

“We're Excited to Chart this Unknown Territory Together”: Storytelling Strategies in Patch Notes Documents

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ABSTRACT

Developers often describe changes to online games in Patch Notes. These documents are for players of the game to learn about changes and revise their understanding of the game. The evolution of Patch Notes Documents (PNDs) as a genre with structural conventions is a story of how adding narrative features helps explain changes to a genre-savvy audience. In this paper, I explore stylistic and structural techniques used in the PNDs to construct a consistent narrative of evolution of the online multiplayer game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Exploring narrativizing as sensemaking suggests that storytelling can supplement existing preservation activities for digital games.

Keywords

Patch notes, narrative, dynamic complex digital object, documentation, reader response theory, preservation.

INTRODUCTION

League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009), a popular online game, has been updated since its original release in 2009. With each update, Riot Games distributes “Patch Notes” that document changes to the game. I call these public-facing documents Patch Notes Documents (PNDs). Each PND describes a set of discrete changes to game elements like champions, items, maps, engine, or interface. One such set constitutes a patch, with an identifying version number. PNDs structure many distinct changes to game elements into a single coherent whole patch. Moreover, PNDs do not exist in isolation and each tell a chapter of the story of *League of Legends*. As documents, PNDs make the volatile change history of *League of Legends* make sense for the players who read these documents on the official web site and in the official client, as well as those fans who read PNDs re-hosted on third-party sites like Surrenderat20.net.

Even if the PNDs tell a coherent story, however, the “actual” stories of changes might not be as coherent. This paper comprises one part of a larger research project that includes interviews with players as well as other sources to explore how changing digital objects are meaningful in various ways. Some of these other sources contradict the coherent narrative of progress in the PNDs. For example, I interviewed one player who described changing his role entirely from support to top lane simply because of a few changes to a champion he played often. Even the language of “buffs” and “nerfs,”

used to describe positive or negative changes to a character, seems to support the instability of the change history of the game. Here, I invoke the sociolinguist Charlotte Linde's work on life stories and retroactive coherence of narratives (1993, 2001). It matters not that the events were never coherent to start with. Instead, the work of making events into a coherent narrative is part of the work that we all do in constructing our identity as humans, or as members of an institution that maintain an artifact over time.

I take the *League of Legends* PNDs as a research source precisely because PNDs are a notable part of many game ecosystems. It is worth understanding how these documents use different narrative strategies to tell a coherent story about the evolution of a game. In this paper, I focus on two types of strategies:

- Stylistic strategies associated with developing an authorial voice.
- Structural strategies associated with identifying and prioritizing change types.

These strategies work together to present the PNDs as a coherent narrative. Through stylistic strategies, the PNDs appear to be authored by a single narrator who espouses a consistent point of view regarding game changes. Through structural strategies, the PNDs emphasize the importance of certain changes and diminish the importance of other changes, promoting a generally coherent account of how the game's balance should be understood.

I use scholarly foundations from narratology and literary studies, which I explain below, to inform my reading of the PNDs and my analysis of the codes I developed. I also rely on close readings of salient examples from the PNDs to illustrate my analysis. Salient examples are thoughtful, intentional examples chosen to represent a broader concept or topic. By conducting close readings of these salient examples, I model the analytical work that went into producing these findings.

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES: STORY-MAKING AS SENSE-MAKING

My understanding of narrative owes a great deal to scholars of stories like Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish who position texts as a collaborative project of connotation and interpretation undertaken by a reader within an imagined audience and an author within an imagined role (Iser 1978, Fish 1980). To this end, I take the PNDs as an interface both between how the individual developers at Riot Games imagine their players, and between how the individual players of *League of Legends* imagine the developers.

In the Reader Response Theory proposed by Iser, a critic or scholar of a text must take a phenomenological approach to understanding *reading* itself. Texts are designed to be read, and a study of texts that abandons the participative process of reading ignores half of the equation. Iser, and the scholars who follow him in using Reader Response Theory as a touchstone, find great value in turning the spotlight on the actual people who read texts. For example, Janice Radway uses interviews and her own study of the social infrastructures around reading to explore how authors of genre romance novels have developed unique genre features that facilitate the interpretation and reading of texts by certain kinds of readers (1991). Without understanding the social, technical, and literary contexts by investigating readers, Radway could not have produced a critical reading of the work that romance novels do. The text is an interface, but we must also study what it interfaces between. In this project, I position players and developers in discourse around the texts of the PNDs and seek to understand how they communicate with one another through this interface. In so doing, I hope to understand the values and meaning that they ascribe to their participation in the cultural project known as *League of Legends*.

STYLISTIC STRATEGIES: TELLING THE STORY OF CHANGE FROM A UNIFIED PERSPECTIVE

This section focuses on the stylistic strategies that developers from Riot Games employ to create a unified perspective in the PNDs. These strategies center around a number of techniques to implement a coherent authorial voice that emerges and persists across the body of PNDs. I rely on concepts from narratology and literary studies to inform my focus on stylistic narrative strategies, and use close reading of salient examples to illustrate how these strategies work in practice.

Many kinds of literary study and narratology distinguish between the actual author and the implied author in order to investigate how the authorial persona is created and maintained. Literary critic Wayne Booth proposed the term “implied author,” referring to the persona constructed by the text when discussing narrative as rhetoric (1983). Narratologists like Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, and Marie-Laure Ryan have debated the muddled relationship between an implied author and a narrator (Genette 1997, Bal 2009, Ryan 2011). Put as simply as possible, the implied author refers to the persona that a reader assumes wrote the text, based on clues from the text. When readers interact with narrative texts, even though they are reading words written by an actual author, they are also reading a narrative constructed by this actual author that adopts an authorial persona. For example, the Gothic text *The Castle of Otranto* was written by Horace Walpole in 1794. The novel, however, was distributed with paratextual material explaining how an early medieval manuscript containing the story was found and restored, constructing an implied author claimed to be someone completely different from, and several centuries older than, Horace Walpole. Claiming to be older allowed the narrative to exploit a sense of authenticity to gain impact, and helped establish a trend in Gothic literature of using paratextual material and implied authors to heighten the emotional effect of the narratives. Typically, however, implied authors are rather close to actual authors, with only a few shades of difference. Ryan argues that it is exactly the authenticity of implied authors that makes them compelling to begin with (2011). With the PNDs, the distinction between implied and actual author is even more complicated, because the PNDs are written by a team of employees of Riot Games that has evolved over time. The PNDs attribute these employees as individuals while persistently maintaining a voice that speaks for Riot Games as a whole.

In this section, I explore the development and construction of authorial voice in PNDs by examining three specific aspects in more detail.

- First, I describe how a distinct authorial voice emerged in the PNDs over time.
- Second, I describe how focalizing language like “you” and “we” instantiates an implied author and an implied audience for the PNDs.
- Third, I discuss how whimsical stylistic choices add depth and intensify the authorial voice.

Emergence of an authorial voice

Authorship of the PNDs can be more complex than it seems, and is affected by institutional or organizational factors. Early on, the PNDs appeared to be a byproduct of the design work, and closer in function to “changelogs” in other kinds of software. The lists of changes distributed in 2009-2010 through the Riot Boards, an early developer-supported forum, simply list what changed with minimal organization and no context. One author was responsible for posting these lists in a thread on the boards, much like any other thread created by any member of the community. The threads were set apart by the author’s name in red text, signifying that the poster was a member of Riot Games. Most of these early PNDs were posted by one individual on the design

team. In contrast, later PNDs are credited to a rotating team of individuals who work in outreach and player community functions. Instead of a designer posting a list of changes from the actual design work, the PNDs require a group of individuals hired to communicate to produce thousands and thousands of words to describe, explain, and justify the changes made to the game. I will address the increasing reliance on contextualizing later, as well as the use of world-building techniques. For now, I focus on the construction of a singular authorial identity to help navigate the transition from the early lists of changes to the current elaborate documents. In my corpus of over 200 PNDs, there are 23 authors formally credited with contributing to the PNDs. Prior to the standardized distribution on the official web site, the PNDs posts formally attribute a single author — the employee who posted the document to the official forum. After the transition to pages on the official web site, the PNDs attribute up to four authors. There may be a simple, structural explanation for this: forum posts cannot be attributed to multiple posters, while the author attribution on the pages just requires another name in a specific field. That said, the formal transition from single authors to multiple, rotating authors has a generalizing effect on the part of the reader, disaggregating the PNDs from a singular person's identity and instead attaching it to Riot Games as an organization. I would like to make it clear that the formal difference between a requisite single author credit and the chance to attribute up to four is what I am discussing here, not the actual construction of the documents.

Despite the rotating cast, authors still find opportunities to display their personalities, as evinced by the first and last paragraph of the introduction to Document 222 (V7.22):

Hey team, Safelocked here. I'm the Lead Gameplay Producer, aka the Gameplay version of Lead Producer Joe "Audible Chocolate" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yq2i6RDmbNc] New001, and before you dive into one of LoL's biggest patch notes to date, I want to take a moment to recap this year. Side note: If you landed here looking for more Runes Reforged information, click here [http://na.leagueoflegends.com/en/featured/preseason-update].

[...]

"We've been talking about preseason changes for about six months now, and if you haven't heard about them just yet: They'll look crazy. They might actually be crazy too—it's preseason, after all! We're looking to discover with you, outplay each other, and learn again. We're in our most ambitious preseason yet, and we're excited to chart this unknown territory together.

See you on the Rift,

Safelocked"

This introduction manages to weave together a singular identity, that of Safelocked, with the collective design identity of Riot Games. The introduction positions Safelocked as a qualified representative of Riot's design team taking a moment to revisit major changes from the past year and introduce a new authoritative source for more information. Safelocked then uses this representative identity to speak for the developers, mentioning that "we've been talking about preseason changes" and that "we're looking to discover with you." In moments like these, the individual authors responsible for PNDs are able to nimbly negotiate their identity as individuals and as representatives of a collective.

I argue that the appearance of introductory segments to the PNDs augments the creation of authorial voice by providing space for the authors to contextualize the idea of iterative development. While it is rare, early PNDs do sometimes include introductions, such as the following:

“Summary from the Designers

This patch is focused upon the following main issues:

- **Area of Effect damage and disable spells being too powerful**
 - Area of Effect is taking a pretty large hit this patch, especially to the damage on Galio’s Idol of Durand, Morgana’s Soul Shackles and Vladimir’s Hemoplague. After seeing its effect on the game over a longer period of time, we’ve found something more akin to Annie’s Summon: Tibbers is a proper mix of area size, damage, and disable. We have several area-effect skills in the game that have snuck past this and we’re looking to bring these back to acceptable levels.
- **Strong supports are able to protect powerful ranged carries too well, cancelling their fragility too easily**
 - We’re starting with a duration nerf to Morgana’s Black Shield and Janna’s Eye of the Storm to reward better timing of the spell reactively and to raise the skill ceiling a bit on these spells. If this proves too little, we’ll evaluate the need for additional changes in a future patch.
- **Ranged carries, holistically, are too safe considering their damage output**
 - While we predict bigger changes will be required, our first adjustments are to lower the movement speeds of ranged carry-style champions to provide more of a tradeoff, and nerf Blessing of the Lizard Elder when used on ranged champions. We’d like to keep ranged carries “safer” than melee, while beginning to provide more tradeoffs that both give melee a place in the game and differentiate the roles of melee and ranged characters.” (Document 37, Patch v1.0.0.106)

In this introductory section, despite appearing in a forum post, the authors strategically use a distant tone and use “we” to speak from a position of authority about the effects of changes that seek to address “main issues.” The use of an introduction section in the documents positions patching itself as a normal, expected activity in the life of a game. A later PND includes the following introduction:

“Sup homies,

Welcome to patch 7.15, the one where we dial back on the Cho’Gath update and tone down some of the dominant competitive picks in the game.

For the competitive side of the game, Regional Finals are approaching. As a result, we’re trying to increase some variance at the highest levels of play, but also to create some stability, and that means many minor changes. To start, we’re giving some dominant champions love taps downwards, as well as showing some love to underplayed champions on the cusp of seeing professional play. So while it may look like a larger patch than usual, many of the changes are pretty small.

Oh, and remember Urgot? Well, we've pimped his ride and now he's headed to the battlefield as a brand new juggernaut, complete with knee-shotguns. We'll say that one more time for you. Knee-shotguns. Check 'em out.

So get out there on the Rift and read up on Urgot's abilities, or you'll Dread Nought knowing what he does when he grinds you to pieces.

Paul "Aether" Perscheid
Phillip "Costy" Costigan
Mattias "Gentleman Gustaf" Lehman
Lucas "Luqizilla" Moutinho" (Document 200, Patch 7.15)

In this introduction, the authors use a stylized, casual tone to describe goals for the patch. The authors use phrases like "the [patch] where" to position patching as an expected part of game development that allows the developers to address issues with the game. The introduction also acknowledges that players might look at the PND and become intimidated by the number of changes, and mitigates this anxiety by calling the changes "love taps." Thus, the PNDs develop a sense of Riot Games as a benevolent developer committed to doing what is best for the game.

Use of focalizing language to instantiate the implied author and the implied audience

In addition to the creation of an authorial voice through tone and diction, deciding how to address the reader also has an impact. In my reading of the PNDs, I created codes to identify focalizing language, especially the use of "you" and "we," and used these codes to establish an understanding of patterns. Focalization in narratology refers to the lens through which a story is told (Prince, 2003). Positioning Riot Games and their playerbase so discretely using "you" and "we" allows the authors of the PNDs to maintain a clear sense of intent while taking the players' complex and multivariied sentiments into apparent consideration. For example, the PNDs often include lines speaking directly to player actions in the interface like "**You** can now open the shop from anywhere on the map, but can still only buy items when **you** are within range of the shop, or dead" (Document 2, Alpha week 2).

The PNDs also address the experience of players dealing with in-game effects, such as the following excerpt:

"All slow zones now update on a quarter-second interval, meaning when **you** move out of a slow field, the slow will wear off almost immediately unless **you're** hit by an ability that applies an individual slow (like Kog'Maw's Void Ooze). What this means: **your** champion's movement speed will be restored more quickly when leaving a slow field, but the slow within the fields have not been changed" (Document 111, Patch V3.8).

And finally, the PNDs may also address an idealized sense of player sentiment, as in the following note about a change to an item:

"Technically speaking, Rageblade still counts as an attack speed item because of its stacking buff. That said, the loss of the flat value feels like (and often is) a step backward, given that attack speed is necessary to stack Rageblade quickly. As a result, it only feels good to purchase Guinsoo's if **you** can supplement it with other attack speed items. We want the Rageblade to feel unconditionally better when **you** complete it, even if **you** don't have other attack speed items" (Document 216, Patch V6.23, emphasis added by author).

In actuality, “you” and “we” can sometimes even refer to the same person — players contribute to the game in various ways, and developers are also often players themselves. The consistent use of “you” and “we,” however, constructs a clear relationship between development and play that positions development as a collective, unified endeavor that also listens to play. It is by constructing this relationship that the authors are able to present developers as a unified identity, even though individual developers and teams may have different goals, approaches, and intents for design.

Creating a distinct authorial voice to speak for the multifaceted corporate identity of Riot Games and the designers within makes it easier to retain a consistent identity through the many different kinds of changes to the game, but it also means that players may have to negotiate the meaning of changes with a unified voice that can never be unified. This complex task of creating an authorial voice is assisted by techniques like using first- and second-person pronouns, developing a consistent language for certain repetitive events, and limning an audience by invoking the actual play by players. Some of these techniques also augment other ways the PNDs interface between developers and players, such as using examples from actual play to help justify a change. In this section, however, I focus on how the writers of the PNDs develop a consistent and focalized authorial voice and how they maintain it to frame changes as coming from a larger construct that most often knows what it is doing. Riot Games has a voice distinct from the voices of any of its members, and it is with this voice that the PNDs are narrated and it is through this voice that they *mean* anything.

Worldbuilding and whimsy: Adding depth to authorial voice

PNDs incorporate numerous references that strengthen the fantasy of the game’s world, along with humorous asides in the form of puns and jokes. This includes “worldbuilding” text like “Tryndamere has been working out and is now approximately 20% bigger” that references the in-game world of *League of Legends* (Document 22, V1.0.0.122). Such worldbuilding inclusions are ostensibly not helpful for the work of the PNDs, which document changes to the game in the real world. In the case of the example above, the writers could easily have said “we’ve increased Tryndamere’s model by 20%” and been just as communicative. Instead of setting the game’s fiction apart, however, the PNDs embrace a complex “half-real” relationship with the game world and nod to its internal coherence as a way to explain mechanical changes (Juul, 2005).

In my reading of the PNDs, I coded many instances where the documents referenced the fantasy of the game world to augment communication about changes to the game. Tying changes directly to the game world allows the writers to motivate changes as serving the game’s overall fantasy, even as they change it. For example, in the following segment from the PNDs, the writers use worldbuilding information about a champion, Garen, to help explain certain changes to an ability mechanic.

“Garen’s a man of simple tastes; he spins, yells, and most importantly fights for his friends. As a protector of the meek and timid, it never made much sense that taking down the hero directly should brand you as a villain when it’s just business. We want Garen’s anti-carry to play out over the course of the game like a sort of vindictive hot-potato, but you shouldn’t be penalized for successfully crushing his dreams in lane.” (Document 149, Patch 5.18)

The excerpt begins with a sentence that characterizes Garen in terms of the game’s fantasy world. Referencing Garen’s “simple tastes,” this passage sets Garen up as a classic hero with a strong sense of his goals, and a strong sense of his worldview. Garen is a “protector,” not a duelist, and as a protector he would accept defeat in the line of duty. The passage transitions from direct worldbuilding and setup of Garen’s character

to using that setup to motivate specific changes to the mechanics of one of Garen's abilities, described a few lines down: "removed SELF-DEFENSE: Killing Garen no longer causes the killer to gain Villainy" (Document 149, Patch 5.18). Garen still does increased damage to the opponent who killed an ally of Garen's most recently, maintaining the "protector of the meek and timid" persona from the worldbuilding text. Now, however, Garen does not switch targets when killed by a different opponent. As explained in the worldbuilding text, "it's just business." This passage is a particularly rich example of the kind of work that worldbuilding does even in the context of an epitextual document such as a PND. Even though the PNDs do not directly contribute to the game's fantasy world, the writers engage in worldbuilding techniques like referencing characters and events in order to support a consistent reading of the patch changes as natural continuations of an extant story.

In addition to relying on worldbuilding strategies to enhance the PNDs, the documents also incorporate puns and wordplay. In my coding of the documents, I use the term "whimsy" to capture these humorous asides. Whimsy and worldbuilding are often entwined as both rely on strands of metanarratives that intersect the patch texts, as with the passage above where the writers use a champion's personality to justify changes to the mechanics and use changes to the mechanics to build a sense of character. Whimsy and worldbuilding are also related because both strategies ostensibly do not add much to the bare-bones function of PNDs: to explain what changed. For example, a very early PND simply lists a set of changes to one champion ability:

- "Dazzle
- * Is fabulous
 - * Increased Cooldown from 13/12/11/10/9 to 14/13/12/11/10
 - * Damage now scales by range (more damage the closer you are)
 - * Increased Damage from 80/130/180/230/280 to 80/160/240/320/400
 - * Reduced Max Stun from 2.5 to 2
 - * Made Tooltip easier to understand" (Document 7, v0.9.22.16)

The first change in the list, "Is fabulous," says nothing about a specific change to mechanics or attributes, and explains nothing for the subsequent changes in the list. Why is it there? What work does it do? It adds humor and depth to the list, and gives the reader a sense of a creative human behind the scenes. I argue that these functions are no less notable when it comes to how we make sense of changes to digital objects over time. If a change is described as making sense in terms of gameplay and in terms of game lore or character identity, that is more support for why the change "needed" to happen. Integrating the narrative of changes into the game's lore also provides another level of explanation besides simply messing with play.

STRUCTURAL STRATEGIES: IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING CHANGES

This section focuses on the structural strategies that developers from Riot Games use in the PNDs to delineate, sort, and highlight types of changes. I describe two primary structural strategies:

- The development of an overall consistent structure for describing changes, in the form of a problem-solution-justification framework.
- The use of textual elements to orient players to certain changes and their effects: headings, lists, text styles, and links.

Characterizing changes through a consistent structure: Summary-context-change

The PNDs feature increasing amounts of contextualizing and justification work, evolving from simple lists to deploying a structure of summary-context-change. In the later PNDs, this structure looks like two distinct sections of text first explaining the issue and then describing why the offered solution is best. After these sections, the change itself is described in the same straightforward manner as earlier PNDs. For example, Document 106 contains the following text about changes to the champion Katarina:

“Summary: Death Lotus now deals more damage at later levels, and has been kicked up a notch overall with higher AP and AD ratios. We've increased the channel time of Death Lotus and removed its cast time delay, meaning Katarina's overall damage should remain roughly the same (if not higher) even if interrupted. The slightly reduced cooldown on Death Lotus means that at rank three it will take exactly three kills or assists to reset her ultimate.

Context: We wanted to re-focus more power and gameplay into Katarina's Death Lotus by increasing its high-threat damage. Ultimately, we think Katarina is more fun and unique when both she and her opponents are focused on executing or stopping Death Lotus. While the increased channel duration might seem like a nerf if interrupted early (since the ability deals damage over time), we removed the cast time delay to accommodate.

Death Lotus

- * No longer has a cast time delay before channeling (previously had a 0.25 second delay)

- * Total damage increased to 400/575/750 (+2.5 ability power)(+3.75 bonus attack damage) (from 400/500/600 (+2.0 ability power)(+3.0 bonus attack damage))

- * Channel time increased to 2.5 seconds (from 2)

- * Cooldown reduced to 60/52.5/45 seconds (from 60/55/50)”

(Document 106, Patch v3.12)

Here, we see an example of the contextualization work in the PNDs. In three sections, the document clearly sets up a tripartite structure that separates the contextualization work from the description of changes. The summary section gives a high-level overview of the changes to one of Katarina's abilities, Death Lotus. The summary section also describes expectations for effects of the changes. The context section explicitly identifies a problem with a lack of “power and gameplay” in the Death Lotus ability, proposes a design solution, and addresses possible criticisms. Finally, the changes section lists actual changes to the mechanics and attributes of the ability. By distinguishing each of these three sections, the PND takes three steps to coming to terms with changes and invites readers to follow along in the narrative.

The writers of the PNDs use the word “context” to set off context sections like the one in the Katarina changes, and I derived the “context” tag from this use. I found examples of justification work inspiring a “justification” code in earlier PNDs, but these were not within distinct context sections. For example, an early PND lists changes to the champion Akali's abilities as follows:

- “* Fixed a bug where Mark of the Assassin [sic] would proc even if you miss or are dodged

- * Fixed a bug where her Twin Passives discipline failed to count Ability Power and Damage gained through buffs, such as improved Ignite, Eye of the Storm, or Mejai's Soulstealer
 - * Fixed a bug where Crescent Slash was spell vamping for too much
 - * *Twin Disciplines Spell Vamp ratio increased to 10% per 100 Damage, from 5% per 100 Damage, to compensate for the above bug fix. In total, Akali will vamp more from her single target spells and less from Crescent Slash*
 - * Akali can no longer Shadow Dance out of disables
 - * Adjusted Akali's hit timing to be more accurate"
- (Document 52, Patch V1.0.0.87, italics added by author)

One of the elements in this list is different from the rest. The italicized element includes an explanation of the change to the Spell Vamp ratio, justifying it as necessary "to compensate for the above bug fix." The line continues, explaining the expected results of this change. In one list element, the PND tangles the three different steps of summary, context, and solution. Tangling these steps within an inconsistent structure and within the genre expectations of a simple list complicates the relationship between the PNDs and their readers. Instead of accepting a list of changes to the game, the reader here must do extra work to construct their own justifications for the other changes in the list.

The other changes in the list above are presented as simple, natural solutions to unspecified problems, yet the change to the Twin Disciplines ability's Spell Vamp ratio requires extra justification. What makes this change different from the rest? The first clue comes from the language of the document. The first three changes in the list begin with the words, "Fixed a bug." The language of fixing a bug proliferates through the PND in various forms like "fixed a bug" and "bugfix." Within the linguistic conventions of software programming, bugs are errors in the implementation of a program that do not reflect an intention on the part of the designer. Bugs exist to be fixed, so the first three changes in the list do not require justification. The final change in the list, "Adjusted Akali's hit timing to be more accurate," similarly deploys the charged language "more accurate" to support a reading of this change as natural progression. Again, no justification necessary. It is perhaps only the second-to-last change in the list, "Akali can no longer Shadow Dance out of disables," that approaches the Twin Disciplines change in terms of desire for justification. There is no language of accuracy or bugfixing to support the natural progression reading of this change. Instead, the reader must work to place the Shadow Dance change in conversation with the Twin Disciplines change and consider why one requires justification and one does not. One compelling reading of the difference suggests that like the "more accurate" change, the Shadow Dance change reflects a better implementation of the designers' vision for the ability. This early PND, however, leaves it up to the reader to produce justification on demand, complicating the work that the reader must do to produce a coherent narrative about changes to the game. In contrast, the later PNDs deploy a consistent structure of summary-context-change that models the justification work that the reader must do to make sense of changes.

I developed "context" and "justification" codes while reading the many PNDs in depth. Both codes describe how the PNDs can function by adding broad detail to explain specific changes. Context sections and justification work illustrate how the writers position design vis-à-vis play. Design is a way to react to play and a way to nudge play in directions. That said, because of the function of the PNDs, they can only ever describe design solutions. The implied solution framed in PNDs is always a specific change or set of changes made to a game element or software target, and not explicitly a suggestion to players to reformulate how they think about the game. Contextualizing

and justifying are both effective narrative strategies in the PNDs that the writers turn to repeatedly.

Orientation through textual elements: Headings, lists, styles, links

In addition to incorporating textual elements of narrative, the PNDs also rely on an evolving structure that supports the generic form of a PNDs. Early PNDs posted on the official forums used the unordered list markup to list distinct changes in a general order of changes to champions, changes to items, and then changes to other game elements. As the PNDs evolved over time, the writers began using more and more structural features of hypertext like nested headings, unordered lists, different colors and typefaces, or within-document links to help the documents flow better. The PNDs released now are recognizable manifestations of the document genre form of *League of Legends* PNDs.

The *League of Legends* PNDs are also distinctive as an early example of an increasingly common genre form: PNDs in digital games. In mid-2019, Riot Games released a new game, *Teamfight Tactics* (Riot Games, 2019), that uses champions and items from *League of Legends*. Riot Games releases PNDs for *Teamfight Tactics* that are separate from the *League of Legends* PNDs but use the same document structure and markup (see Figures 1A and 1B, below). Another major game company, Blizzard Entertainment, also releases structured PNDs for their MOBA game, *Heroes of the Storm*, and games in other genres like *World of Warcraft* and *Overwatch*.

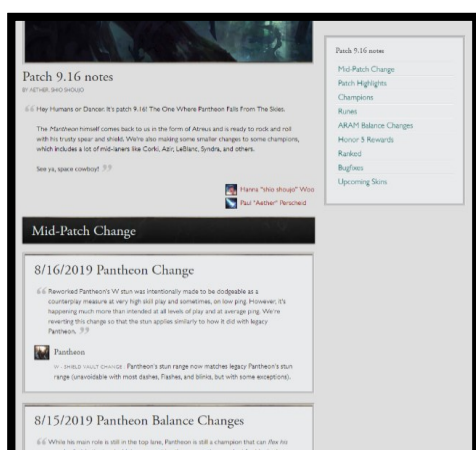


Figure 1A: *League of Legends* Patch 9.19 PND (posted August 13, 2019). Screenshot provided by author, taken September 9, 2019.

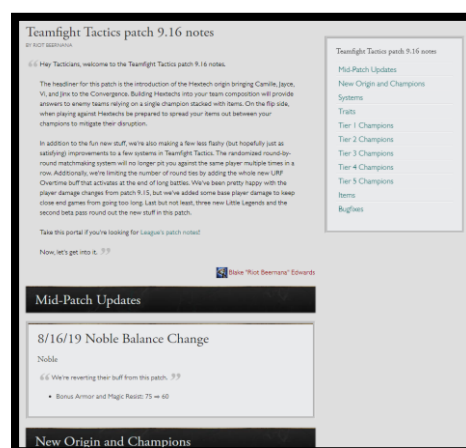


Figure 1B: *Teamfight Tactics* Patch 9.19 PND (posted August 13, 2019). Screenshot provided by author, taken September 9, 2019.

The latest PNDs in my corpus take full advantage of a clear structure by incorporating tiered headings that break the documents into distinct sections. In my coding, I was able to identify clear patterns of these sections. The latest version of the PND structure in my corpus first includes an introduction and a list of any “hotfixes” or changes to the game since the patch was introduced. Next, the document features a section addressing changes to champions, with any new champions or reworked champions listed at the top. The champion changes are generally listed in alphabetical order by champion after this. Within champion changes, changes to attributes (stats) are listed first, and then changes to the champion passive, Q ability, W ability, E ability, and R ability, often the champion’s ultimate ability, are enumerated. After changes to champions, the document typically moves to changes to items. These are typically organized by item, but occasionally PNDs highlight changes to a set of

items used primarily by a role. Next, the PNDs feature changes to the map, neutral game elements, and the UI, as well as chat and matchmaking features. Changes to these later elements do not appear in every patch, and the order is also not always consistent. Bugfixes are typically the penultimate section of patch notes, and finally, the last section of the PNDs lists new cosmetic items that will be released that patch. Each section of the PNDs is demarcated by a hypertext header. Starting with Patch 4.10 in 2014 (Figure 2, below), the PNDs feature a clear navigable sidebar listing major sections of the document.

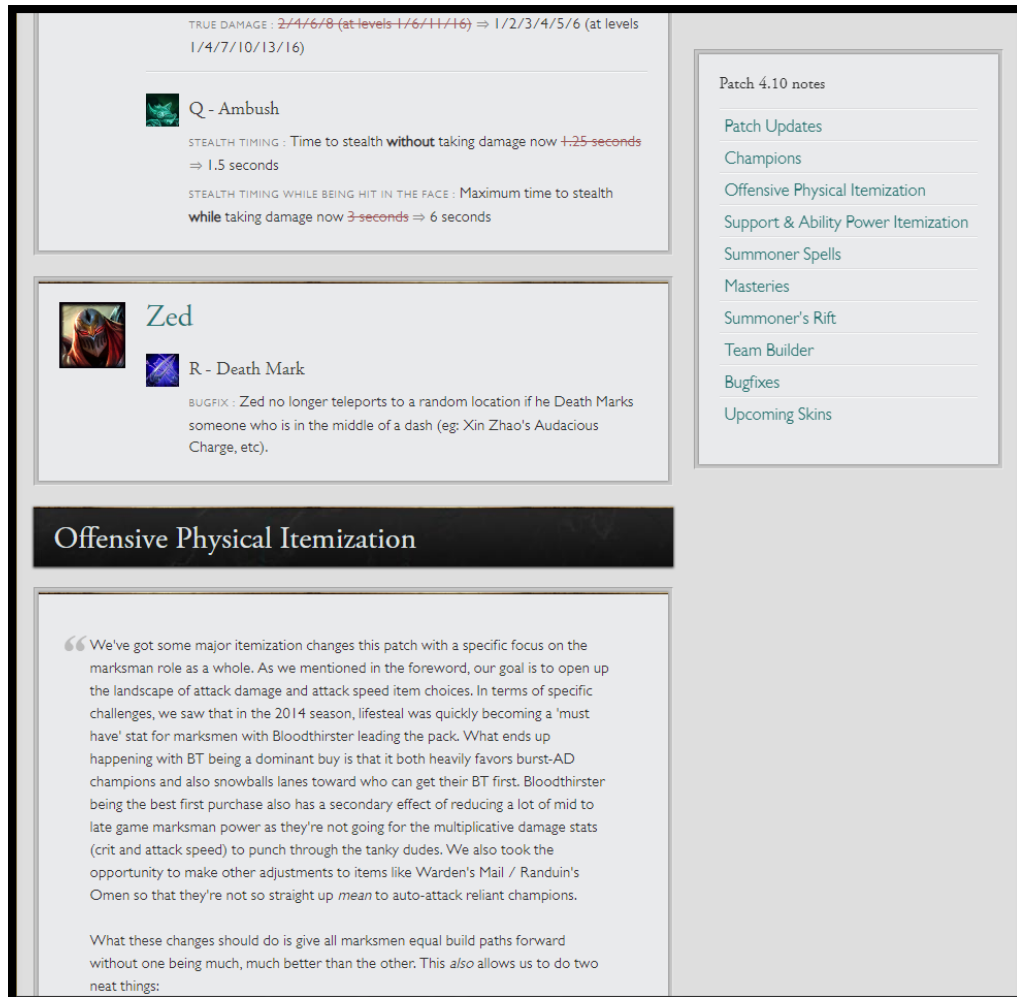


Figure 2: *League of Legends* Patch 4.10 notes featuring the earliest example of a navigation sidebar on the right listing major sections of the document. (Posted June 17, 2014, screenshot taken by author September 6, 2019)

The structure of the PNDs implies a priority for attention to changes. From an extensive reading of the PNDs in my corpus, I have identified trends in the different structures of PNDs that implicate assumed player attention in different ways. The earliest PNDs are simple lists with a general structure of champions, items, etc. The middle recency patch notes are complex documents with the same general structure of champions first, then items, then map/other changes, and finally minor things like new skins and Bugfixes. The most recent PNDs posted after I constructed my corpus include sections for “minor changes” in each larger category such as “champions.”

I consider texts as design objects to some extent, and thus the language of affordances becomes relevant. Putting the changes to champions at the start of the document, where

they are easiest to access, connotes that these changes are the primary changes to attend to about the game. They also take up the bulk of the PNDs, even in the initial simple list forms. In previous work, I have described different software targets for changes to *League of Legends* (Gursoy et al., 2019). Looking at that typology, it might be easy to assume that changes to characters are only a small part of the wider world of changes to the game, but the structure of the PNDs tells a different story. Even though changes to champions are a small part of the typology, they are a huge area of focus for the work of changing the game.

CONCLUSION

Through stylistic and structural strategies, the PNDs present a unified, consistent narrative of progress in order to explain changes to *League of Legends* over time. Stylistic techniques like focalizing language and whimsy help build an authorial voice to speak for Riot Games, while structural features such as headers and clearly demarcated context and justification sections help strengthen the consistency of the narrative over different PNDs. In this paper, I have explored how these stylistic and structural techniques function within the PNDs over time to develop a grand narrative of change to *League of Legends*.

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