

Designing Exclusivity, Archive and Temporal Rarity in Prestige LoL Skins (2018-2026)

DISEÑO DE EXCLUSIVIDAD, ARCHIVO Y ROTACIÓN EN LAS SKINS PRESTIGE LoL (2018-2026)

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Abstract: The Prestige skins subcatalogue in *League of Legends* condenses a form of digital luxury in which design, rarity and temporality operate as coupled persuasive mechanisms. This article examines its evolution (2018–2026), focusing on launch seasonality and the Mythic Shop as a device for curating the archive and administering scarcity. It adopts a descriptive-interpretive case study that combines a quantitative delimitation of the subcatalogue, to stabilize an object shaped by rotations and returns, with a comparative qualitative analysis of its value operations: F1 edition-object, F2 experience and perceptual legibility, F3 media event, F4 storytelling and secrecy, and F5 seasonality. The system intensifies the tension between unrepeatability and reintroduction, producing inequalities of access that allow the past to be monetized through re-editions while preserving the temporal hierarchy that sustains its exceptionality.

Keywords: Luxury; Digital Fashion; Digital Cosmetics; Visual Effects; Seasonal Events; *League of Legends*.

Resumen: El subcatálogo de *skins* Prestigio de *League of Legends* condensa una forma de lujo digital en la que diseño, rareza y temporalidad operan como mecanismos persuasivos acoplados. El artículo examina su evolución entre 2018 y 2026, atendiendo a la estacionalidad de los lanzamientos y a la Tienda Mítica como dispositivo de curaduría archivística y administración de la escasez. Se adopta un estudio de caso descriptivo-interpretativo que combina delimitación cuantitativa y análisis cualitativo comparado para describir cinco operaciones de valor, F1 objeto-edición, F2 experiencia y legibilidad perceptiva, F3 acontecimiento mediático, F4 *storytelling* y secreto, y F5 estacionalidad. El sistema intensifica la tensión entre irrepitibilidad y reintroducción, produciendo desigualdades de acceso que permiten monetizar el pasado mediante reediciones sin cancelar la jerarquía temporal que sostiene su excepcionalidad.

Palabras clave: Lujo; moda digital; cosméticos digitales; efectos visuales; eventos estacionales; *League of Legends*.



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1. Introduction

In League of Legends (LoL), a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game and one of the most influential titles in the contemporary competitive ecosystem, the scheduled provision of content has consolidated as a model of continuous updating. This logic, also characteristic of game-as-a-service (GaaS) ecosystems, understood as environments of constant updating and persistent digital economies (Bonales-Daimiel et al., 2026: 102; Nieborg & Poell, 2018), operates through seasons, events, patches, rotations and cosmetic content. It also includes the economy of packs and collectible objects in sports video games (Rodríguez-Ramírez et al., 2021: 22–27). Within this context, the customisation of appearance has shifted from an accessory form of embellishment to a regime of managed visibility, structured through intensive calendars and economies of recurrence that reorder playtime and spending without altering the game's mechanical core.

Within this framework, the value of certain digital goods is shaped by their capacity to produce distinction, social legibility, and recognition among players, both inside and outside the match, beyond their immediate use. The object reorganises the sensory and relational field of the gaming experience by linking user perception, on-screen public legibility, and the temporality of desire to a persuasive management of scheduled content supply. A skin, as an aesthetic variation of the base model, preserves the ludic structure of the character while rewriting its layers of presentation, including animations, visual effects (VFX), particles, sound design, voice lines, and the editorial paratext of splash art (Reay & Wanick, 2023). Customisation thus becomes a material practice of signalling and continuity, whose technical operations modulate avatar visibility, aesthetic differentiation, and the situated forms of recognition attached to its in-game use.

This shift converges with the expansion of the GaaS model and growing centrality of non-functional goods as a core monetisation mechanism. In catalogues that expand through seasons, events, and rotations, value is structured through modes of access, as a persuasive architecture of windowed scarcity within inventory systems, in line with digital game economies that combine continuous updating, promotional temporality, and symbolic consumption (Bonales-Daimiel et al., 2026). From the perspective of scholarship on consumption and ownership, cosmetic content can be understood as a reconfiguration of possession under digital conditions, articulated through fragmented, platform-dependent access rights (Belk, 2013: 477–478; Belk et al., 2022: 198). In this setting, distinction is produced through forms of managed scarci-

ty, scheduled returns, and intermediary currencies that organise the urgency of access. These objects may also operate as forms of game-specific cultural capital, as they display long-term participation, knowledge of the system, access to past events, or a sustained capacity for investment, thereby entering into dynamics of prestige and recognition close to what Consalvo (2007) defined as gaming capital. In parallel, studies on attachment to virtual goods describe how relationships with these objects are stabilised through accumulation, care, and symbolic maintenance which, despite lacking direct functionality, intensifies commitment and continuity (Koles et al., 2025). Within this context, the Prestige line, introduced by Riot Games in 2018, offers a privileged case for examining one of the most intensified yet still underexplored ways in which cosmetic customisation takes the form of digital luxury.

2. Justification, aim, and state of the art

This study focuses on the Prestige line of League of Legends as a case for analysing how digital luxury is articulated through visual finish, temporal rarity, and administered access. To this end, it proposes a comparative functional typology that connects skin categories, modes of acquisition, visual features, and persuasive function, thereby examining how exceptionality is constructed, displayed, and made recognisable under conditions of play and competition (Han et al., 2010: 15–17).

Table 1. Baseline typology of skin categories, acquisition methods, availability, and persuasive function (as of December 2025–January 2026)

Skin category	Acquisition method	Visual features	Availability	Persuasive function
Standard / Epic	Store, chests (1,350 RP)	Changes to the model and basic effects	Permanent	Baseline aesthetic differentiation and routine identity signalling
Legendary	Store, chests (1,850 RP)	Expanded set of animations, unique VFX, and adjustments to audio and presentation	Permanent	Intensification of cosmetic value through audiovisual density, thematic coherence, and performative distinction
Ultimate	Store (3,350 RP)	Multiple variants, state-based evolution, and more complex animation and VFX packages	Permanent	Anchoring of maximum value and showcase effect, intensifying display as sustained performance

Mythic (Hextech, events)	Crafting, Mythic Essence/gems, event loot	Exclusive design, marked material textures, lighting treatment, and “premium” VFX	Limited / rotating	Managed rarity and the conversion of accumulation or chance into access, with control over supply and scheduled return
Mythic Variant	Capsules/event-related loot, restricted acquisition	High-end variation on an already prestigious base, with refined materials and VFX and a distinctive finish	Very limited	Extreme scarcity as an incentive for intensive spending, segmentation by investment threshold, and singularisation of the inventory
Prestige	Mythic Shop rotations (150–250 Mythic Essence), events and exclusive currency, limited-time access	Reinterpretation, elevated finishes, and signals of exclusivity across splash art, model, and VFX; sometimes involving paratextual rewriting through lore or event framing	Temporal / seasonal	Verifiable exclusivity and administration of temporal urgency through windowed scarcity, stabilising player seniority as an archival property and producing recurrence through scheduled return windows
Competitive Reward	Ranked rewards (Victorious), Honour, Clash, or other milestones; not available in the store	Season-branded design and legitimacy criteria oriented towards signalling achievement	Once per season / non-returning	Merit-based prestige and seasonal retention, producing social hierarchy without direct transaction

Source: prepared by the author.

Building on this matrix, the study is justified by a persistent asymmetry in the existing literature. There are many approaches centred on political economy, monetisation, and consumer behaviour, yet comparatively few studies precisely describe the visual-morphological, finishing-related, interface-related, and visual-editing variables of cosmetic items remain comparatively scarce, even though this technical layer sustains their perceived value (Reay & Wanick, 2023; Winata et al., 2022). In the case of League of Legends, Spanish-language scholarship has tended to privilege spectacularisation and the expansion of the game into esports as a mass narrative, offering useful contributions for understanding the infrastructure and procedural value of broadcasting (Martín Muñoz & Pedrero Esteban, 2021: 74–76). However, it has paid less attention to the regime that governs the circulation of cosmetic content

through the interface, or to the 2022 transition as a reorganisation of archive and rarity. Experimental evidence suggests that personalisation through cosmetic microtransactions can intensify identification with the character without altering objective performance, while becoming associated with perceived competence and enjoyment; this displaces cosmetic content from the logic of inert aesthetic embellishment (Böffel et al., 2021). Yet this focus remains tied to controlled uses and leaves open the need to describe how the platform produces urgency, return, and hierarchies of access, precisely where luxury becomes legible, comparable, and contestable. This gap can be brought into dialogue with the literature on persuasive design in video games and with what has been conceptualised as dark or deceptive interface patterns (Brignull et al., 2023; Zagal et al., 2013).

The main aim is to map the Prestige line as an apparatus of managed scarcity and to analyse how the redesign introduced in 2022 reorganises archive, rarity, and visible surface treatments, turning access into a serialised procedure to produce value. Complementarily, the study seeks to identify and describe patterns of finish, release, and legibility that operate as visual editing, technical refinement, and temporal control of the catalogue, in dialogue with frameworks of luxury consumption and studies on cosmetic items, perceived value, and chase-item acquisition logics in other titles and genres (Dubois et al., 2021; Järvinen, 2023; Kordyaka & Hribersek, 2019).

3. Method

The methodological design is based on a descriptive-interpretative approach, articulated as a case study, combining a quantitative phase aimed at delimiting the Prestige sub-catalogue with a qualitative phase devoted to the comparative analysis of formal, paratextual, and interface-based operations. The first phase makes it possible to operationally delimit an object shaped by calendars, rotations, withdrawals, and reintroductions; the second examines the procedures through which these conditions of access are translated into visible forms of rarity, finish, and recognition. The corpus was reconstructed through triangulation of specialised databases and targeted verification in the game client, to correct inconsistencies in dates, naming and availability, according to criteria of traceability and replicability in digital audiovisual content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019).

3.1. Materials

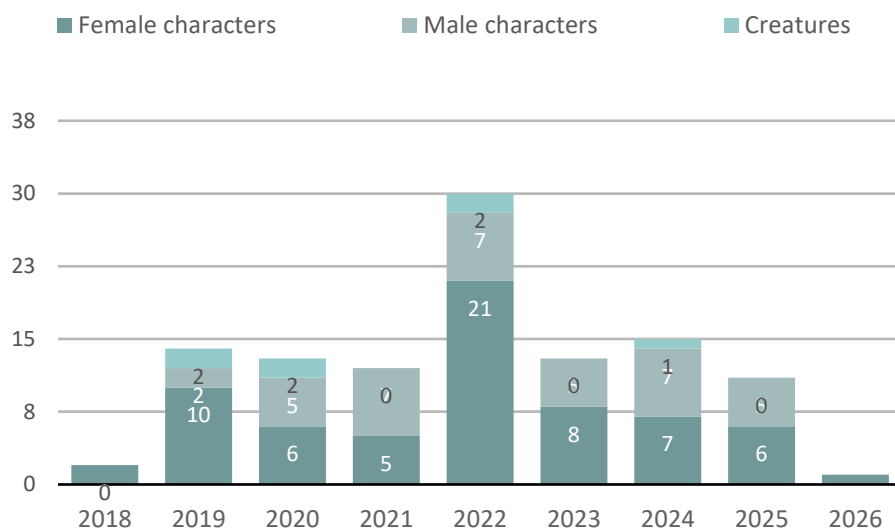
To identify and select the sample, a systematic search was conducted in specialised League of Legends databases (Riot Games, n.d.; lol.skin.info, n.d.), with results cross-checked against the game client where possible in order to correct inconsistencies in dates, naming, and availability. The query covered all registered collections and was conducted on [access date], in patch [patch version], using the following string: ("prestige" OR "prestige 1.0" OR "prestige 2.0" OR "mythic") AND (additional term(s): "skin", "edition", "mythic shop"). Triangulation was justified by two convergent limitations: fragmented archives with low granularity for reconstructing dates and availability periods; and dependence on community repositories, whose uneven updating, nomenclature changes, and coexistence or overlap of [release] and [reappearance] records hinder standardised indicators without carry-over errors. Data were stored in structured databases, with date normalisation and duplicate removal for entries associated with the Prestige 1.0/2.0 transition (section 4.1), through cross-checking.

The sample was delimited according to a nominal-operational criterion: it included skins whose official name contains "Prestige" in the PC version of LoL, distinguishing original releases, reintroductions (rotations/unvaultings), and commemorative variants associated with the 2022 system change. The unit of analysis was the individual skin; its status (Prestige 1.0, Mythic Shop, reappearance, "Edition 2022") affects the count if releases are conflated with returns from the archive. The division of the sample by gender was resolved through an operational rather than ontological criterion, since the game brings together humanoids, spectres, and object-bodies with variable gender markers. Accordingly, the categories "female" and "male" group characters with a humanoid silhouette and stable gender coding in their official presentation, while "creatures" includes non-humans or strongly dehumanised forms (beasts, yordles, inorganic entities, or spectral energies). Assignment was based on lore and official presentation (story, speech, voice, and interaction), resolving liminal cases through internal consistency and paratextual predominance.

Applying these criteria, Prestige accounts for 5.39% of the total number of skins in the database (2,057), corresponding to 111 entries: 66 associated with female champions (59.45%), 38 with male champions (34.23%), and 7 with creatures (6.32%). The annual distribution shows a marked increase in 2022, consistent with the introduction of the Mythic Shop and inventory rotation (Figure 1). Each skin was recorded as either obtainable or unavailable in December 2025, distinguishing between commercial availability and presence in

the historical archive; subsequent entries outside the data-collection window were also noted, such as *Prestige Veiled Lady Morgana*, scheduled for 2026.

Figure 1. *Annual development of the Prestige sub-catalogue by character category and gender coding*



Source: prepared by the author.

3.2. Analytical Procedure

The corpus analysis began with a quantitative delimitation designed to stabilise an object shaped by variations in scheduling, rotation, and reintroduction. The count of releases, returns, and acquisition modes made it possible to construct a minimal temporal map of the sub-catalogue, select comparable cases, detect period-based concentrations, and distinguish between release and return when database records and shop logic tend to overlap.

Although the initial presentation is quantitative, with network and graph methods applicable to the sequencing of releases, circulation through access windows, and co-presence of aesthetic lines, the research shifts its centre towards qualitative interpretation. This first layer supports the formal analysis in a field where studies on morphological and finishing variables remain scarce in comparison with approaches centred on political economy or consumption (Reay & Wanick, 2023; Winata et al., 2022). Since the notion of digital luxury brings together heterogeneous dimensions that are not always formalised in comparable ways in the literature, the analysis starts from a delimited set of

observable variables through which exceptionality becomes legible in the corpus. Specifically, eight analytical dimensions of value-producing operations were considered: (1) surface and material treatment; (2) luminosity and VFX density; (3) relationship between splash art and in-game model; (4) perceptual legibility during gameplay; (5) editorial and paratextual singularisation; (6) degree of extra-diegetic or media inscription; (7) narrative thickness or regime of secrecy associated with the skin line; and (8) temporality of access, return, and reintroduction. On the basis of these variables, categories F1–F5 were constructed inductively as dominant formal groupings, defined by the differential recurrence of specific combinations of features. Each skin was assigned to the predominant pattern organising its persuasive function, even when it displayed secondary traits shared with other groups.

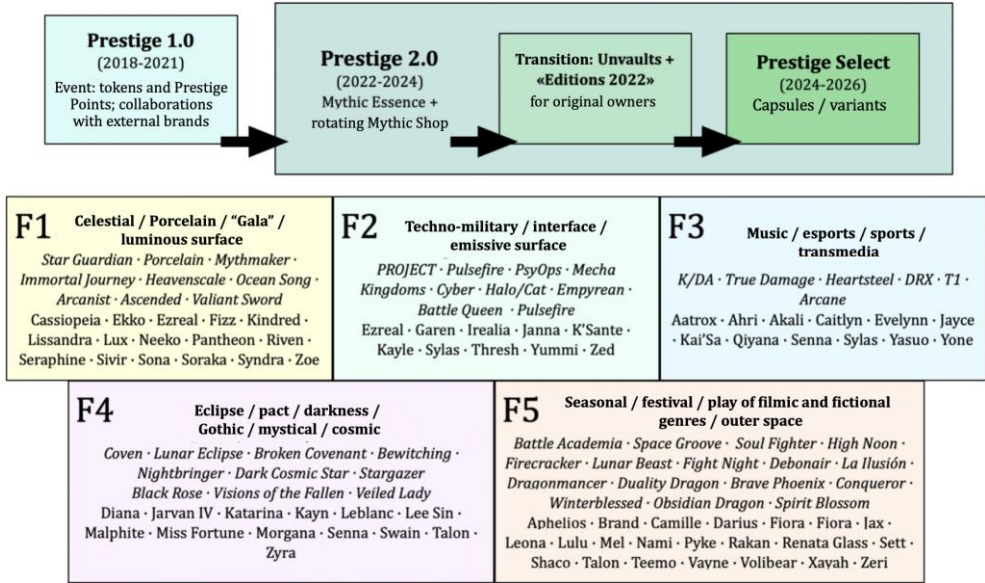
The analysis is articulated as a case study, suitable for examining complex phenomena within their contexts of production and use (López-Barajas & Montoya, 1995), and draws on Casetti and di Chio's audiovisual textual analysis (2017), applied to character construction while refining its scope in order to address visual characterisation procedures beyond dialogue. From this point, each skin was broken down into an operational triad: representation (splash art), in-game enactment (model, animations, VFX), and access conditions (window, rotation, return, commemoration). On the basis of this segmentation, recurrences and variations in form, materiality, and perceptual hierarchy were identified, then reordered and regrouped for interpretative modelling, in order to recognise prestige strategies linked to visual editing, technical refinement, and temporal control of the catalogue.

4. Results: periodisation and formal groupings

Before turning to the comparative visual typology and the strategies associated with the aesthetic and experiential construction of luxury, Riot Games' design framework should be situated as a contrastive point of reference, since its formal intelligibility depends on the temporality of the service and on its regime of continuous updating. In this service-based context, visual effects operate as a mediation between art and design aimed at sustaining units of style and in-game enactment, prioritising legibility, containment of visual noise, thematic adequacy, and the production of impact (Riot Games, 2017). On this basis, Figure 2 functions as a descriptive instrument where the periodisation of the Prestige system developed in section 4.1 converges with the identification of formal groupings presented in section 4.2, enabling a comparison of dominant operations of finish, luminosity, and in-game legibility. The classifi-

cation is organised not around thematic essences, but around recurring technical, visual, and experiential patterns that make it possible to describe how exceptionality is constructed and rendered recognisable under conditions of performance, attention, and competition (Han et al., 2010: 15–17).

Figure 2. *Periodisation of the Prestige system (2018–2026) and formal typology F1–F5. The figure translates shifts in access logics, circulation regimes, and procedures of finish and legibility into an analytical classification of skin lines and characters according to their dominant pattern.*



Source: prepared by the author.

4.1. From Prestige 1.0 to Prestige 2.0: Unvaults and Special Capsules

The ecosystem of rarity tiers and visual qualities in *League of Legends* is broad and variable, in keeping with the continuous operation of the game-as-a-service (GaaS) model. Whereas the broader set of cosmetic items is acquired through contingent routes shaped by events, missions, seasonal milestones, and shop rotations (94.61% of the total), the Prestige economy (5.39%) emerges as a relatively stable circuit, standardised as a premium channel and, above all, traceable in terms of access.

In a massive digital environment continually reshaped by patches, rebalancing, and seasonal reprogramming, this measurable character is sustained

through the control of time, the administration of the catalogue, and mechanisms of retrospective differentiation. These rely on a visuality of finish which, although often reduced to the imagery of the golden patina, more precisely operates as a conventional code signalling belonging to a specific, recognisable, and economically quantifiable regime of participation. This stability is crucial for the analysis because it shows that the production of exceptionality does not depend on material scarcity, but on its industrial management through acquisition modalities which, after a relatively unified initial scheme from 2018 onwards, begin to coexist and overlap from the turning point of 2022. Since then, the focus has shifted towards variables such as the curation of the general archive, the duration of the shop window, the logic of nostalgic return, and the inscription of accumulated seniority as a verifiable difference between profiles. In parallel, this regime of value is supported by paratextual lore: non-playable, yet operationally decisive for designing interactions, motifs, and aesthetic coherence. This framework fosters loyalty and contextualises the characters, but it must be continually readjusted within an expanding universe, with up to 170 champions and a Runeterra subject to continuous updates, reordering processes, and redistributions of hierarchies and affinities.

The initial Prestige 1.0 scheme (2018–2021) thus operates as an early apparatus of exceptionality anchored in a narrow temporal window and in the economy of the event. It also coincides with paratextual collaborations associated with new luxury (Batat, 2019), such as Louis Vuitton within the True Damage environment of Qiyana and Senna: according to media estimates, the physical capsule was priced at several thousand euros, placing Prestige in explicit proximity to luxury fashion. Acquisition remained subordinated to the annual event, either through the accumulation of tokens in event passes or through expiring Prestige Points, linking possession to temporal pressure and programmed closure. Formally, many pieces operate as golden variations close to the base skin, closer to refinishing through contrast and shine than to full reinvention. This minimal difference functioned, paradoxically, as a social trophy through irreproducibility and subsequent inaccessibility, becoming a guarantee of retrospective belonging (Riot Games, 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis, gaming activity was channelled towards commemorative and audiovisual formats, with particular force in the musical expansion of K/DA and in the circulation of music videos where characters operate as stars outside the match, in dialogue with genealogies of virtual singers such as Hatsune Miku and with a retail intelligence in which audiovisual media and fashion act as

vectors of transmission and brand value within a broader service regime (Reay & Wanick, 2023; Navarro Gaviño, 2022).

The transition to Prestige 2.0 marks a departure from the hegemonic golden motif and an internal intensification of the game universe through crystalline grammars, textural density, emphatic palettes, VFX, and the editorial singularisation of splash art. If this contrast is maintained as a working hypothesis, new luxury moves beyond allusion and begins to name a regime shift, displaced from the object as brand towards the object as access, curation, event, and administration of visual information. The 2022 turn rewrites acquisition and reward beyond a merely monetary or object-level taxonomic adjustment, insofar as the conversion to Mythic Essence and the institutionalisation of a rotating Mythic Shop shift the catalogue from closure towards a circuit of periodic returns, marked by explicit timers (Riot Games, 2022; Riot Games, 2024).

Since 2022, access has shifted from absolute closure towards the visible administration of windows, returns, and cumulative planning. Some Prestige 1.0 skins reappear as unvaulted pieces, while the 2022 Editions, reserved for original owners, manage the classic tension of luxury, expanding access without eroding exclusivity, by retrospectively reinstating a temporal hierarchy of possession. With Prestige Select (2024–2026), linked to capsules and recent variants, this logic of curatorial re-entry and second opportunity becomes more pronounced. Its distinctive feature lies not only in the capsule format, but in a visual specialisation that moves away from the golden motif as the hegemonic mark of prestige (F2, F4, F5), shifting towards crystalline grammars, textural density, and more emphatic palettes, where surface treatments and VFX are read as high-resolution finish rather than mere recolouring (F1, F3). In this shift, exclusivity depends less on external legitimations than on the internal intensification of the game universe, updated through interface, paratext, and the editorial singularisation of splash art (Figures 3–7).

This retrospective framework also delimits comparisons that would otherwise be distorted by mixing heterogeneous shop logics, since visual and paratextual traits remain subordinated to the design of access and circulation. In the corpus, sophistication appears with particular recurrence among female-coded champions, as Figure 1 suggests (59.45%). Incorporating gender as a variable makes it possible to observe the distribution of prestige both in feminised champions and in masculinities reconfigured through staging and paratextual identity vectors, such as Prestige Heavenscale Ezreal (2024) or Prestige Empyrean K'Sante (2022), as well as their convergence with reper-

toires of spectacularity and exposure described in previous studies (Lynch et al., 2016: 474–476).

4.2. Classification Framework and Formal Grouping

4.2.1. Gilding and Surface Illumination (F1)

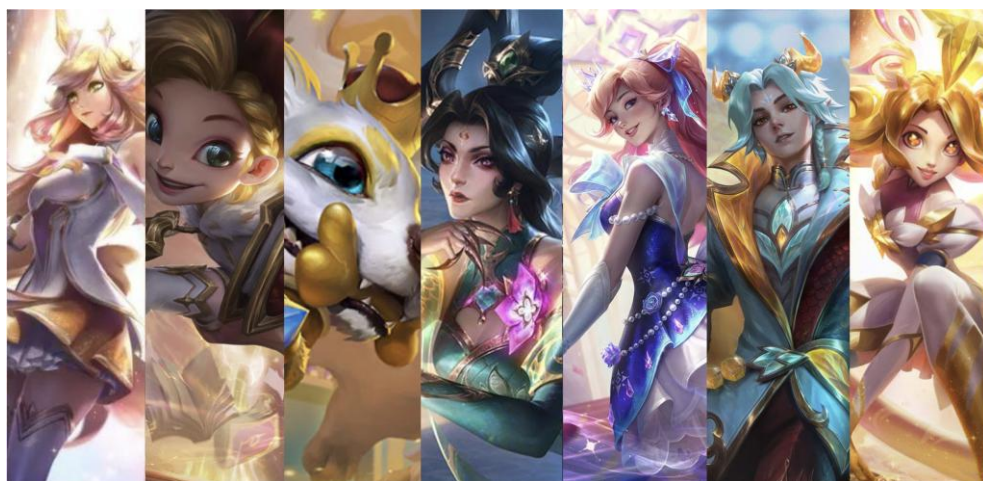
In the first grouping of the diagram (F1), the Prestige edition operates as a layer of value legible from Prestige 1.0 onwards, not through full reinvention, but through finishing procedures comparable to the passage from a base piece to a “reissue” within a regime of high visibility. Metallic trims, faceted inlays, lacquers or enamels and, above all, an administration of shine designed to withstand camera distance and visual compression sustain a recognisable ostentation even under intermittent attention. This surface regime functions as a status marker within the game’s social ecosystem: it enables display and peer recognition, and is activated as a stand-out exceptional item whose singularity depends on immediate readability (Adams, 2014, p. 267; Cerezo-Pizarro et al., 2023). The insistence on an immaculate finish, free from perceptual interference or irregularity, is constitutive; the polished appearance becomes a condition for the credibility of luxury and for its function as a visible marker of distinction.

Prestige Star Guardian Soraka and Arcanist Zoe sharply delimit the mechanism of gilding. On a chromatic base dominated by intense cool tones and high contrast, the Prestige intervention, a second layer over a prior upgrade, shifts the scale towards warm whites and golds, makes the character’s coronation explicit, and concentrates shine in structurally legible areas: edges, waist, movement across the map, and staff. In the latter, the central piece gains presence through faceting and light emission.

In this grouping, the distribution leans towards female-coded champions associated with protection and respectability; male-coded champions appear in smaller numbers, without becoming marginal. The precious finish is verified both in female-coded humanoid silhouettes and in non-human bodies. In female cases, gilding is coupled with already stabilised repertoires of ornament and ceremoniality, visible in Prestige Star Guardian Neeko and Syndra: perceptual stimulation adds material density and a simulated enamel-like texture. This is also evident in the ceramic fragility of Porcelain Lux, Lissandra, and Kindred, and by the filigree of Prestige Mythmaker Sivir and Cassiopeia, as if the render sought supplementary polish and a position of nobility through textural accessorisation. Prestige Star Guardian Ekko and Prestige Heavenscale Ezreal are

included because their youthful stylisation and light silhouettes allow gilding to be read as gala editing rather than as armour or martial intensification. The presence of Kindred or Fizz is productive: it shows that this regime of value does not require a humanised body as its privileged support. Prestige is anchored in surfaces and emissions and, by transferring precious finishing to non-human forms, prevents the grouping from being reduced to a narrow gender reading, even though the general bias of the sub-catalogue persists.

Figure 3. Characters represented, from left to right: Soraka, Zoe, Fizz, Cassiopeia, Lux, Ezreal, and Neeko.



Source: prepared by the author.

The coherence of F1 is sustained less by the name of each skin line than by the modulated repetition of a lighting procedure. What operates here is not flat recolouring, but a stratified recomposition. Ceremonial status is reinforced; costume incorporates golden blocks that compact the silhouette; and the particle field is reorganised into sparkles and luminous creatures, such as fairies or butterflies, that accompany the character as markers of rarity. Surface legibility is privileged, along with a close relationship between splash art and model, so that luxury is stabilised as a promise of sharpness and technical refinement rather than as a distortion of narrative background, in line with an economy of clarity and noise control as the horizon of VFX. This stabilisation allows F1 exclusivity to function as an exceptional object, a stand-out good that distinguishes and sustains reputation by making visible an investment of time, attention, or resources. From this basis, the contrast with other groupings becomes clearer

when prestige abandons direct surface jewellery and shifts towards other modes of value production: in F2, as experience, through conditions of readability and perceptual performance; in F3, as an extra-diegetic event; in F4, as revelation, through a secret that reopens dimensions of the character under clandestine access; and in F5, as recognisable intercultural value, supported by relatively stable repertoires of transnational legibility.

4.2.2. Premium Instrumentality: Interface and Kinetic Legibility (F2)

In this second grouping, the conventional form of prestige abandons gilding as an immediate signature and shifts towards an intensification of the instrumental. Resources are deployed that invoke imaginaries of interface, technical optics, and laboratory protocols, with Hextech operating as a tacit reference for diegetic legitimation; the qualitative shift lies less in the aesthetic citation than in a verifiable improvement of readability. In perceptual terms, the Prestige edition operates as a “hardware” update, as a reconfiguration of the conditions under which the body is recognised when the image travels in compressed form, passes through particle noise, and coexists with a concurrence of effects. In the visual breakdown, when the scene seems to disassemble through excess signal, rapid decision-making must be sustained. Luxury is thus experienced as an improvement in the start, transit, and closure of actions, and this clarity is registered as quality.

Value is no longer fixed in a stable chromatic presence, but displaced onto performance. Hierarchised luminous contours, energetic edges, transmission traces, and microtextured materials exceed decorative function: their effectiveness is measured in movement continuity, edge cleanliness, and silhouette stability during accelerations, interruptions, and abrupt shifts of scale or speed. Unlike F1, where prestige is consolidated as a promise of refinement through aesthetic and moral polish, here it is formulated as high-quality animation, perceived above all as the production of ambiguity for the enemy under perceptual stress.

Figure 4. Characters represented, from left to right: Irelia, Sylas, Zed, Thresh, Lucian, Janna, and Yuumi.



Source: prepared by the author.

Temporal evolution is tied to two vectors encouraged by the competitive environment. On the one hand, the legibility required by kits based on speed, precision, and repositioning favours solutions in which distinction is inscribed in guides of kinetic recognition rather than in fixed chromatic marks. On the other, the sophistication of rendering and real-time effects open up a decisive field: the generation of micro-environments of action on the map, including volumes, zones, thresholds, traces, energy fields, or visual ground, which do not merely accompany the character but delimit the event. In this drift, prestige also qualifies the space in which the character acts, displacing part of exclusivity towards an operative micro-scenography produced by the engine and its layers of visual and auditory effects. Variation becomes differential in animations, impacts, telegraphs, and finishers, precisely where UX perceives consistency.

Within this technological fetishism, PROJECT (Irelia, Sylas, and Zed) concentrates the economy of line and emission, making the body recognisable through accents and trails in movements and overlaps: it matters less as a “skin” than as a grammar of transparent contours and distorted edges, reinforcing an instant yet shifting identification. Pulsefire (Thresh and Lucian) reframes the figure through a chronotechnics of devices and data layers, displacing aura towards an informational field. PsyOps Ezreal hybridises techno-

logical signal and channelled energy, reconfiguring shine as the external visualisation of an internal process. Mecha Kingdoms Garen turns difference into a reading of power and mechanical coherence, where high-end quality is measured by the volume and forcefulness of the ensemble as machine. Cyber (Halo/Cat) insists on the portable and framed device, and the purification associated with F1 is linked here to apparatus-based intervention rather than illumination. Empyrean, by contrast, encodes quality in the treatment of boundaries, thresholds, vibration, and refraction, as an engineering of the limit rather than through metallic effects. Comparability is ultimately sustained by a technical shift towards emission and the optimisation of experiential effects: the aims of prestige change less than the means through which they are achieved, from energetic drawing to the administration of movement through the action space. Consequently, added value does not reside in the character's interiority or status, but in the variable dynamics it offers within the scene.

4.2.3. Eventhood: Celebrity, Esports, and Brand Circulation (F3)

In this grouping, prestige shifts towards an event economy external to the game, and the system manifests itself as an unstable relation between circulation and form. The surface functions as performance costume and organises a regime of public visibility linked to musical intellectual property (IP), competitive teams, and transmedia extensions; acquisition is thus integrated into a logic of participation in media seasons rather than into an ornamental enhancement of the character. This explains its prominence in Prestige 1.0, when access remained tied to the event and exceptionality was reinforced by episodic collaborations and launch narratives capable of installing a moment of global circulation. This phase concentrates Kai'Sa, Akali, Ahri, and Evelynn under K/DA; Qiyana, Senna, and Yasuo in True Damage; and Yone in Heartsteel. It also includes competitive inscription, with DRX through Aatrox and T1 through Jayce and Sylas, as well as the television tie-in of Arcane Caitlyn, where media circulation operates both as a threshold of access and as a guarantee of belonging to a narrative larger than the match. Luxury functions here as a phenomenon of circulation: it depends on the moment and on its public memory more than on the isolated materiality of the object.

Figure 5. Characters represented, from left to right: Kai'Sa, Akali, Evelynnn, Senna, Jayce and Caitlyn.



Source: prepared by the author.

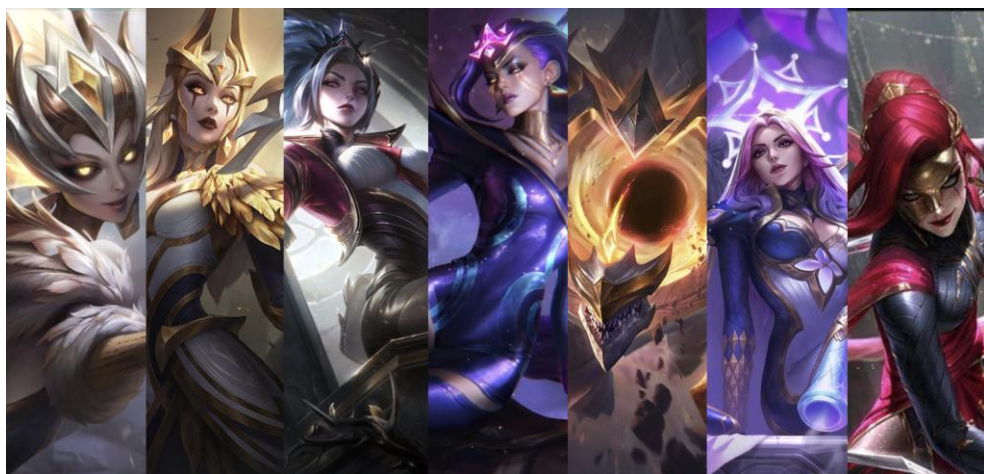
F3 reaches its main pressure point when the promise of exclusivity depends more on brand circulation than on a formal difference from other lines. In some cases, collaboration provides an external framework of legitimization, as with Louis Vuitton around Senna or Qiyana, but this proximity to key elements of cultural validation associated with the musical star or celebrity does not guarantee a perception of luxury if the finish remains too close to the non-Prestige version. When the differential is diluted in a ready-to-wear register, the comparison is not only with other Prestige skins, but also with the base skin, which is repositioned as a baseline for comparison and as a source of diminished persuasive effect. In this gesture, the promise of status elevation may become counterproductive, since exceptionality becomes debatable and, therefore, negotiable in reception. This fragility is aggravated when the modification pushes towards an excessive humanisation of figures whose appeal depended on a threshold of strangeness or power that could not be fully domesticated, as in K/DA Evelynnn, subordinated to the popularity regime of the event. At this intersection, F3 makes it possible to observe how the transition from Prestige 1.0 to Prestige 2.0 relocates the collaborative signature and campaign aura, moving them from the event towards compatibility with media spectacle and, at the same time, with a discipline of in-game legibility, as in Arcane Caitlyn. However, when this promise attempts to compensate for a

formal difference that is not fully realised in gameplay experience, an insufficiency of visual or experiential plasticity becomes exposed.

4.2.4. Canon Distortion, Secrecy, and Character Rewriting (F4)

In F4, exceptionality is played out less through immediate visible evidence than through an economy of concealment. Characters are reorganised as custodians of secrets, subject to rules of belonging that are not exhausted by chromatic surface, but instead hinge on restricted access to a particular regime of plasticity within the game universe. Quality takes the form of layers of secrecy administered through VFX or dialogue, a revelation that accumulates through gameplay experience. Hence the recurrence of cosmic imaginaries such as eclipses, pacts and falls, masks and veils, and signs of conjuration, while interpretation shifts from material ornamentation towards a ceremonial quality of the body in the process of corruption. Within this framework, Coven Zyra, LeBlanc, and Akali, or the lunar modulation of Lunar Eclipse Senna, produce rarity through a status of initiation and becoming, as versions traversed by oaths and affiliations never fully made explicit. Something similar occurs when the motif shifts towards Nightbringer, or towards the sombre gravitation of Dark Cosmic and Dark Star, where finish operates less as a boundary than as an atmosphere, as an inner edge that organises in-game perception.

Figure 6. Characters represented, from left to right: Zyra, Leblanc, Akali, Diana, Malphite, Miss Fortune and Katarina.



Source: prepared by the author.

The concealment of information makes it possible to describe the role of diegetic corruption and storytelling that these lines introduce in relation to F1. Prestige does not merely intensify background traits; it enables controlled deviations that test new experiences on a familiar base or character. In some cases, this deviation is built through sedimentation, with characters reappearing gradually in lines such as Coven, so that the temporality of the collection reveals new pacts, shifting hierarchies, and rewritten affiliations without fully explaining them. The operation rarely depends on explicit in-game narrative, understood as a developed and verifiable progression. Instead, it is sustained by re-contextualisation, by the rhetoric of the skin line, and by an investiture of the body articulated through VFX, materials, and microtexts, such as voice lines or specific interactions, which function as clues rather than explanations. Around Black Rose, Masque of the Black Rose Katarina and Veiled Lady Morgana work through differences of affiliation, mask, and veil that bind interpretation together more than they explain a trajectory. The same principle runs through Broken Covenant and Bewitching, as in Broken Covenant Miss Fortune and the Bewitching versions of Morgana and Miss Fortune, where exceptionality is legitimated by a ritualised apparatus of return rather than by the promise of absolute novelty. F4 turns this difficulty into a productive feature: prestige becomes belonging to a narrative and aesthetic order in which suggestion, threat, and partial knowledge sustain desire without making it obvious, leaving the catalogue in a state of almost complete, yet never closed, revelation.

4.2.5. Seasonal Prestige: From Cultural Citation to Filmic Genre (F5)

In F5, prestige shifts towards a logic of citation and seasonal synchrony, where exceptionality is produced as tone rather than solemnity. Unlike F3, whose value rests on the media event, this grouping is governed by a grammar that reorganises the catalogue through festivals, celebratory calendars, and genre play. It is important to stress the material inflection of this seasonality, which functions as an equivalent to clothing stores organised by season, yet is structured around the Northern Hemisphere calendar; winter, summer, or spring are thus stabilised as global markers, even though they do not apply equally to the entire player base. The promise of luxury is no longer fixed in a stable aura of the champion, but depends on a seasonal edition capable of condensing, legibly and at a distance, a recognisable mode: saturated palettes associated with cultural lineages, explicit textures, and particle rhythms as temporal signatures. Interculturality operates less as external legitimation than as a transnational repertoire of festive codes and circulating imaginaries: Win-

terblessed, Spirit Blossom, High Noon, Firecracker; winter, night fair, comedy, pop, western, and combat-as-spectacle. The differential component thus becomes seasonal editing and novelty, collectible through return and variation rather than through irreproducibility.

Figure 7. *Characters represented, from left to right: Nami, Sett, Talon, Renata Glasc, Camille, Vayne and Mel.*



Source: prepared by the author.

The density of F5 stems from its status as a macro-grouping: it accommodates heterogeneous lines without losing coherence because they are unified by high stylisation and visual consistency rather than by a closed theme. In *Battle Academia*, *Space Groove*, *Soul Fighter*, *Debonair*, *Fight Night*, or *La Ilusión*, prestige tends to reward champions able to sustain exaggeration without losing silhouette, and whose legibility benefits from a controlled theatricalisation of gesture, accessory, and situational finishers. Rather than claiming gravity, as in F4, the finish relies on material precision and culturally located elements, with VFX that organise impact as brief interactions able to withstand, and at times cut through, the noise of the match without becoming confusing. High quality is not asserted through accumulation, as in F1, but through calibration and seasonal self-awareness, a clarity that admits the wink without collapsing into saturation. *Firecracker* and *Lunar Beast* translate the Lunar New Year into a surface regime where festivity appears as controlled energy, through sparks, confetti, and gunpowder, without saturating the frame, as in *Prestige Firecracker Vayne* and *Prestige Lunar Beast Fiora*. In *Winterblessed*, premium value is formulated as crafted coldness, through re-

fractions, polished frost, and contained halos, with Prestige Winterblessed Camille and Prestige Winterblessed Mel. In combat-as-spectacle, Soul Fighter turns luxury into ring energy legible through blow and trail, as in Prestige Soul Fighter Pyke and Prestige Soul Fighter Shaco, while Fight Night locates distinction in a nocturnal stylisation of club and fight, as in Prestige Fight Night Zeri. The western introduces an ironic and dark epic that reframes rather than ennobles the champion, as in Prestige High Noon Talon. When the catalogue invokes exteriorised or bestial mythologies, premium difference may be supported by volume, scale, and material weight, as in Prestige Obsidian Dragon Sett. Taken together, F5 suggests that exclusivity is projected as an industrial capacity to generate seasonal attachment without losing singularity of design. Repetition becomes compatible with value because this value does not depend on ontological rarity, but on programmed position and on the way each seasonal return rewrites and links, through variations of finish, the visual memory of a festival or genre to specific characters. Sophistication lies in how the game manages shared visual cultures, compresses them into legible signs, and turns them into a habit of return without fully neutralising their particularity.

5. Discussion

The development of the analysis rests on a quantitative paradox. Although the Prestige sub-catalogue is limited in volume, it acquires disproportionate importance within the interface through the cadence of its releases, its paratextual reiteration, and its insertion into regimes of mediated access. The singularity of the system lies not only in the object itself, but in the temporal architecture that organises its circulation. In line with GaaS models, value shifts from the one-off purchase towards a regime of updating, return, and persistence that turns playtime into both a monetisable resource and a condition of access (Dubois & Weststar, 2022; Ivanov et al., 2021).

The discussion centres on a tension between irreproducibility (F1, F3) and reintroduction (F2, F4, F5). The system reopens the archive in order to monetise it without fully eroding the temporal hierarchy of those who gained access earlier, through retrospective compensations and commemorative editions that negotiate this paradox. This temporal economy generates frictions when it intersects with the professionalisation of performance in highly competitive environments. As specialisation increases, the system rewards expertise and erodes the centrality of access-based prestige as a stable guarantee, as shown in Table 1. Symbolic capital (Consalvo, 2007) shifts towards consis-

cy of execution, economy of decision-making, and compositional coordination. At this threshold, seniority bifurcates between practical memory of the champion and the visible accumulation of objects obtained through mediated access. The result suggests that skins oriented towards the competitive scene tend to favour less intrusive selections, through tonal fidelity and the reduction of distraction, while a broader audience finds in these skins a means of visibility and enjoyment. At the same time, display and differentiation become tied to planned return under persuasive administration. Rarity thus ceases to be equivalent to absolute irreproducibility and begins to function as regulated reintroduction, retrospective compensation, and staggered access.

Read through the lens of the digitalisation of luxury (Batat, 2019, p. 267), the Prestige system no longer sustains its main promise in the material density of the cosmetic item as a high-end patina (P1.0), but displaces value towards an orchestration of experience, service, and access regime (P2.0). The brand reduces its dependence on external legitimations, such as Louis Vuitton, and relies instead on an internal engineering of exposure, return, and controlled variation aligned with sector conventions (Reay & Wanick, 2023, pp. 78–79). Between 2018 and 2021, a reading of branded content persists, capable of placing Prestige in proximity to the luxury industry; however, this does not guarantee an in-game high-end effect when the formal differential is minimal or remains too close to the base skin (F1, F3). This fragility is aggravated by real access conditioned by consistency and accumulation: luxury is verified less as possession than as a discipline of sustained engagement, return, knowledge of the system, access to already closed events, and the capacity to interpret retrospectively the shifting conditions of access.

The 2022 turn crystallises this transformation by turning scarcity into a manageable property. The reopening of the archive does not operate as a simple repetition of the past, but as a mechanism for making it both profitable and hierarchical. Dates, versions, commemorations, and modes of access allow exceptionality to survive recirculation. From this perspective, the F1–F5 typology shows that prestige does not operate as a homogeneous category, but as an uneven distribution of techniques of valorisation. Each family activates a different technique, from immediate visual marking to perceptual performance, media density, seasonal temporality, system memory, and archival competence.

This elasticity of prestige makes it possible to connect the temporal administration of the inventory with a second dimension of value: in-game legibility. Riot Games' 2017 technical statement, centred on clarity, containment of noise, and thematic coherence, shifts the debate from the golden signature

towards a perceptual economy in which quality is tested under visual stress. At this point, a structural contradiction emerges: the system proclaims noise reduction as a normative principle while commercialising exceptionality through signal intensification and the accumulation of effects, especially in F2. Clarity remains both a normative ideal and a terrain of aesthetic and competitive negotiation. Players who do not own these skins incorporate an additional burden into high-speed tactical calculations, with the risk of perceptual friction and spurious readings of advantage when visual recognition, anticipation, and decision-making depend on minimal differences. The system thus tends to reward those who master these visual repertoires, although this advantage remains displaced onto the perceptual field and does not appear as an explicit modification of the rules.

6. Conclusions

The Prestige line makes it possible to conceptualise digital exclusivity as a design of circulation. Exclusivity thus no longer depends on absolute irreproducibility, but is sustained through a controlled elasticity that inscribes differences between players: the object may return, but it returns under specific conditions, hierarchies, and temporal markers. In this sense, the archive does not function as a neutral repository of the past, but as an economic and symbolic infrastructure oriented towards producing value in the present, sustaining continuity of gameplay, and renewing the persuasive force of the catalogue.

The main contribution of the article lies in showing that this exclusivity does not operate homogeneously. The F1–F5 typology makes it possible to describe five modes of Prestige valorisation: surface gilding, perceptual performance, media event, narrative secrecy, and programmed seasonality. These categories do not merely classify visual styles, but distinct ways of making prestige recognisable under conditions of play, interface, and circulation. Digital luxury thus appears as a variable combination of finish, legibility, memory, temporality, and access. This shifts the analysis of cosmetic items beyond monetisation or consumption, making it possible to observe how exceptionality is produced through the relation between visual design, editorial regime, and temporal administration of the catalogue.

The case shows how monetisation is articulated through persuasive design that turns time, consistency, and attention to the calendar into conditions of access. Rather than relying solely on visual desirability, the system displaces value towards waiting, access windows, and intermediary currency, resembling interface logics that the literature on dark or deceptive patterns de-

scribes as mechanisms for modulating attention, behaviour, and spending through urgency, partial opacity, and temporal pressure. The system thus re-converts loyalty into eligibility and transfers part of the pressure from ludic performance to the administration of inventory and catalogue memory. The reappearance and rotation of the archive establish the conditions under which a cosmetic item can circulate again without losing distinction. The specificity of digital luxury within the GaaS model therefore lies in the capacity to bring the archive back without restoring it as mere availability. Each reappearance is placed under a form of control that reorders its value through variants, commemorative editions, differentiated access, rotations, limited windows, and seasonal cycles. Return is addressed above all to those who have learned to inhabit the system's calendar: those who persist, accumulate currency, recognise the genealogy of the catalogue, and turn this operational memory into a condition of eligibility.

Ethics and Transparency

This research did not involve intervention with human participants or the collection of personal data. The corpus consists exclusively of public and accessible materials from the League of Legends game client, its visible interface, and official Riot Games documentation, cross-checked against specialised repositories. For this reason, ethics committee review was not required. The analysis was conducted using verifiable materials, without recourse to private sources or confidential information.

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Conflict of Interest

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Author Contributions

Contribution	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4
Conceptualization	X			
Data curation	X	X		
Formal Analysis	X			
Funding acquisition	X			
Investigation	X			
Methodology	X			
Project administration	X			
Resources	X	X		
Software	X	X		
Supervision	X			
Validation	X			
Visualization	X			
Writing – original draft	X			
Writing – review & editing	X			

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study have not been uploaded to a specific public repository, since no independent database containing primary information suitable for deposit was generated. Rather, the analysis is based on an analytical enumeration constructed from information available in the game client interface itself and cross-checked against official Riot Games documentation. Data collection was carried out through consultation of the visible pages of the client and manual verification in the game client, aimed at confirming the effective presence of each item within its windows of availability and return. As documentary support, official Riot Games communications on Prestige and the restructuring of Mythic content were used, together with Mythic Shop support documentation in the versions published and current during the period analysed, including Riot Games (2020), Riot Games (2022), Riot Games (2024), and Riot Games (n.d.). Consequently, the data are verifiable through public sources and the game client itself, although they are not hosted in an external repository.



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