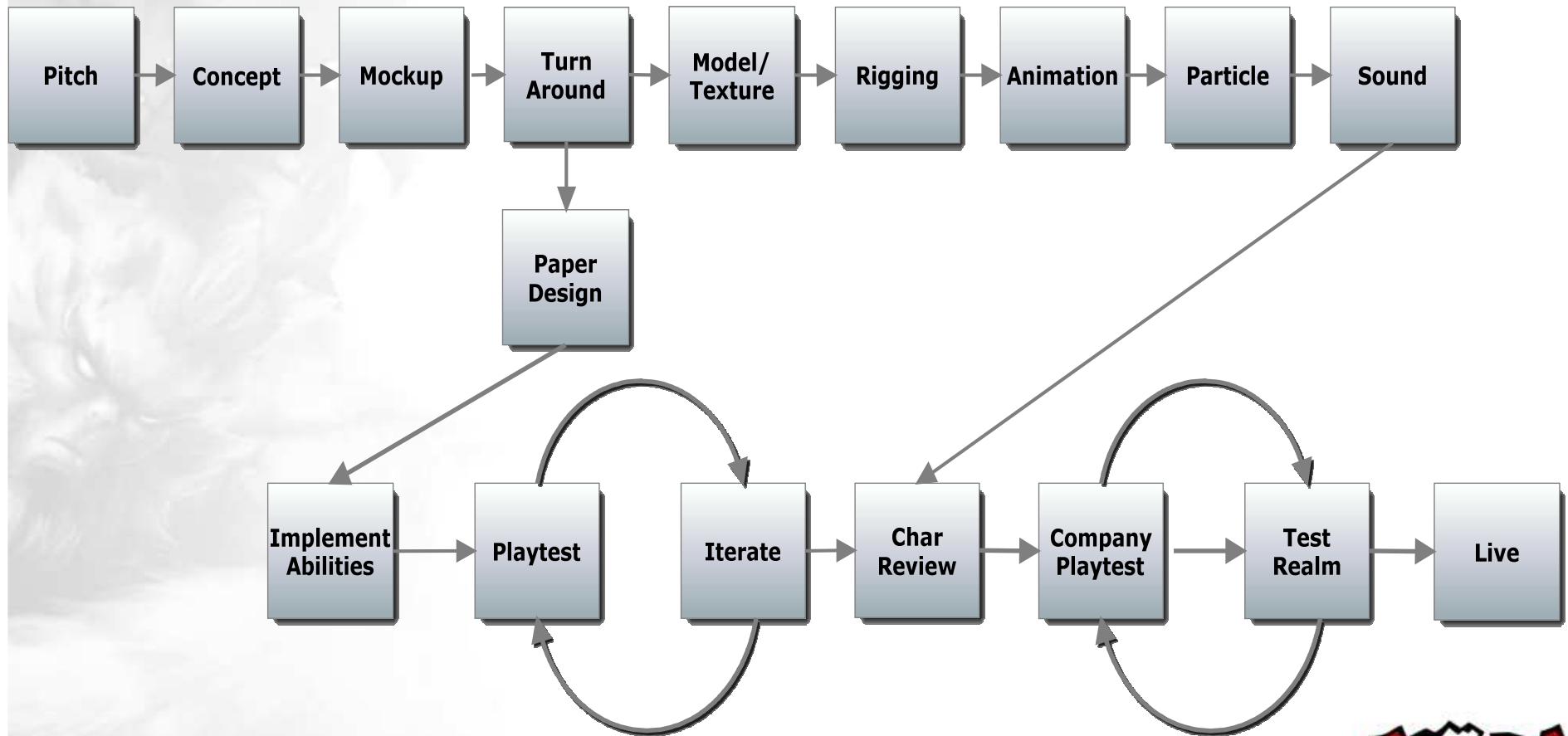
Pitch → Concept → Mockup → Turn Around → Model/Texture → Rigging → Animation → Particle → Sound

Turn Around → Paper Design

Paper Design → Implement Abilities → Playtest ⇄ Iterate → Char Review → Company Playtest ⇄ Test Realm → Live

Sound → Company Playtest

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS –
WHAT WENT WRONG

Waterfall

- False sense of control of software development
- Not flexible – fixed: order of execution, priorities & dates
- Gantt charts are useful for planning certain activities
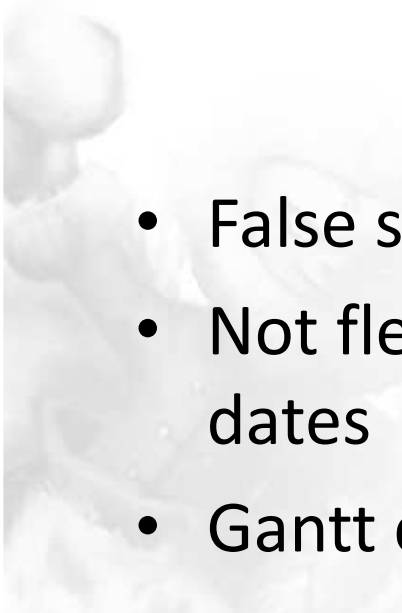
Manual Deployment

- Prone to human error, lengthy and inefficient
- Hurt development velocity
- Downtime is very damaging to customers

IT ALL STARTS WITH DESIGN

Design Goals

- Focus on fun & gameplay

- Expand upon what was great in DotA & evolve the experience

- Retain and enhance the depth while lowering the barriers to entry

DESIGN – WHAT WENT RIGHT

Character Design
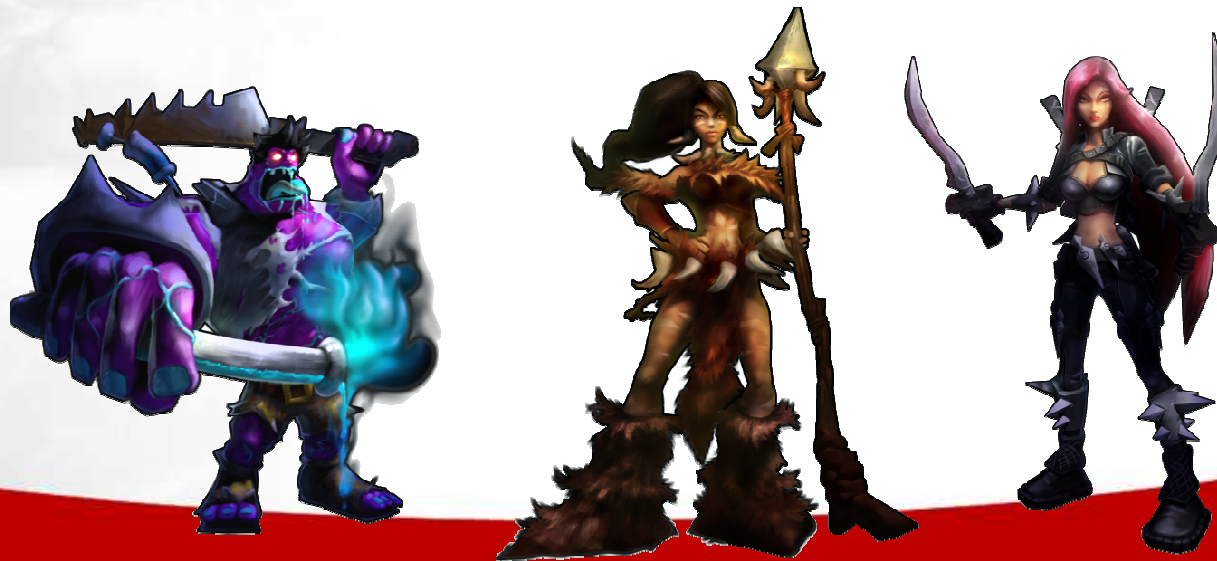
Controversial Decisions for Core Fans

- Removing deny
- Core mechanics & "spammy" abilities
- Brush
- Not losing gold on death

In-game shop

Did Not Prioritize Competitive At Launch
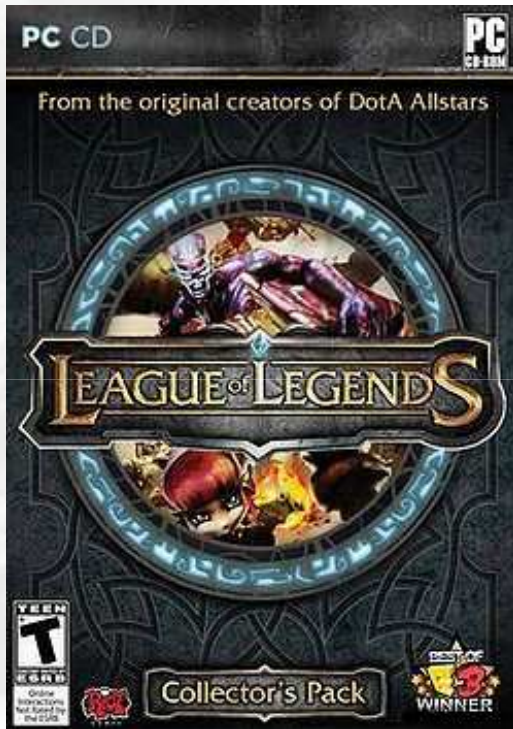
Pre-season – Nov 09
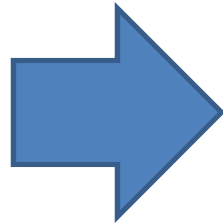
Season One – July 10

Matchmaking & Separate Game Types

Summoner System

Monetization

DESIGN – WHAT WENT WRONG

Onboarding

- High learning curve still challenging
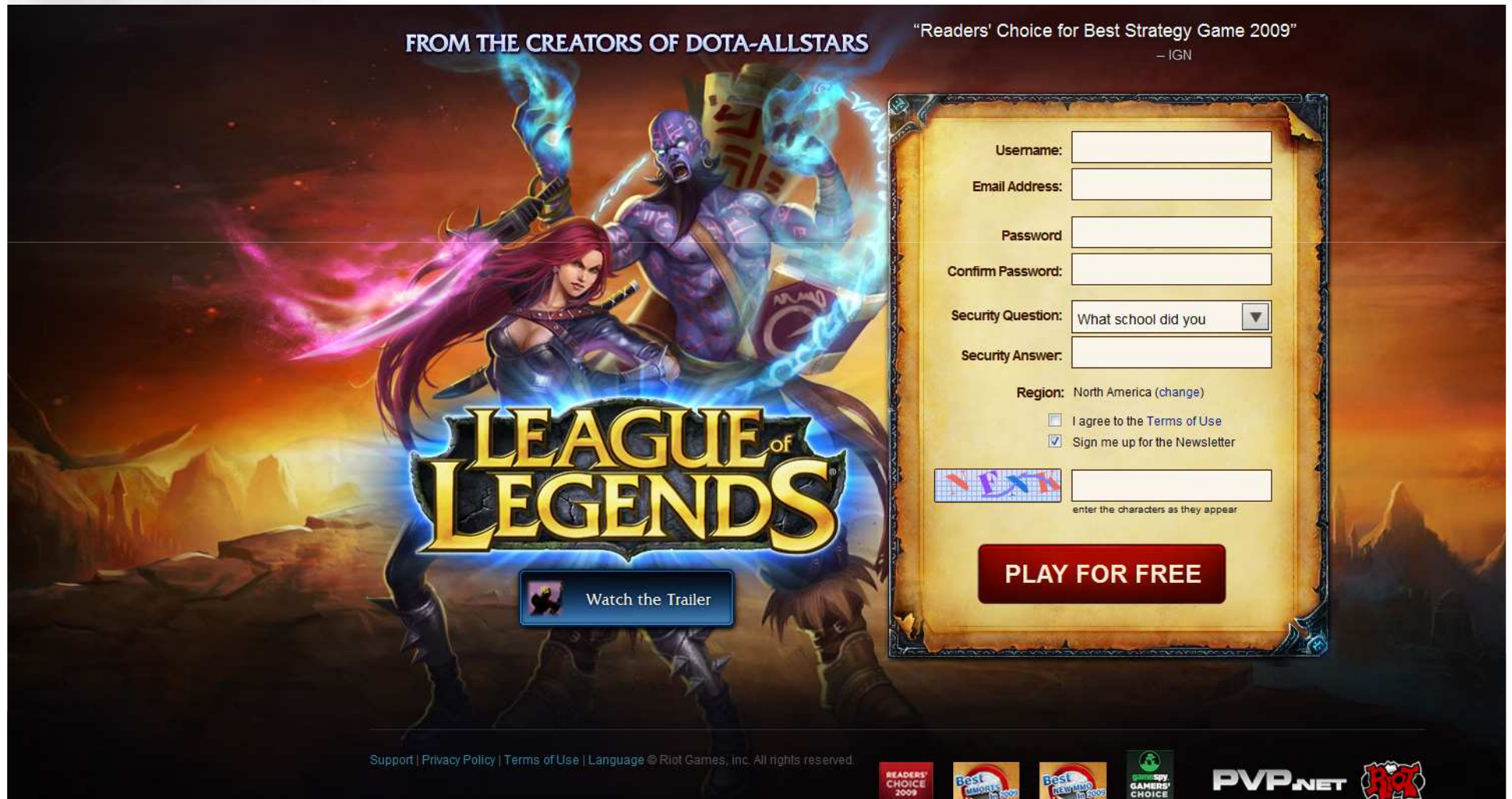
Community self-policing tools
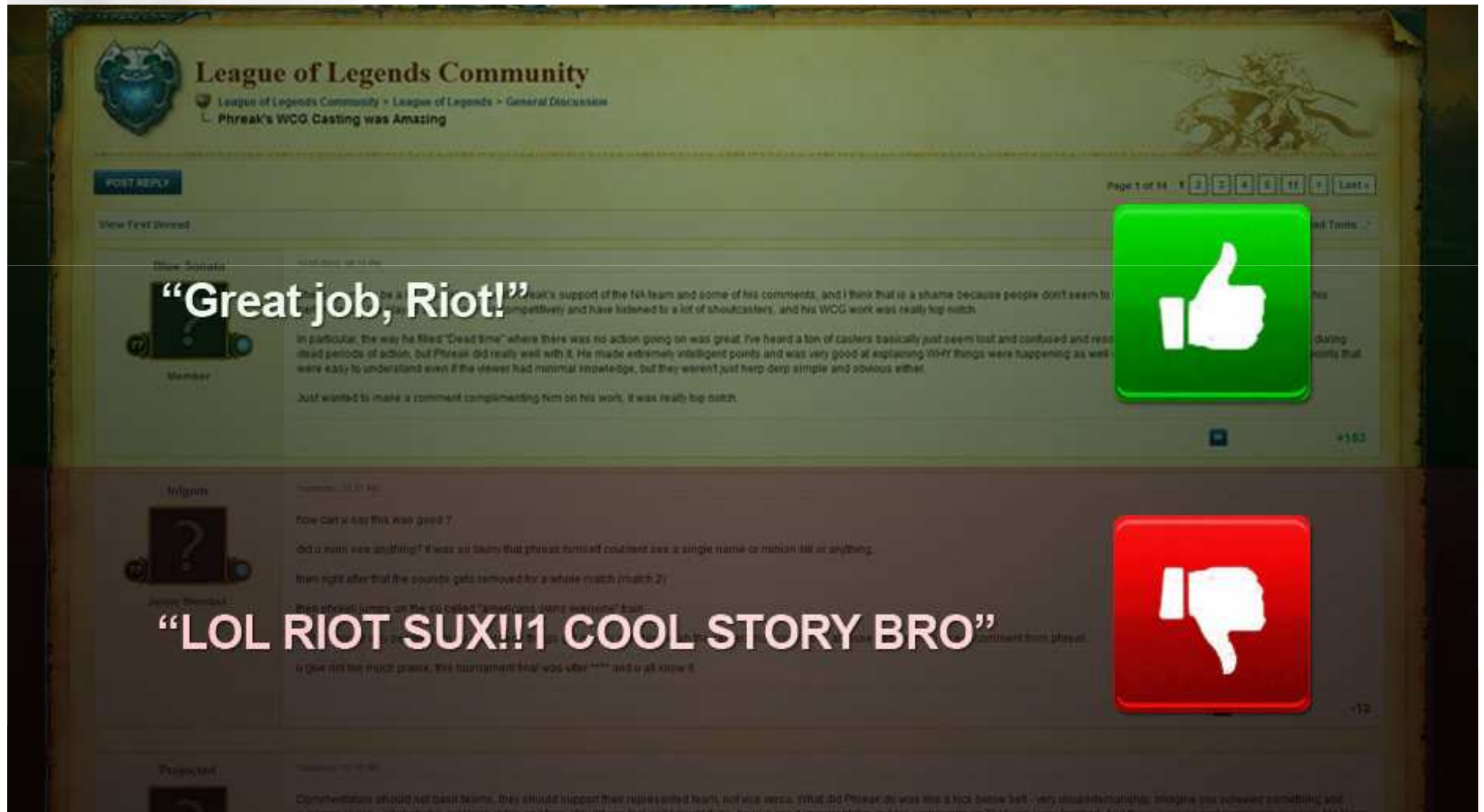
THE FIRST IMPRESSION - <u>ART</u>

Art Philosophy

- Gameplay trumps art needs
- Infuse personality / humor
- Don't alienate the East
- Push the imagination envelope
- Differentiate

ART – WHAT WENT RIGHT

Character Art
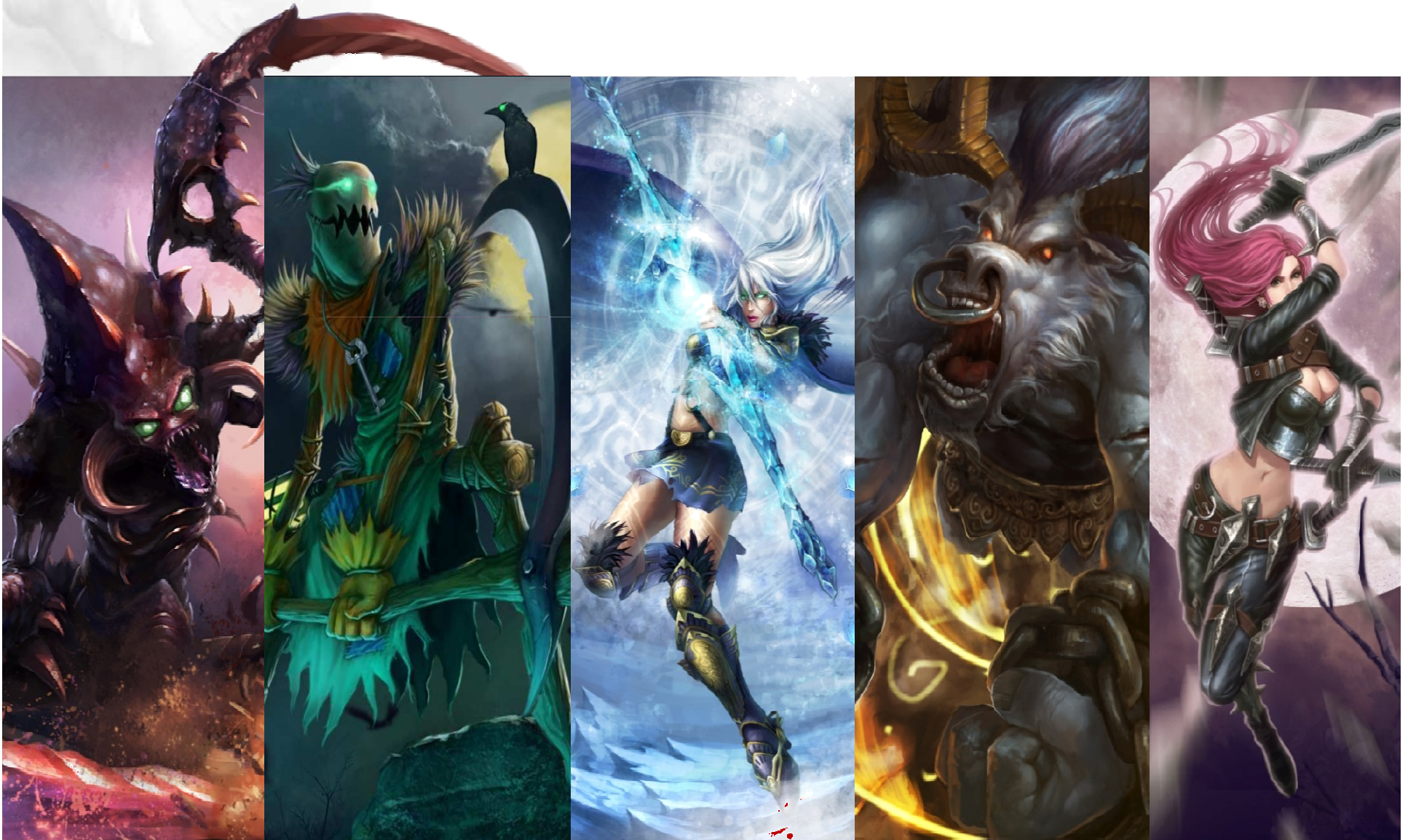
Stylized Look & Color Palette

Visual Effects

ART – WHAT WENT WRONG

Lack of Strong Tech Foundation

- Started with poor tech and bad tools
  - Limited our ability to do everything we wanted to do, so we worked around them (animations, shaders, etc)
  - Polish suffered & missed opportunities

Big improvements on the horizon

- Hiring an Art Director!

THE BACKBONE - <u>TECH</u>

Tech Philosophy

- Create that which was required to make the game fun
- Build tools to support our largest content pipelines
- Leverage viable 3rd party software

TECH – WHAT WENT RIGHT

Our Platform

Persistent Features:

- Leveling, talent trees, etc.

Community and Social Features:

- Friends list, chat, clans, etc.

Competitive Features:

- Rankings, ladders, elaborate matchmaking, etc…

Monetization:

- Wallet, shop, double currency management, worldwide payment methods, etc..

Massively Scalable:

- Big CCU numbers!
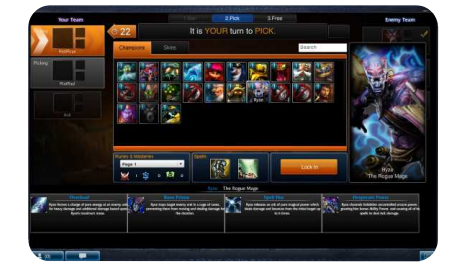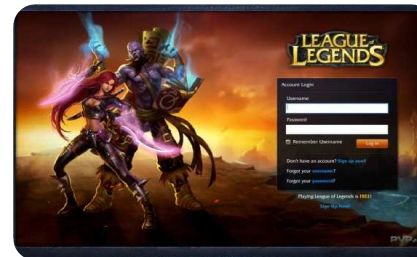
Load Testing
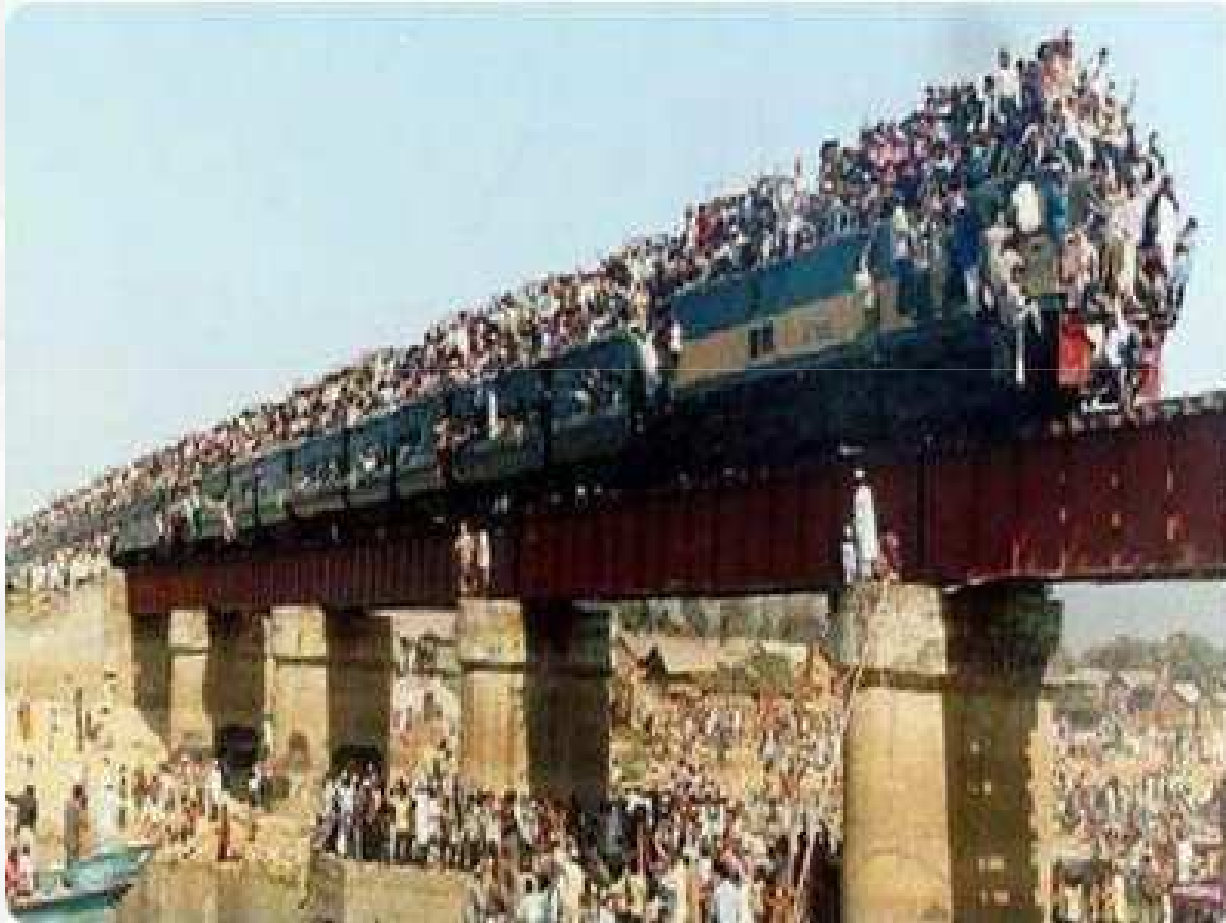
TECH – WHAT WENT WRONG

We grew fast!

Daily unique logins

27-Sep   27-Oct   27-Nov   27-Dec   27-Jan   27-Feb   27-Mar   27-Apr   27-May   27-Jun   27-Jul   27-Aug
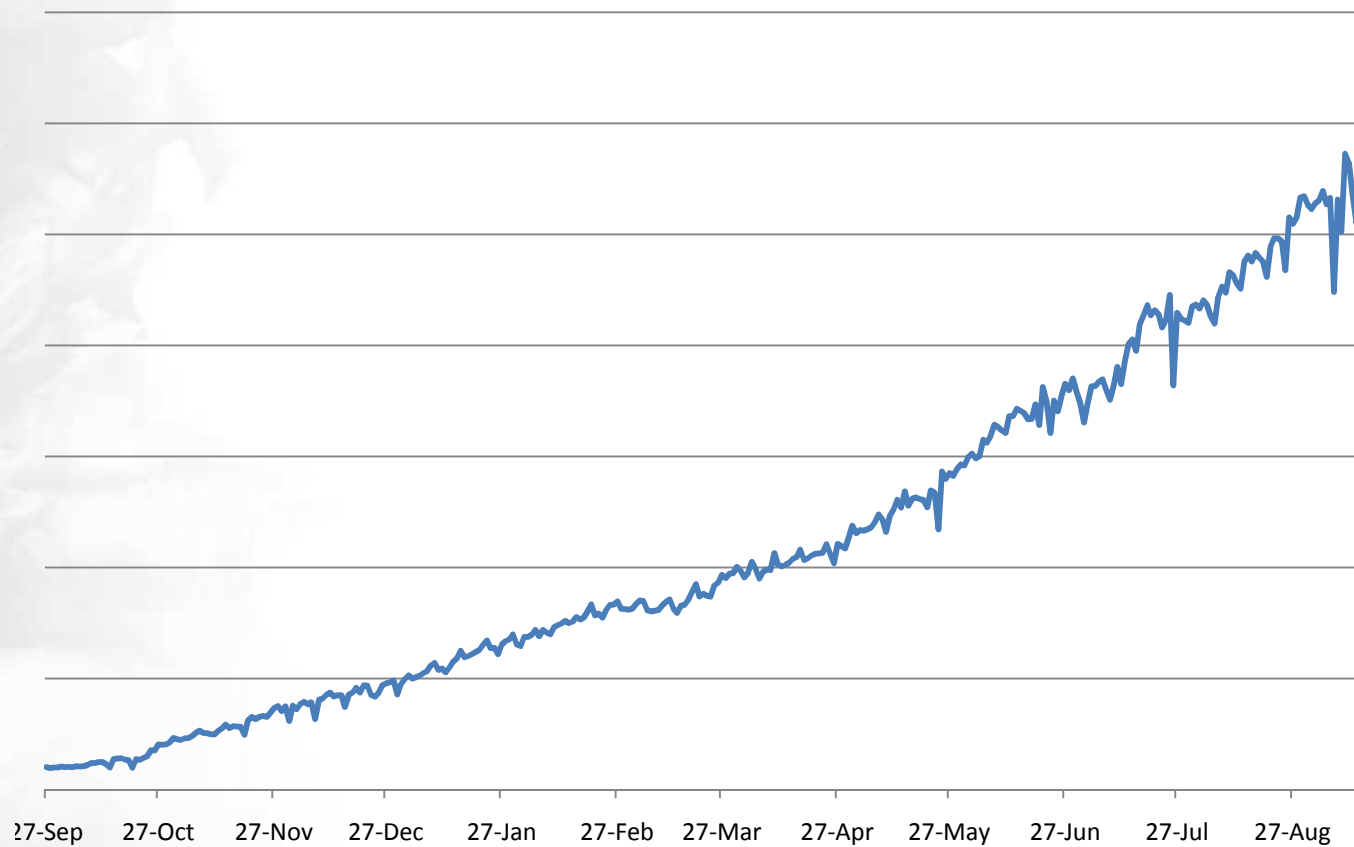
3rd Party Tech Products

- 3rd party tech
  - Patcher
  - Store
  - Billing
  - Chat
  - Back-end

THE LINK TO CUSTOMERS - **PUBLISHING**

Games as a Service (GaaS)

- **Better for the users**
  - Flexible payment models
  - Frequent updates
- **Better for the business**
  - Direct to consumer
  - Low friction adoption & word of mouth
  - Long tail revenue model
- **Better for development**
  - Iterative
  - Rapid user feedback

The Service Org

Game Development →

	Service
	Marketing
	Community
	Network/Operations
	Customer Service
	Web

We view service as an investment, not a cost

RIOT GAMES

Community Management

- This is much more than just managing the forums
- Number one job of the team: create evangelists
- Strong communities are sticky
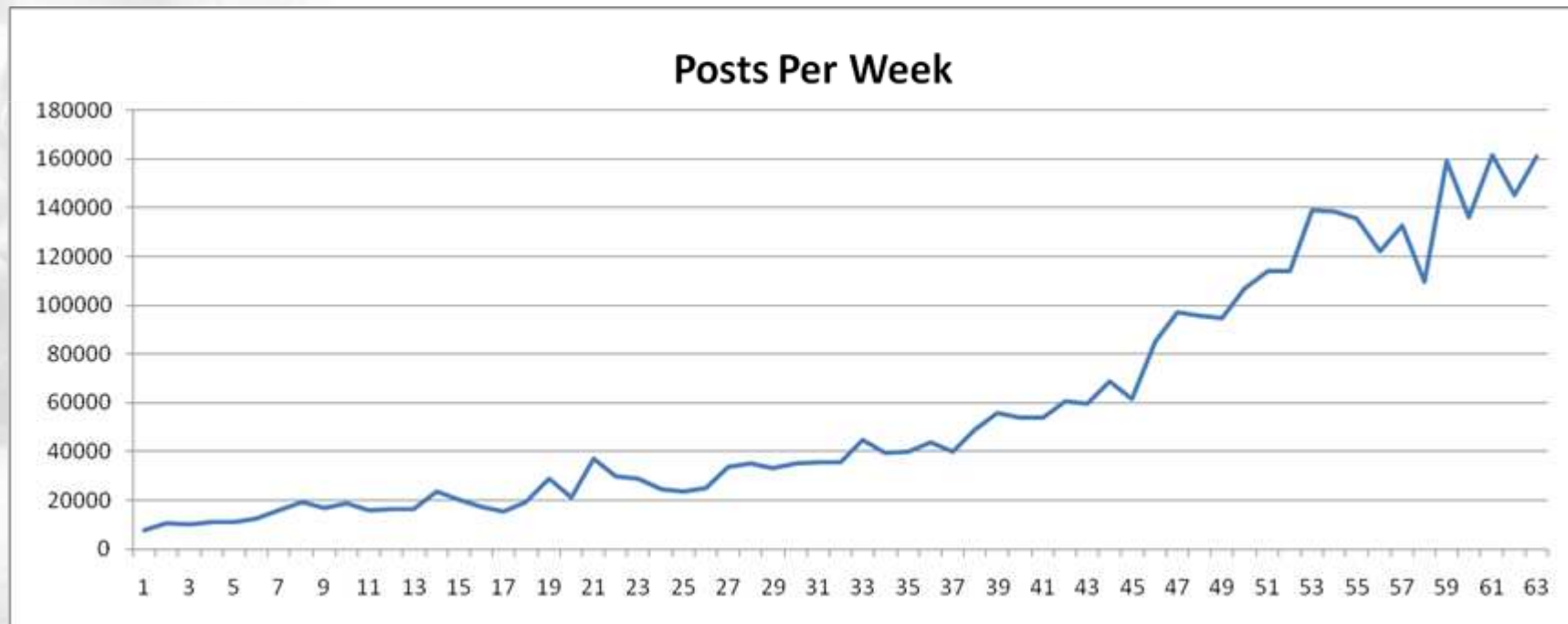
Customer Service

- Mission: to resolve customer issues while attempting to improve the perception a user has of the company post-interaction with CS

- Manage the self-support system (>90% of our user issues are resolved through this system)

- Police player behavior to create a healthier community

Network Operations

- Ops are the guys who keep the service running smoothly
- You don't notice them unless something is wrong
- It's easy to underestimate and undervalue operations
- We started lean here to avoid overinvestment and have been bitten with issues managing our growth

Traditional Marketing Isn't Sufficient

- Smarter Ongoing Marketing
  - Iterative, analytic-based advertising
  - Consumer centric dialogue on forums, e-mail, and in-game
  - Value-chain of motivated PC partners

- Community
  - Build trust and ownership through honesty and transparency
  - Create and facilitate evangelism (Refer a Friend program)
  - Leverage the audience (Facebook, YouTube, etc)
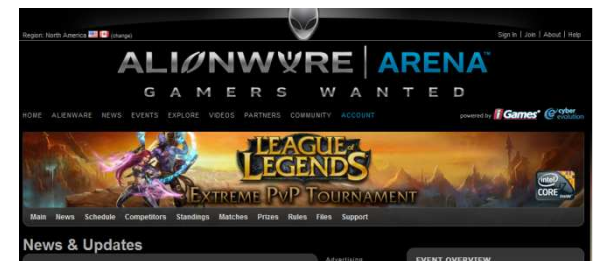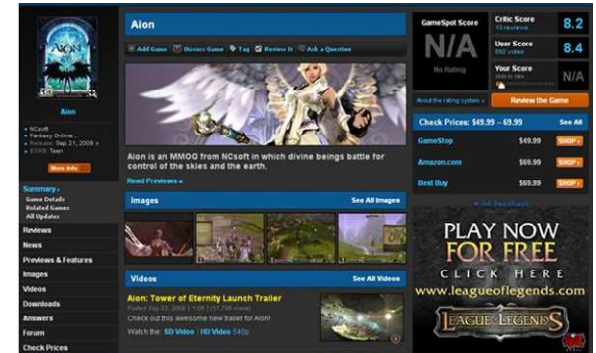
Key Performance Indicators

- KPI
  - With a core audience, the most important metric is **churn**
    - How well you retain your users is a reflection of:
      - How fun your game is over a sustained period of time
      - How satisfied, engaged and excited you keep your audience
  - Other key metrics:
    - Bounce rate
    - Monetization rate (of actives)
    - ARPPU vs. ARPAU

Additional Expertise…

- Merchandising
- Data analysis / biz intel
- Billing, fraud, currency management & payment methods

What's Next?

- Hiring!
- Launch in Asia
- Develop new projects
- Work with 3rd parties

Q&A