

Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming

Review Of: Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming

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In understanding E-Sports and the professionalization of computer gaming, it is important “*not only [t]o take a look at the players, whose stories understandably so captivate us with their vision of what the future might for play and work, but to take into account larger structural mechanisms and other activities (teams, leagues, broadcasters) as central mechanism in the formation of a pro culture . . . ultimately, thinking about e-sports helps us analyze the transition many groups face as they struggle to convert their leisure time and playful passions into serious play, where the stakes are high, reputations, built, and money gained (and lost).*”¹

Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming is written by T.L. Taylor. Taylor’s goal for the book is two-fold: to understand competitive high-end computer gaming “as a phenomenon in its own right, but also to situate it within our culture at large.”² The goal of this book is to study the overall culture of e-gaming and analyze is sociologically, specifically focusing on the transition from gaming as a casual hobby engaged in strictly for leisure, to a professional career.

T.L. Taylor is an Associate Professor in the Center for Computer Games Research at the IT University of Copenhagen. Her work as a qualitative sociologist in the field of Internet and game studies “focuses on the interrelation between culture, social practice

¹ T.L. Taylor, RAISING THE STAKES: E-SPORTS AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF COMPUTER GAMING 30-31, 33 (The MIT Press, 2012).

² *Id.*

and technology in online leisure environment.”³ She has spoken and written about the sociological perspective of a variety of gaming topics, including “network play and social life, values in design, intellectual property, co-creative practices, avatars, and gender and gaming.”⁴ In addition to authoring *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*, T.L. Taylor is also the author of *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, which explores the wildly popular world of multiplayer online games.

Legally, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* focuses on the regulations of the industry, discussing IP issues and licenses.

This book is structured into six sections:

Section 1: “Playing for Keeps”

“Playing for Keeps” serves as an introduction to the book. It lays out basic structures and provides “an initial setup for understanding the pro world, giving an early glimpse into a tournament and juxtaposing it against the South Korean model.”⁵

Section 2: “Computer Games as a Professional Sport”

“Computer Games as a Professional Sport” contemplates and debates whether or not computer gaming can be considered a sport, in the traditional sense of the word. The goal of this debate is to contribute to the book’s overall sociological study of the culture of e-gaming and how its players feel about the nature of the “sport” and playing it. This section also examines the rules of the sports and the regulation of matches and

³ T.L. Taylor, MIT Comparative Media Studies Writing, available at <http://cmsw.mit.edu/profile/tl-taylor/>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ T.L. Taylor, *RAISING THE STAKES: E-SPORTS AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF COMPUTER GAMING* 31 (The MIT Press, 2012).

tournaments. Taylor uses stories she heard from players and personal observations she collected from her extensive research efforts.

Section 3: “Professionalizing Players”

“Professionalizing Players” takes a “more sociological approach in asking how someone becomes professional” in the e-gaming industry, noting that the career path of a player “is heavily dependent on being actively socialized into a professional identity by a range of actors and forces.”⁶ This chapter also examines how e-gaming, which usually begins as a simple hobby for most players, can transform into work or even a professional career.

Section 4: “Growing an Industry”

“Growing an industry” focuses on the business aspects of e-gaming. Taylor presents “several institutional models for organizing e-sports and how competition is actually managed.”⁷ This section also focuses on sponsorship for players and tournaments and examines the legality behind the industry.

Section 5: “Spectatorship and Fandom”

“Spectatorship and Fandom” presents an overview of the main competition venues, with a specific focus on offline tournaments and matches. “This chapter discusses how websites, forums, podcasts, video on demand, and a variety of media help foster a growing community centered around the pro scene.”⁸

Section 6: “Conclusion”

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at 32.

⁸ *Id.*

“Conclusion” wraps up the book by discussing some of the most recent developments in the gaming industry, with specific focus on globalization, commercialization, and mainstreaming.

The goal of this book is to study the overall culture of e-gaming and analyze it sociologically, specifically focusing on the transition from gaming as a casual hobby engaged in strictly for leisure, to a professional career. This book is written from a sociological standpoint and is geared towards academia, as is evidenced by the language used throughout. The author mostly relies on interactions she had with those involved in the industry and personal observations from the research she conducted in attending e-gaming tournaments, specifically offline matches.

While a valuable contribution to the academic world in general, the legal analysis and discussion in *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* is limited to a mere fourteen pages. However, those fourteen pages are well written and well researched, as it focuses on the unlicensed use of certain games, such as the well-known *World of Warcraft*, in widely attended offline tournaments, with emphasis on implications from the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. While I would not necessarily recommend this book for legal research, I would recommend it to students and professors engaged in sociology and the study of emerging niche cultures in our modern society.