The rise of esports

The first video games appeared more than 50 years ago and the first video game competition took place in 1972. In 1990s video games went online and in 1997 Cyberathlete Professional League, the pioneer in professional video game tournaments, was established. The community around competitive gaming was slowly growing, but there was very little money in esports, so almost no one could make a living by playing. This changed after 2010 when the big brands in IT industry (Intel, Nvidia, MAD and other) realized the true potential of esports, started investing in it and the big rise of esports begun. It had great impact on the industry and also on the players.

The rise of esports begun at the start of this decade around the time company Valve announced a Dota2 tournament called The International with prize pool of 1.6 million dollars, which was by far the biggest prize pool for a single game at a tournament at the time. A lot of people had questioned authenticity of the announcement, because they did not believe the tournament was really going to take place. However Valve did not lie about the tournament. After it came to an end and the winners successfully received their prize money, the implication was clear. There will be more money coming into esports − soon the professional players will be able to make a living by playing video games. Reality is that now, five years after the rise of esports started, there are many players living their dream. A lot of professional players now make a living gaming, there are many more big tournaments than before, the viewership multiplied and in a few years esports will certainly become mainstream.

Besides Dota2 there were few other games with bright future. The most prominent of them were League of Legends, the most popular online multiplayer game today, and Starcraft 2, a classic strategy game with especially strong player base in South Korea. These three games were later joined by Counter Strike Global Offensive, the newest iteration of a famous first person shooter game, and Hearthstone, a collectible card game. Keep in mind that the games mentioned are the most popular and that there are many other games being played professionally/semi-professionally.

These games attracted a lot of people, however that doesn't necessarily mean everything about it is a good thing. In reality, from a human point of view, it is quite the opposite. The main reason for that is the unfriendly environment (often called "toxic") created by those players. A lot of people in these games use violent language, whine all the time, blame everyone but themselves and so on. Some of these games are especially unfriendly to beginners, because players don't like losing and the matchmaking systems of these games are far from perfect, which means that experienced players all the time end up in a team with players that are far from being experienced.

It is also worth mentioning that a lot of players like watching online video streams of tournament matches, professional players or just famous streamers. There is nothing wrong about that, however there is a chat attached to each one of these streams and quite often the audience has very sexist, racist or in another manner unpleasant comments. The last time I watched a big tournament online I realized that these manners of online communities started carrying over to "real life". There were quite many people in the arena, where the tournament took place, with signs saying various things from encouraging some team or player, which I liked, to unpleasant ones, which I would rather not mention.

Although there are some problems, for example the toxicity in some games, I think that the pros heavily outweigh the cons. Especially if players realize what is wrong about their behaviour and will try to do something about it.