University of Victoria

Department of Computer Science

Defense of the Ancients: From mod to phenomenon

*TS 320 - Summer 2014*

Bill Xiong

V00737042

June 21, 2014

**Humble Beginnings**

I grew up in a very traditional Chinese family. My mother, ever concerned with my studies, forbade me access to games and the Internet until very late in my high school career. To fill the void, I would often sneak out to the afterschool gaming groups that formed in the computer labs after school had long finished for the day. Under the guise of doing group projects, I would spend hours watching and playing StarCraft and Warcraft III, the only two games that were able to be run under the school computer’s settings. I spent countless hours there, on the excuses-for-machines that the school called computers, trying and failing horribly to play Blizzard RTS games with a terribly sticky mouse and semi-functioning keyboard.

One day, I arrived in the lab to find it nearly full. Every person was gathered around a single computer, watching intently as one of the leading RTS players in the school tried his hand at something that was so different from Warcraft and yet so similar at the same time. I asked the nearest fellow spectator what was going on, and I only got one word in response: “DotA.” It was so spectator friendly, even back then.

DotA, or Defense of the Ancients, started as a little-played custom map called “Aeon of Strife” out of StarCraft. It never picked up steam, but it was ported to Warcraft III by a group of fans, and later compiled into DotA Allstars by Steve “Guinsoo” Feak. The idea behind the game was very simple: instead of having the immense complexity of a large-scale RTS, the mod reduced the game to a few, powerful player-controlled units battling each other, alongside an army of computer-controlled weaker units called creeps. Guinsoo loved the format and dreamed that it would one day become a competitively viable professional sport, highly ambitions for a mod built on top of someone else’s game, which a player had to find on the Internet, download, and install correctly just to be able to play.

**Conclusion**

DotA began as a little-played custom map and one developer’s dream for it to one day be accepted as a competitive game. In this aspect, Guinsoo and his clan-mates have more than succeeded: today, dota 2 is the most owned item in Steam. In China, the term “dota” is synonymous with e-sports, so much so that the Chinese Administration of Sport, the official sports authority of the Government of China supports it and broadcasts it on television, a feat unheard of for a “western” game. The US recognizes Dota and League of Legends as a sport, on par with NBA, NFL, and NHL so that pro players can get visas to come to the country for events. The success of the genre is also very apparent: the current world championship has a prize pool of nearly $9.8 million dollars, $8 million of which was contributed by the community. The player base only ever seems to grow, and though the market seems saturated, it generates more and more money each year. Despite dota’s notoriously high learning curve and insurmountable skill ceiling, new players just keep showing up, and the game grows every year.