Universiteit Utrecht

"Portraying Disability: *League of Legends'* Multifaceted Approach Across Game, Lore, and Media"

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24-04-2025

Arcane Savior Viktor, League of Legends (Riot Games)

Abstract

The representation of disabilities in media remains underexplored, especially from a transmedia perspective. This study therefore examines the portrayal of mental health and disabilities through a transmedia lens, investigating how the *League of Legends*' transmedia universe shapes and evolves the representation of disabilities across its various platforms. Focusing on Jinx (mental health) and Viktor (physical disability), this analysis follows the characters throughout the game *League of Legends*, the tv show *Arcane* and other additional transmedia narratives. A textual and transmedia analysis was used to examine how these characters and their disabilities are portrayed in *League of Legends* and how this is translated across its transmedia extensions. Findings reveal that the original portrayals in the game lack depth and dimensionality, employing superficial disability tropes. The transmedia expansions, particularly *Arcane*, evolve these portrayals and provide more opportunities for representation through character backstories and nuanced physical/emotional depictions. This analysis highlights how transmedia storytelling allows for layered disabled characters, which could help improve representation in future media.

Keywords: transmedia, disabilities, multiplicity, narrative continuity, representation, tropes, stereotypes, mental health

Contents

Introduction

In a world where digital media is everywhere around us, video games are emerging as powerful platforms with the possibility of being more than mere entertainment. Portrayals of mental illnesses can, for example, influence the way people see these mental illnesses in real life both positively and negatively.[1] Spreading more awareness and discussing representations of disabilities, both physical and mental ones, is important to open the conversation around these topics. Jethro Shell, lecturer in games and information systems, found through a survey that "the overall results showed that disabled characters were under-represented in video games trailers, and respondents to the survey viewed disabled characters as the least represented group."[2] While representations of mental health and/or physical disabilities have been studied already for various media, for example video games[3] and movies[4], something that seems to be missing is research regarding representation throughout a transmedia world. This is interesting to examine since "a character in one work is not necessarily the same in another, making their actual identity hard to unpack."[5] An example of such a world is *Runeterra*, the fictional world of the characters from the game *League of Legends*. *League of Legends* is a multiplayer online battle arena (also called MOBA) with over 140 different playable characters, called champions. It was released in 2009 and developed by *Riot Games*. In the game, two teams of five battle against each other to invade and destroy the enemy's base and nexus.[6] Each character has their own lore, some more elaborate than others, and their own unique abilities and playstyle. Among all these characters, there are quite a few champions with either physical disabilities or mental health issues. Two of these characters, Jinx and Viktor, form the basis of this thesis, where I will be analysing the portrayal of these disabilities.

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[1] Kelli Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*. Proceedings of the 2018 Connected Learning Summit, 2018: 77.
[2] Jethro Shell, "What Do We See: An Investigation Into the Representation of Disability in Video Games," *arXiv (Cornell University)*, January 1, 2021: 1. https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2103.17100.
[3] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 2018.
[4] Steven H. Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood," the Psychiatric Times 20, no. 6 (June 1, 2003), https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/articles/stigma-continues-hollywood.
[5] Joleen Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, Amsterdam University Press eBooks, 2023, 13. https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048553495.
[6] "League of Legends How to Play," n.d., https://www.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/how-to-play/.

This will, however, not be limited to the MOBA video game. The world of Runeterra consists of quite an elaborate universe spanning over animations, music groups, video games and a card game.[7] In this thesis, I will conduct a textual and transmedia analysis to examine the relevant transmedia extensions of *League of Legends* and analyse the way in which these portray the disabilities of the characters. Following the example of games scholar Joleen Blom I will examine the pursuit of narrative continuity in a transmedia world and the multiplicity of transmedia characters.[8] This leads me to ask the following research question: *How does League of Legends' transmedia universe shape and evolve the representation of disabilities across its various platforms?* The transmedia perspective of this research question provides insight into the representation of disabilities across various media, showing if a character is represented differently across multiple media platforms. During my analysis I will also look at some notes and comments from the developers for more information and to investigate the role of developers in creating authentic representation. It is however important to keep in mind that notes from developers are usually released for a reason, meaning that the company wants you to have this information. My main question will be divided into the following two sub questions:

Firstly, *how does the base game of League of Legends represent disabilities through its champion design, narratives, and gameplay mechanics?* I start with the game itself since this is the starting point of the transmedia world, and for a lot of players probably their point of entry into this world. This part of my analysis will focus on analysing how disabilities are depicted within the core game itself, and how these portrayals are integrated into the visual design, gameplay and lore of the characters in *League of Legends*.

The second sub question is: *how does the transmedia universe of Runeterra expand and evolve the representation of disabilities across its platforms*? This second part examines how the broader transmedia worldbuilding influences and shapes the representation of disabled characters. The transmedia extensions that will be studied

[7] Brent Yan, "League of Legends: The Convergence of Transmedia Storytelling and IP Evolution," *ResearchGate*, August 2024, https://doi.org/10.62517/jnme.202410410.
[8] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 47, 48.

are *Arcane*[9], which is an animated show based on the lore of the game and its characters, music videos on YouTube and the official *League of Legends Wiki*[10].

To answer these two sub questions, I will be discussing the following topics: Firstly, character design and narratives will be analysed, examining the ways in which the designs and narratives of the champions point to certain disabilities. Literature from Hyler[11] on tropes of mental illness in Hollywood, Dunlap[12] on the representation of mental illness in video games and Shell[13] on the representation of physical disabilities in video games will be used to provide information on the portrayal of disabilities and harmful stereotypes. Following this, I will examine the backstories on the wiki and voice lines from the characters in game. Lastly, I plan to explore the abilities of the selected characters. Next to analysing the design of these abilities, the gameplay mechanics will also be taken into consideration.

The champions I will focus on are Jinx and Viktor. The reason I chose to look at both mental as well as physical disabilities is because they don't always stand alone and can influence each other. Viktor, for example, can be seen struggling with depression in *Arcane* because of his physical disabilities. The representation of these disabilities will be explored throughout all the previously mentioned transmedia extensions, with some additional information regarding other disabled characters in *League of Legends*. By examining these characters I will investigate how *League of Legends* and its transmedia extensions either perpetuate or challenge common problematic tropes in disability representation, such as the villanization of disabled characters.[14] To avoid harmful stereotypes in this research, I will approach this analysis from different perspectives and use the transmedia context to explore how these characters are portrayed across media platforms and look for nuanced portrayals. I will also balance both positive and problematic representations to ensure an inclusive understanding of the disability representation in *League of Legends* and its transmedia extensions.

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[9] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, *Arcane*, Riot Games and Fortiche, 2021 – 2024.
[10] League of Legends Wiki, "League of Legends Wiki," n.d. https://wiki.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/.
[11] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood."
[12] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*.
[13] Shell, "An Investigation Into the Representation of Disability in Video Games."
[14] Jan Stasieńko, Agnieszka Dytman-Stasieńko, Krystina Madej, Adam Flamma, and Maciej Śledź, *"Fragile Avatars?": Representations of Disability in Video Games*, Lower Silesia University Press, 2021: 102.

A reason for this research is that more discussions around this topic could help fight stereotypical portrayals by inviting people to talk about their disabilities. As can be seen in texts from Cole and Barker,[15] Dunlap,[16] and Stasieńko et al.,[17] representation of disabilities in videogames has been studied already. However, compared to other social issues like gender and race, it could use more research.[18] Accurate representations of disabilities are important since representation in the media can have a significant impact on society's perceptions of disabled individuals.[19] Additionally, a transmedia perspective adds another angle to this research, exploring not one medium but various platforms. This analysis of a transmedia world is therefore a necessary expansion on the current research. The different transmedia extensions of *League of Legends* are therefore the main factors for my choice of examining the world of Runeterra. The transmedia narratives offer insight into the way disability representation might change or develop across various platforms. By focusing on the transmediality of *League of Legend's* disabled characters, this research will put more emphasis on the way these characters and their disabilities are represented across various media. This also allows more insight into the characters themselves. In summary, *League of Legends* provides a good starting point as a game where stereotypes are both reinforced and challenged. Furthermore, it demonstrates the use of transmedia extensions and how the disabilities are translated into different media.

Following this introduction, I will start out with the theoretical framework, followed by an explanation of my method, which will be a textual analysis, or more specifically a transmedia analysis. This will be followed by the actual analysis, which at the start will be mostly descriptive and later translate into a more interpretative analysis to explain the meaning of what has been examined.

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[15] Alayna Cole and Dakoda Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 2020, 87, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/games-texts-alayna-cole-dakoda-barker/10.1201/9780429331329.

[16] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*.

[17] Stasieńko et al., *" Fragile Avatars?": Representations of Disability in Video Games*.

[18] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 77.

[19] Hugh Klein and Kenneth S. Shiffman, "Underrepresentation and Symbolic Annihilation of Socially Disenfranchised Groups ('Out Groups') in Animated Cartoons," *Howard Journal of Communications* 20, no. 1 (January 30, 2009): 55–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170802665208.

Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical framework I explore the literature surrounding two main topics: transmediality and the representation of disabilities. Firstly, I will discuss concepts related to transmediality to paint a clear picture of the worldbuilding, narratives and characters in the world of Runeterra. Following this, I will focus on the representation of physical disabilities as well as mental health. My theoretical framework is mostly situated in the field of media and game studies, combined with some additional research on mental health and physical disabilities.

Transmedia storytelling

A central part of my research is the transmedia storytelling and worldbuilding of *League of Legends*. Transmedia storytelling involves, according to Jenkins, stories being told across different kinds of media, where each medium adds to the narrative.[20] While they are all connected, each product can still be enjoyed without having to know the others. *Arcane*, for example, can easily be watched and understood by people who don't know anything about *League of Legends* and vice versa. When the same characters appear in different texts and platforms, they become transmedial. Blom argues that this can cause identity issues, for example with establishing a consistent identity across texts. Characters that appear in different franchises can potentially be portrayed as different people with some overlapping aspects. In the case of Riot Games, however, it concerns a transmedia franchise that is therefore trying to obtain narrative consistency.[21] Blom critiques the idea that transmedial characters have the same identity throughout different works, rejecting the idea of narrative continuity. She refers to the Japanese cross-media strategies, where the multiplicity of characters is embraced.[22] This multiplicity of characters ties in with the relevance of my research, examining what it means for the representation of disabilities when characters are

[20] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006, ProQuest Ebook Central, 97, 98. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=2081610.
[21] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 17.
[22] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 14.

represented in different ways throughout various media within the same transmedia world.

By creating new content, the franchise keeps the customer's interest and loyalty.[23] This transmedia content can create strong emotional attachments between the consumers and the product. The motives behind it are therefore often economic, since this can make the sales of the product go up. Transmedia franchises are usually most successful when the same creative unit, in this case the company Riot Games, maintains control throughout the entire franchise.[24]

According to media scholar Dan Hassler-Forest, transmedia storytelling is not just telling a story across different platforms. It is also a dynamic process involving the participation of fans, technological changes and the way media companies produce and distribute content.[25] Transmedia storytelling provides additional content, new ways for the audience to connect with characters and gain a deeper understanding of the story.[26]

Lastly, this thesis applies a few of Jenkins' core concepts of transmedia storytelling to analyse the representation of disabilities in *League of Legends* and its transmedia extensions. These concepts together with Blom's material will provide a helpful framework for understanding how disability narratives can change and evolve across various media platforms. One of these concepts is drillability, which is mostly about the depth of engagement. I will examine how the representation from *League of Legends* spreads beyond the game itself and I will investigate how these transmedia extensions allow for deeper engagement with characters like Jinx.[27] Two other concepts Jenkins discusses are continuity and multiplicity. Continuity is about coherence, which includes the previously mentioned narrative consistency. Multiplicity

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[23] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 97, 98.
[24] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*,106, 108.
[25] Dan Hassler-Forest, "Transmedia Politics: *Star Wars* and the Ideological Battlegrounds of Popular Franchises." In *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, edited by Matthew Freeman and Renira Rampazza Gambarato, 297. London: Routledge, 2018.
[26] Mélanie Bourdaa, "Transmedia Storytelling: Character, Time and World – The Case of *Battlestar Galactica*," in *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 135, 136.
[27] Henry Jenkins, "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday)," Pop Junctions, 2009, https://henryjenkins.org/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html.

allows for different versions and perspectives on characters.[28] These concepts are also referred to by Blom, who welcomes the idea of multiplicity in characters.[29] I will use these concepts to analyse whether the transmedia storytelling of Runeterra maintains continuity or allows for more diverse interpretations. This transmedia storytelling takes place in a detailed and rich universe that can support multiple characters, the creation of which Jenkins calls worldbuilding. This world can manifest itself throughout different media platforms, providing more detailed context for disabled characters.[30] According to Jenkins, "storytelling has become the art of world building."[31] The purpose of this transmedia storytelling would be to create a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience."[32] However, as Blom argues, "an emphasis on stories and worlds generates the problem of *narrative continuity* as an ideal towards which transmedia storytelling strives."[33]

Another concept mentioned by Jenkins is that of seriality. According to Jenkins, "we can think of transmedia storytelling then as a hyperbolic version of the serial, where the chunks of meaningful and engaging story information have been dispersed not simply across multiple segments within the same medium, but rather across multiple media systems."[34] This will be examined through lore updates and the ways in which *Arcane* deepens the story of Jinx and Viktor. Lastly, subjectivity concerns the exploration of the story through different characters' perspectives. Different media platforms provide various perspectives on a character, like the way Jinx's mental illness is framed in the game compared to how it is explored in *Arcane*. All these concepts will be applied to *League of Legends* and its transmedia extensions to explore the portrayal of mental health and physical disabilities in this transmedia world.

[28] Jenkins, "Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling," 2009.
[29] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 14.
[30] Henry Jenkins, "Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: The Remaining Four Principles of Transmedia Storytelling," Pop Junctions, 2009, https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge_of_the_origami_unicorn.html.
[31] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 116.
[32] Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101," Pop Junctions, March 21, 2007, https://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.
[33] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 16.
[34] Jenkins, "The Remaining Four Principles of Transmedia Storytelling," 2009.

Representation of Mental Health and Physical Disabilities

The portrayal of mental illness and physical disabilities is important to discuss since the way media depict these can simultaneously reflect our cultural values and influence the way people view them in the real world.[35] Dunlap argues that discussions of representation have mostly been focused on the lack on gender and race,[36] which is why Dunlap provides a framework for researching the portrayal of mental illness in video games. The framework focuses on a spectrum consisting of three groups: one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations. A one-Dimensional representation consists of the mental illness not being essential to the character, acknowledging that it exists but only being referenced in the background. Following this, a two-dimensional representation does have mental illness as an essential part of the character. In this case, the portrayal lacks depth.[37] Lastly, the three-dimensional representation does not treat mental illness as just plot points, but instead "these representations have depth and dimensionality and examine the experience of mental illness from multiple perspectives."[38] Dunlap also describes a couple of film and television tropes that were used to map the portrayal in video games. The following tropes are mentioned: the homicidal maniac, the narcissistic parasite, the female patient-seductress, the rebellious free spirit, the specially gifted, the zoo specimen,[39] the simpleton, and the failure or victim.[40] I will use these tropes to examine if characters like Jinx and Viktor fit these tropes. To get an idea of the tropes, I will shortly go into each trope and explain the main criteria according to Steven Hyler, a clinical professor of psychiatry. The tropes are as follows:

The homicidal maniac concerns the stereotypical idea of someone who's insane and, because of that, extremely violent. This character usually appears in horror films as an uncontrollable killer. Hyler follows this by mentioning that, with a few exceptions, people that have mental disorders are not more prone to committing violent crimes

[35] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness*, 77.
[36] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 77.
[37] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games,* 80-82.
[38] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 83.
[39] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood."
[40] Jane Pirkis, Warwick R. Blood, Catherine Francis & Kerry McCallum. *A review of the literature regarding fictional film and television portrayals of mental illness*. Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne, 2005.

compared to the rest of the population.[41] The narcissistic parasite is a trope where the mental patient is depicted as someone who continuously seeks attention and is in a narcissistic relationship with their therapist. The patient is also seen as self-centred. This trope usually appears in comedy films.[42] The third trope mentioned is that of the female patient as a seductress, where the mental patient often has sex with her therapists. The patient here is highly sexualized, providing harmful stereotypes.[43] The stereotype of the rebellious free spirit portrays mentally ill characters as individuals who rebel against the norms of society,[44] and that of the specially gifted is usually a character with special abilities or talents that either stem from their disability or are there to compensate for the disability.[45] Lastly, we have the zoo specimen. This trope dehumanises people with a mental illness, depicting them as crazy people with no rights, likening them to animals in a zoo.[46]

Jane Pirkis et al. add two more tropes to this list, which are the simpleton and the failure or the victim. The simpleton is used as a comedic relief and usually doesn't really comprehend what's happening around them. The failure or victim doesn't contribute anything meaningful to society and is seen as a lost cause.[47]

The settings of a medium can also influence the way disabilities are portrayed. Shell mentions that a lot of worlds in video games have fantasy or post-apocalyptic settings, resulting in them not being representative of real life. This means that when diverse characters are included, this is often used as a narrative element instead of aiming to provide accurate representation.[48] Shell examined 108 video game trailers for his research. While a trailer does not fit into the genre of a video game, from a transmedia perspective trailers can be seen as a paratext of the video game that enhances worldbuilding and connects video games to other platforms like film adaptations.[49] The analysis revealed that disabilities are often portrayed in a

[41] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"1.
[42] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"1.
[43] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"2.
[44] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"2.
[45] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood," 2.
[46] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood."
[47] Pirkis et al., A *review of the literature*, 9.
[48] Shell, "An Investigation into the Representation of Disability in Video Games," 18, 19.
[49] Jan Švelch, "Towards a Typology of Video Game Trailers: Between the Ludic and the Cinematic," *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*, September 1, 2015, 19, https://doaj.org/article/ed86247632a944159b2fd7d42788b59f.

stereotypical way, where characters "overcome" disabilities or have prosthetics or enhancements, often resulting in an unrealistic world view.[50]

To examine some types of physical disabilities that are common in video games the book *"Fragile Avatars?" Representations of Disability in Video Games* provides useful information regarding harmful tropes and the importance of representation. There are a couple different types discussed here, one of the most common ones being a disability resulting from an injury or a disease, affecting the arms or legs. Just like Shell, Stasieńko et al. argue that these disabilities often affect the story and are used to develop a narrative background. They also discuss residual or partial disabilities, which is often connected to an enhancement resulting in the disability being used as a weapon.[51]

Another way disabilities are portrayed is by limiting the character in some respects but making them extremely talented in another. A character can, for example, be very limited in their mobility, but at the same time be very intelligent. There are also cases where the disability is just a visual and does not have any significance to the plot.[52] This is, according to Alayna Cole, 'incidental' representation,[53] which occurs when the character has a disability with limited narrative or mechanical significance. While this still provides representation, it can also be seen as a form of erasure because it undermines the impacts disabilities have on people in real life. Another occurrence is that characters get replacements for lost limbs which make them more powerful but besides that do not impact them in any meaningful way. This once again is a form of erasure since these games ignore the challenges that come with prosthetics and instead use them to empower the character. An alternative way to look at this is as a way of escapism for people with disabilities to experience a world where they are more abled than the average person.[54]

Characters in games often aren't portrayed with long term health conditions because of the idea that this weakens them, and that players would prefer strong characters. Mental health of physical disabilities also often gets downplayed, so the

[50] Shell, "An Investigation into the Representation of Disability in Video Games," 18, 19.
[51] Stasieńko et al., *" Fragile Avatars?": Representations of Disability in Video Games*, 34, 35.
[52] Stasieńko et al., *" Fragile Avatars?": Representations of Disability in Video Games*. 40–43.
[53] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 87.
[54] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 87–89.

player does not have to worry too much about the character's disabilities.[55] Another issue is the vilification of characters, which occurs when video games use either visible disabilities or mental health symptoms as a main point in the character of a villain. This can result in harmful stereotypes where these health conditions are associated with negative motifs like evil or scary.[56]

While the latter part of this theoretical framework mostly focused on videogames, the analysis in this thesis will not be limited to *League of Legends*. The main text, however, will remain the video game since that is the starting point of the transmedia world. Because of this, my analysis will start by examining the characters in the game using the works mentioned in this theoretical framework. By applying concepts from Jenkins and Blom I will follow this up with an analysis of the various transmedia extensions to examine the way these portrayals are shaped and evolved in the other media. Before starting with this analysis, I will discuss the methods I plan to use to carry this out.

[55] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games,* 85-87.
[56] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 92, 93.

Methodology

As method I will be using a textual and transmedia analysis to gather and analyse the information needed for my research. A transmedia analysis will be applied by examining how characters and narratives unfold across various media platforms, using the works on transmedia from Blom and Jenkins as described in the theoretical framework. For the appliance of textual analysis, I will follow the steps of Alayna Cole and Dakoda Barker, who discuss the practical application of textual analysis to games. When performing a textual analysis, this does not have to apply to a literal text like a novel. Instead, it also includes interactive experiences like games. By calling these "texts" they can be analysed with the tools provided by various fields that use the method of textual analysis.[57] Applying this lens allows me to approach the texts from different perspectives and within various social contexts, viewing games not just as consumer products but as cultural artefacts. To examine these, both the audiovisual elements as well as the background information must be taken into consideration, which means looking at game mechanics as well as narrative and aesthetic elements.[58]

Another more simplistic definition of textual analysis is provided by professor and researcher of sexualized media Alan Mckee: "When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text."[59] Textual analysis is not about finding the 'correct' or 'most accurate' interpretation, but rather about trying to understand how people make sense of the world.[60] To do this, Mckee argues that the most important thing is to look at the context. For example, different people will interpret texts in different ways. Following this, he provides three levels of contexts that are important to look at next to the core of the text:

1) The rest of the text: This is about highlighting the way a character is framed depending on the "rules" of the narrative. It is therefore important to take

[57] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 1.
[58] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 2-5.
[59] Alan McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, May 1, 2001, 3, https://eprints.qut.edu.au/41993/.
[60] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 4,5,8.

narrative context into consideration, for example the way in which Viktor's disability is a crucial part of his motivations and character development in *Arcane*.[61]

2) The genre of the text: someone getting chased will be less likely to be interpreted as scary in a comedy movie, while a chase in a horror movie is much more likely to be seen as tense and scary. *League of Legends* is a MOBA video game, where the champions must fight other characters. This competitive nature can influence the portrayal of disabilities. *Arcane* is a sci-fi fantasy show. It is not meant to be realistic or a reflection of our own world. Technological and magical elements may be used to enhance or reduce disabilities.[62]

3) The wider public context in which a text is circulated: *League of Legends* was released in 2009. This means that some champions were made and released around that time, while other champions only came out during recent years. Aurora, who has been confirmed to be autistic, only came out last year. It should be taken into consideration around what time the champions were released, since the wider public context could have been very different about 15 years ago. The same can be said about *Arcane*, the first season of which came out in 2021, about 16 years after *League of Legends* was made.[63]

To perform this textual analysis, I will not be able to look at every single character and scene in the Runeterra universe. I will therefore select a diverse set of characters, including characters from different release periods with either physical disabilities, mental health issues or both. Since *League of Legends* has quite a few transmedia extensions, this will also have to be limited to a few relevant texts. The ones that will be examined are the base game *League of Legends*, its animated show *Arcane*, the *League of Legends* wiki and a couple of cinematics related to the characters. The elements that will be analysed are character design, lore and backstory, in-game

[61] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 13.
[62] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 13.
[63] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis,"14.

dialogue, abilities, cinematics and promotional material. These elements have been chosen because they provide opportunities for physical and mental disabilities to be portrayed. While in a tv show the personality of characters and the way they act are important in examining their portrayal, in a game it is crucial to look at the game mechanics. These show what kind of role the character has and what this character allows the player to do.

During my analysis I will examine both aspects to see if they do indeed show signs of disabilities and if so, how they are portrayed. Jinx and Viktor form the base of my analysis. I selected these characters based on how much content there is available to analyse in both the base game and its transmedia extensions. For disabilities related to mental disorders I only picked characters that are confirmed to have them, since it's difficult to otherwise determine which characters suffer from mental disorders. Since Viktor suffers from both problems with his mental health as well as a physical disability, it is important to take both mental and physical disabilities into account. In Viktor's case, having a physical disability had a negative effect on his mental health. Since the two are related and influence each other I have decided to examine both instead of leaving one out of this analysis. Jinx will provide more insight into the representation of mental health, and other characters in this list will only be cited when relevant or to provide additional information and depth.

Character	**Disability**	**Release date**	**Media**
Viktor	Cripple, depression	2011	Arcane, League of Legends, wiki, cinematics
Jinx	Bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder	2013	Arcane, League of Legends, cinematics, wiki
Camille	Prosthetic legs	2016	League of Legends, cinematics, wiki
Aurora	Autistic	2024	League of Legends, cinematics, wiki

There are also some limitations to the approach of textual analysis. First, the method is subjective to a certain degree due to the interpretative nature of the method.[64] I will implement several strategies to enhance the validity and reliability of this research. Firstly, I will analyse multiple sources of data to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of the disability representation in Runeterra. Secondly, I will be reflective and acknowledge my own biases and assumptions.

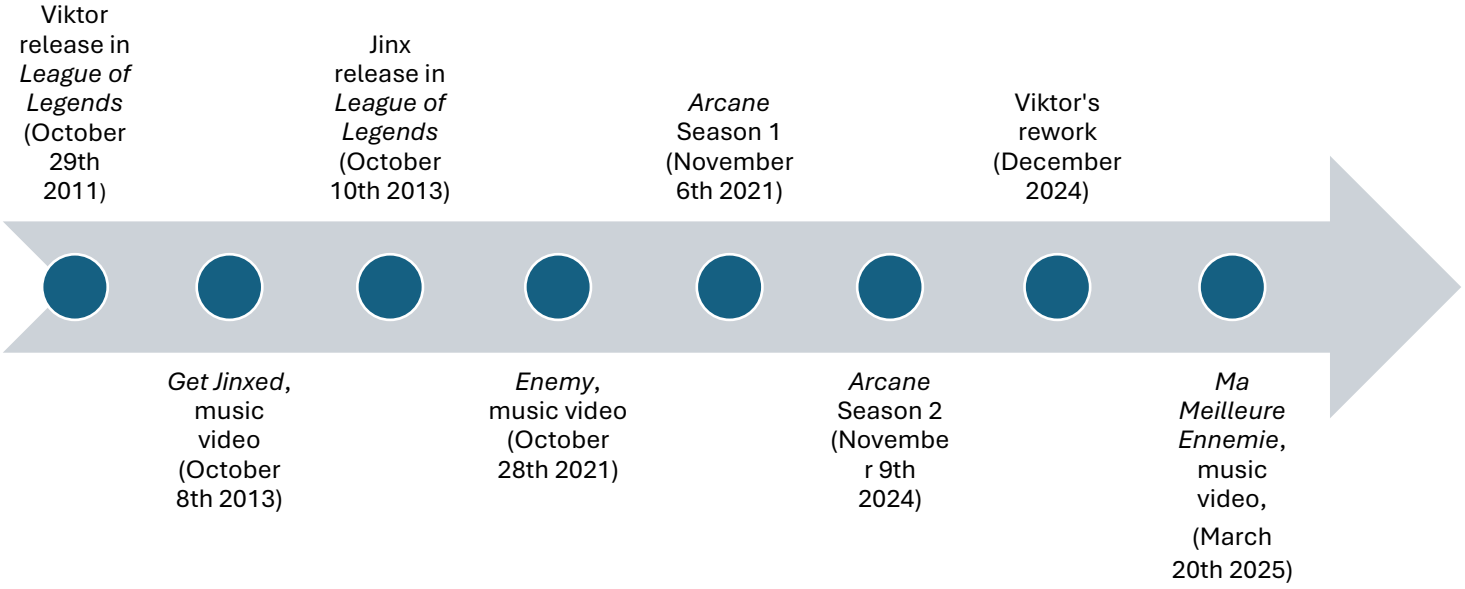
My analysis will be divided into two different parts, related to the two sub questions. The first part will be linked to the following question: *how does the base game of League of Legends represent disabilities through its champion design, narratives, and gameplay mechanics?* The question will be answered by examining the characters Jinx and Viktor. Their appearances in the base game *League of Legends* will provide a common thread throughout the analysis. Following Cole and Barker's method, I will start by examining Jinx's visual design, in-game abilities and narrative in the game and then move on to Viktor. Some of their skins, which are alternate appearances of the characters, will also be examined. To analyse these elements, I will look at their splash arts, voice lines in the game and playstyle. To get a good idea of their playstyle I will play some games as these characters and record them to watch back and examine.

The second part of the analysis will discuss the following question: *how does the transmedia universe of Runeterra expand and evolve the representation of disabilities across its platforms*? This question will link the appearance of the characters in the base game to their design and narrative in Runeterra's transmedia world. The analysis will once again start with Jinx and then move on to Viktor. During this part I will examine how Arcane, the animations and other promotional materials depict and explore the characters and provide more backstories. The official wiki as a text will be more prominent here since it provides a lot of background information for the narrative around the characters. This information will not always be clear in the game itself but can be established by the developers through this official wiki.

[64] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 18.

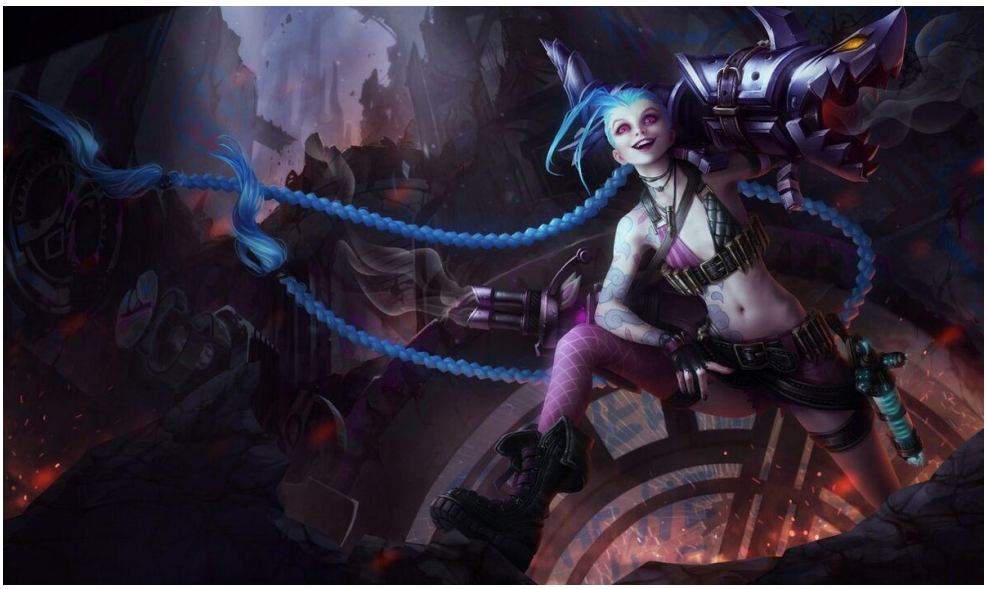
Analysis: The portrayal of disabilities in League of Legends

In this analysis I will provide a descriptive analysis of Jinx and Viktor, which will then be translated into more insightful content, examining the meaning of their portrayals and the way they are depicted. Pictured below is a timeline containing all the transmedia extensions that will be studied in this analysis, apart from the official wiki since the wiki does not have a specific date of release. This analysis will start out with the following question: *How does the base game of League of Legends represent disabilities through its champion design, narratives, and gameplay mechanics?* The main text, *League of Legends*, will therefore be discussed first. Afterwards I will continue to the second sub question and examine the transmedia extensions in chronological order, separated per character.



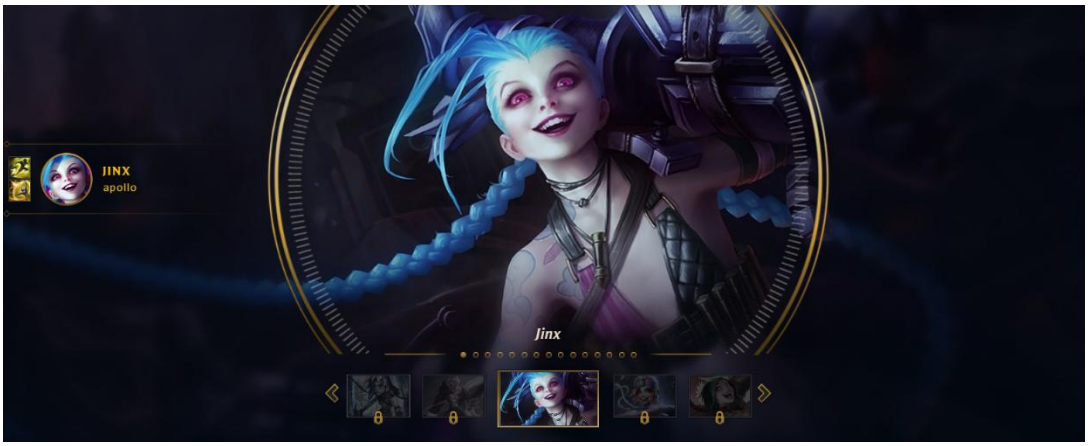
Jinx in League of Legends

Jinx has been represented as a character with mental health struggles in various media. To examine this representation, I will analyse the main text, but also the context surrounding Jinx's character according to McKee's levels of context.[65] The main text in this case is *League of Legends*, elements of which include visual design, lore and in-game abilities. Starting with the visual design, pictured below is Jinx's original main splash art and her base skin in the game. Her splash art shows her smiling in front of a destroyed background. She's holding her weapon, still smoking, indicating she used it recently. Jinx is pictured with a "crazy" look in her eyes, shown through the unnatural colour and emphasized by her facial expression.[66] She has a lot of skin exposed and carries bullets around in a belt around her top. This splash art is the main picture of Jinx which players will encounter when they look up the character in game. Her splash art is depicted next to a short description of her role and abilities, and the image also appears if the player selects Jinx during champion select before entering a game. This image of Jinx with a "crazy" expression is therefore the main depiction of the in-game character.



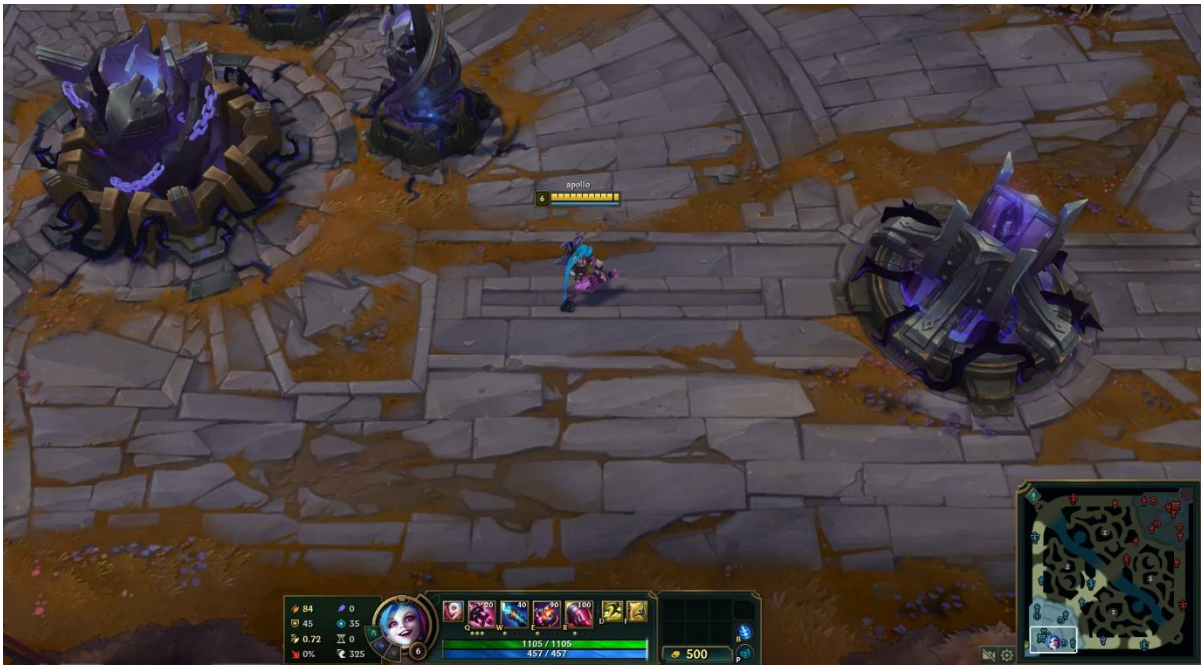
Jinx splash art, League of Legends (Riot Games)[67]

[65] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 13.
[66] "Jinx - Champions - Universe of League of Legends," n.d., https://universe.leagueoflegends.com/en_US/champion/jinx/.
[67] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, Riot Games. Microsoft Windows/Mac, 2009.



Jinx, champion select[68]

The image below on the left, which looks a bit like a profile picture, is what players will see during the game as well. It is displayed on the bottom next to her abilities, but also on the minimap that shows where the character is. Jinx's visual design does not seem to showcase any symptoms of mental health struggles, instead depicting her as a violent person that enjoys destruction. Her laughing expression with the "crazy" eyes is what players will constantly see in the game when looking at Jinx, making that image something which players will immediately associate with her.



Jinx in-game[69]

[68] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.
[69] Riot Games, screenshot of *League of Legends*, 2009.

If we, following McKee's steps, look at the rest of the text, there are some subtextual cues regarding Jinx's unhinged violence. Her brightly coloured weapons with names like Chompers and Fishbones almost seem toy-like, something a child would come up with. This could reflect some kind of innocence to Jinx's character in the game. Additionally, Jinx has some voice lines referring to grief and trauma, hinting that there is more to know about her past. These voice lines will be discussed more later in this analysis, but what becomes clear is that the rest of the text explores the untold trauma of Jinx, which seems hidden in the game itself.

If we delve a bit more into the context, we can find some sketches made for Jinx's expressions on the official page *Universe* of *League of Legends*. The goal of these expressions was to capture a 'manic and unpredictable' character.[70] As said for this concept art, the visual design of Jinx is meant to capture an erratic persona who loves destruction. This concept art set the initial idea of Jinx's character, which established further expectations that players would have for her. It forms the base structure of the game, something which the game then continuously must try to imitate.[71] There are no obvious signs in this design that point towards Jinx having any mental health struggles, but the way she is depicted does fit the description of the "homicidal maniac" trope as described by Hyler, which is the stereotypical idea of a character being uncontrollable and violent because of them being "insane".[72] While the genre of *League of Legends* is a MOBA game, which means fighting and violence is to be expected, this does not necessarily set the expectation of a character enjoying this violence. The genre of the text therefore does not seem to influence the way Jinx is portrayed.[73] What could be considered is the fact that Jinx was released in 2013, when mental health awareness was less developed compared to recent years.[74] This could have influenced the way Jinx was initially conceptualized. Stereotypical portrayals like Hyler's tropes were more prevalent, affecting Jinx's portrayal at the time of her release.

[70] "Jinx - Champions - Universe of League of Legends."
[71] Laurie Taylor, "Networking Power: Videogame Structure from Concept Art," in *Videogames and Art*, ed. Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell (Intellect Books, 2007), 226–37.
[72] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"1.
[73] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 13.
[74] GiShawn Mance, "The Growth of Mental Health Awareness," *Howard Magazine*, 2022.

Jinx expression studies[75]

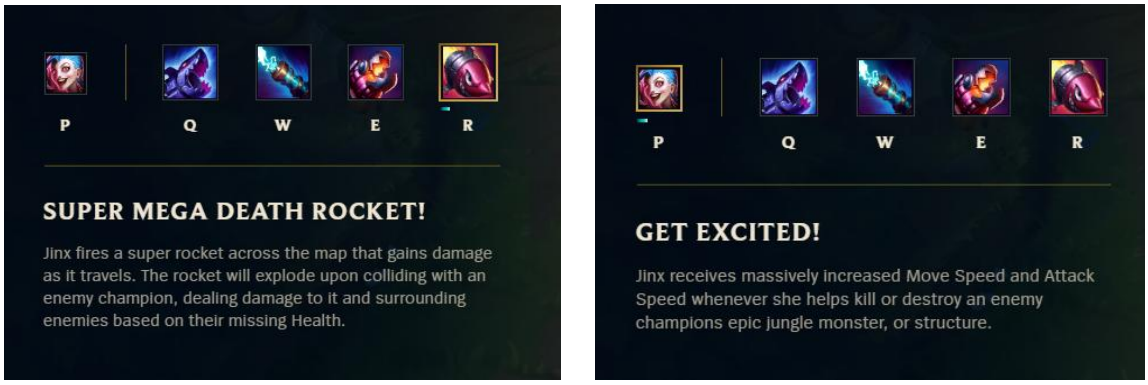
A good example of a more recent character is Aurora, a champion released in 2024 who according to Riot Games is autistic. While Jinx's mental health was never explicitly stated in the game, Aurora was presented as an autistic champion, even having a "champion insights" blog where the developers talk about this.[76] In a champion's insight blog by Riot they explain how Aurora is sensitive and easily gets overwhelmed by large crowds and loud noises. They emphasize that she does not capture the full spectrum of autism, instead covering some of the most basic parts of having autism. Part of the developers that worked on Aurora are autistic themselves, and they got a change to share some of their experiences during Aurora's development.[77] Her autistic traits can also be recognized through some of her voice lines in the game, where she mentions that she enjoys time alone and easily gets overwhelmed.

"*Spending time with others is exhausting. If I seem curt, don't take it personally."*[78]

"The sounds, the smells... I hate it."[79]

[75] "Jinx - Champions - Universe of League of Legends."
[76] "Champion Insights: Aurora," June 20, 2024, https://www.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/news/dev/champion-insights-Aurora/.
[77] "Champion Insights: Aurora."
[78] Contributors to League of Legends Wiki, "Aurora/LoL/Audio," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://leagueoflegends.fandom.com/wiki/Aurora/LoL/Audio.
[79] Wiki, "Aurora/LoL/Audio," n.d.

Following the visual design and lore of Jinx, her abilities in the game also seem to reflect her personality. Every character in the game has four abilities, one of which is the ultimate, and a passive. Every ability has its own name, two of which are pictured here.

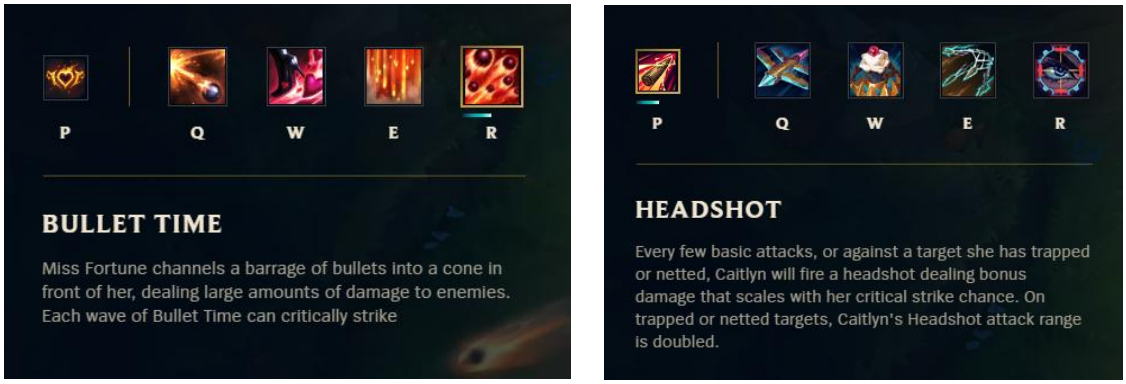


Jinx's abilities in League of Legends[80]

Jinx is a marksman, which means she is a ranged champion relying on basic attacks to do damage. To do this damage, Jinx mostly uses her weapons that she named Pow-Pow and Fishbones, occasionally engaging in a one-sided conversation with them.[81] She has the ability to constantly switch between the two, representing her unpredictable personality. Her passive ability is called "Get excited!" and grants her movement and attack speed after she kills or destroys something. This emphasizes her need for murder and destruction, making her stronger and showing how she enjoys the chaos that she is causing. This mechanic represents her excitement and allows players to experience this as she sprints around the battlefield, which could create an immersive experience for the player through gameplay.[82] This representation of her is further emphasized through the names of her abilities, for example her ultimate which is called "super mega death rocket!".[83] A simple "death rocket" for the name would have been a clear description of the ability. The use of positive adjectives for a destructive weapon aligns with the way the game portrays

[80] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.
[81] Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://wiki.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/Jinx/Audio.
[82] Jenkins, "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn."
[83] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.

Jinx's personality. Other markman's abilities, for example Miss Fortune and Caitlyn, have ability names without all the extra adjectives and with no exclamation mark, showing how Jinx's abilities are named differently because of the way her character is portrayed. It doesn't seem to point towards Jinx having mental health issues, instead pointing more towards the idea of Jinx as a "crazy" character, following problematic tropes regarding mental health where characters with mental health conditions are associated with violence.[84]



Miss Fortune and Caitlyn's abilities in League of Legends[85]

Jinx's explosive personality is further emphasized through her voice lines in the game, for example the voice lines that can be heard when selecting the champion:

"Rules are made to be broken…like buildings! Or people!"[86]

This line immediately makes it clear that Jinx is a character who doesn't follow the rules and enjoys wreaking havoc. Her erratic behaviour can be seen in other voice lines throughout the game as well:

"Whatever, let's just start shooting!"[87]

Her voice lines do not seem to refer to Jinx having any mental illness, instead putting her down as a fun crazy character that jokes about everything. She jokes about being crazy and does not seem to think much about what she's doing, appearing more as a comedic relief.[88]

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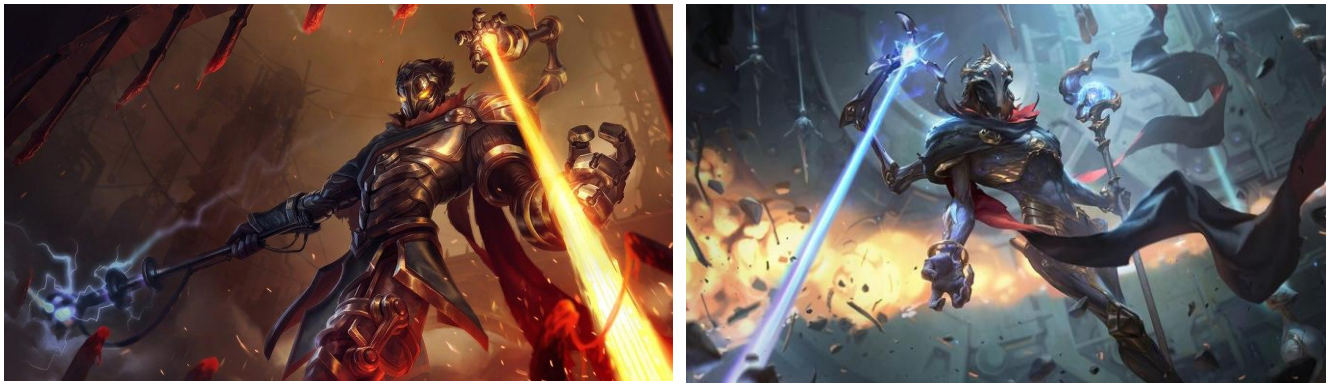
[84] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 93.
[85] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.
[86] "Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki."
[87] "Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki."
[88] Pirkis et al., A *review of the literature*, 9.

In summary, while the game does not seem to portray Jinx as a character with mental health issues, there are some symptoms present like Jinx talking to her weapons and unstable mood patterns that are shown through emotional outbursts like Jinx manically laughing while attacking and childlike taunts (*"She's such a loser, always ready to cry! Ta-ta-ta-taa!"*[89]). The game does not focus on these symptoms and instead leans more into her as a fun, chaotic character with a "crazy" personality that does not take much serious and loves destruction. Her symptoms get downplayed and keep the character easy to understand and play with a "chaotic" personality and aggressive gameplay. This way, the player does not have to worry about their character's disabilities.[90] The portrayal of Jinx changes in different media, which will be explored after the analysis of another *League of Legends*' character: Viktor.

[89] "Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki."
[90] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 85-87.

Viktor in League of Legends

Viktor, or *The Herald of the Arcane*, is a mage in *League of Legends* that got released in 2011. Recently, in December 2024, Viktor got reworked after the release of the second season of *Arcane*. This means that both his visual design and his in-game abilities got changed. In this part, I will explore these elements from both before and after his rework to examine the main text as well as the rest of the text surrounding his character in *League of Legends*.[91]



Viktor's old splash art vs his reworked splash art[92]

Before he became *The Herald of the Arcane*, Viktor's title was *The Machine Herald*. His old design focused a lot on Viktor as a cyborg, his visual design resembling a human with a lot of mechanical changes. In both the splash art and the in-game model a brace can be seen on his left leg, indicating that this leg is disabled and needs support. He also has his cane, which in this case looks more like a weapon because of the electricity coming out at the top and because of how Viktor is holding it in the splash art, pointing it somewhere as if ready to attack instead of using it to support himself.

When looking at the reworked splash art and model on the right, the brace on his left leg is not visible anymore. Viktor looks less like a human with technological augmentations and more like an evolved humanoid being. While his brace seems to

[91] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis," 13.
[92] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.

be gone, he does appear to be using the cane more in a way of using it to support himself while moving instead of just as a weapon. This is however not the case in the game itself, where he occasionally uses his cane to walk but seems fine without it and uses it to attack. The game does not make it clear if the cane is more of a weapon or a supportive tool for Viktor. While Viktor's original design pointed towards him having a physical disability through his brace, this was removed after the rework.

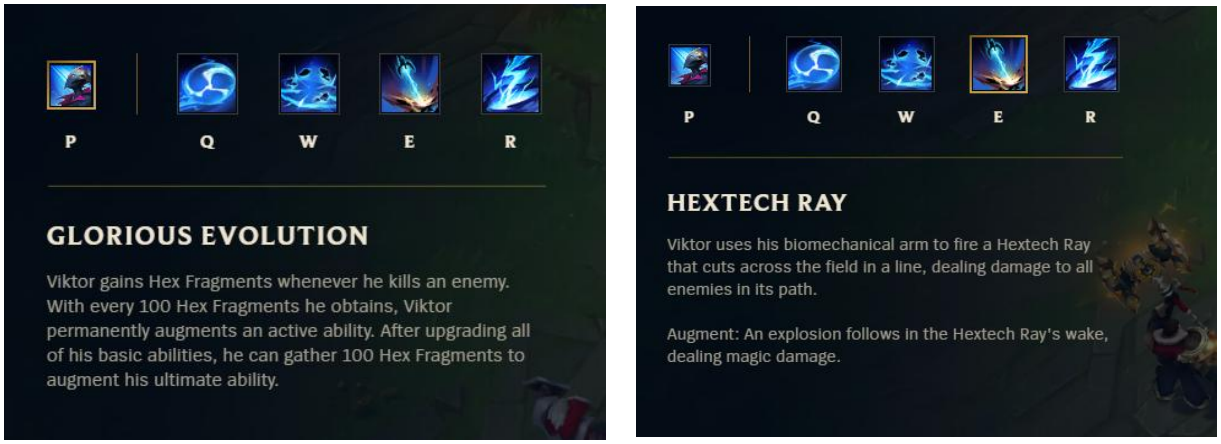
In-game model, new vs old Viktor[93]

In early concept drawings of Viktor's original version, the brace can be seen more clearly, showing that this was part of the design in early stages of his development. What is interesting about Viktor's narrative is that the canon lore surrounding Viktor does not mention anything regarding him being a cripple. He is however depicted wearing a brace to support his leg and uses a cane. The fact that Viktor's disability only seemed visual and did not add any narrative could be viewed as incidental representation, which occurs "when chronic health conditions are included in a text with limited mechanical or narrative significance."[94]

[93] SkinSpotlights, "NEW Vs OLD Viktor Model Comparison | League of Legends," November 26, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHTIrkYHn3Y.
[94] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 87

Early Viktor colour concept[95]

Viktor's abilities revolve around Hextech, which is a combination of magic and technology. In the game, Viktor uses his biomechanical arm to use these Hextech abilities. His passive is called "glorious evolution", which is something Viktor's kit revolves around. His passive states that his abilities upgrade throughout the game, evolving his power and making him stronger. This ability represents his ongoing transformation and enhancement, empowering himself through Hextech and augmenting his body to overcome his limitations. His in-game abilities and mechanics do not directly represent him as a disabled character, instead focusing on his technological advancements made through Hextech. They emphasize his transformation, focusing on his evolution. Through these abilities, the game depicts Viktor as a strong character instead, which is often preferable for game characters because of the idea that players prefer powerful characters.[96]



Viktor's abilities[97]

[95] "Viktor - Champions - Universe of League of Legends," n.d., https://universe.leagueoflegends.com/en_US/champion/viktor/?mv=image-gallery.
[96] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games,* 85-87.
[97] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.

In the game's lore, Viktor is an inventor with a passion for studying. He is obsessed with the idea of a glorious evolution, surpassing humanity's limits. This can be noticed throughout his voice lines in the game: *"Humanity has stumbled…but I will catch the fallen, and show them the glory of evolution."*[98] Viktor strives for perfection, believing that *"to live with flaws, is to be subject to them."*[99]

Viktor's old portrayal in *League of Legends* aligned with that of incidental representation, depicting Viktor as a cripple but limiting the narrative and mechanical significance of this disability. After the rework, Viktor's disability is not apparent anymore. Apart from him having a cane, which could also be viewed as a weapon, there are no signs of a disability in the visual design, narrative or gameplay mechanics. However, different portrayals for both Viktor and Jinx arise through the various transmedia extensions of *League of Legends*.

[98] "Viktor/Audio | League of Legends Wiki," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://wiki.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/Viktor/Audio.
[99] "Viktor/Audio | League of Legends Wiki," n.d.

Jinx and Viktor's characters in the transmedia worldbuilding of Runeterra

Following the game League of Legends, I will now analyse how the transmedia universe of Runeterra expands and evolves the representation of disabilities across its platforms, starting with Jinx.

Jinx as transmedia character

In chronological order, the first appearance of Jinx is in the music video of Jinx's theme song *Get Jinxed* by Riot Games and Djerv. This video was released in 2013 and portrays Jinx in constant battles, blowing things up and enjoying herself while doing so. The song emphasizes this with Jinx constantly laughing and lines like "*so much better, so much fun. Let's start from scratch and blow up the sun*."[100] The lyrics mention her being bored and therefore wanting more "energy" which in this case is shown as her blowing stuff up. The song also mentions "fun" multiple times, emphasizing Jinx as the wacky fun character that enjoys destruction simply because she is bored, and she thinks it's fun. This personality of Jinx in this video aligns with her character in *League of Legends*, which makes sense considering it was released to introduce the character in the game. The portrayal of her mental health is therefore also similar in the sense that it is not really explored, showing the character once again as a "homicidal maniac"[101] but not diving any deeper into her character.

[100] League of Legends, "Get Jinxed (Ft. Djerv) | Official Music Video - League of Legends," October 8, 2013, 1:29, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nUuwO0GDs.
[101] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood,"1.

Jinx in Get Jinxed[102]

The second music video that Jinx appears in is *Enemy* by Riot Games, Imagine Dragons and JID. This music video is based on *Arcane* and got released in 2021 shortly before the first season of *Arcane* came out. *Enemy* begins with Jinx as a child, Powder, seemingly happy and carefree. Throughout the song, it starts to show some of the more difficult times she experienced as a child. From this point on, the video shows moments of Powder crying and hitting herself. Her adult version, Jinx, also shows up, showing them side by side as if they were two separate characters. By showing her childhood, the video already goes into more depth regarding Jinx's character than *League of Legends* ever did. Jinx is not shown as a "homicidal maniac", but as a person that went through a lot of trauma and grief and is learning to deal with that.

So, while Jinx is quite a superficial character in *League of Legends*, she appears with a different personality in this music video, showing the multiplicity of the character. The music video frames her mental state through visual metaphors like chaotic environments and shadowy figures. Her mental problems are also emphasized by the lyrics, for example the following line referring to Jinx having trust issues and being afraid of people turning on her behind her back[103]: *"tell you you're the greatest. But once you turn, they hate us."*[104] It is however important to keep in mind that this

[102] League of Legends, "Get Jinxed (Ft. Djerv)," 2:15.
[103] Songfacts, "Enemy by Imagine Dragons (Featuring JID) - Songfacts," Songfacts, n.d., https://www.songfacts.com/facts/imagine-dragons/enemy.
[104] ImagineDragonsVEVO, "Imagine Dragons X J.I.D - Enemy (From the Series Arcane League of Legends)," October 28, 2021, 0:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9G1VOjN_84.

is a video of about three minutes, so the content being shown is limited. While this transmedia extension does start to delve deeper into Jinx's mental health, moving towards her as a three-dimensional character, this only truly comes to live in the tv show that was released shortly after: *Arcane*.

Jinx and Powder, her younger version, in Enemy[105]

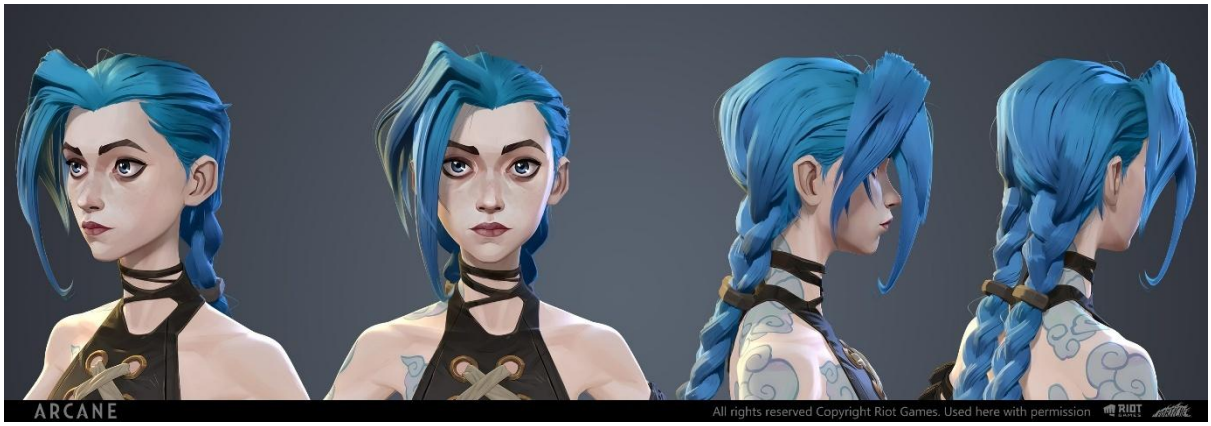
In *Arcane*, Jinx gets introduced as a child called Powder. Her personality was shy, sweet and clumsy, very different from the way Jinx is portrayed in the game. In the first episode Powder and her sister Violet (Vi) are introduced on a burning bridge amidst destruction and with their dead parents lying on the floor.[106] This immediately shows the traumatic events Jinx experienced as a child. Powder also seems to be very emotional, having an emotional breakdown in the third episode after her sister does not want to take her on a mission to rescue their adoptive father. In this scene, she starts destroying things and hitting herself on the head, showing self-harming behaviours.[107]

After Powder decides to join the rescue mission for her adoptive father anyway, she causes a massive explosion while trying to help which ends up killing her adoptive

[105] ImagineDragonsVEVO, "Enemy," 2:37.
[106] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, "Welcome to the Playground," *Arcane*, Season 1, episode 1, Riot Games and Fortiche, 2021: 1:30.
[107] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, "The Base Violence Necessary for Change," *Arcane*, Season 1, episode 3, Riot Games and Fortiche. 2021: 18:15.

father and brothers. This leads to Vi calling her a Jinx (leading to the change of name) and abandoning her.[108] The following episode takes place after a time skip of seven years, showing Jinx as an adult. Throughout the show, Jinx is shown to hallucinate regularly. Other symptoms she shows are impulsiveness, unstable emotions, heavy fear of abandonment and paranoia. While she seems to become more stable in the second season, experiencing fewer hallucinations, she continues to struggle with depression and suicidal behaviour. In the last episode of the second season of the show, Jinx attempts to commit suicide before being stopped by Ekko.[109]

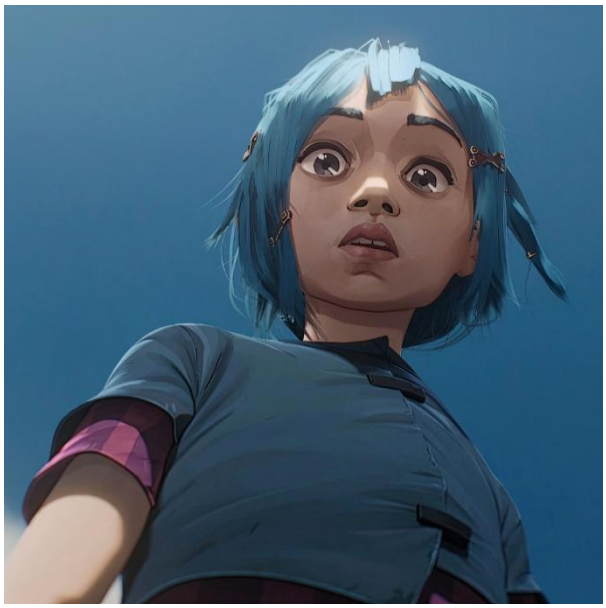
Unlike *League of Legends*, *Arcane* dives deep into Jinx's character and portrays her as three-dimensional by adding a lot of depth and dimensionality to her character.[110] Her mental illness is not just treated as a plot point but is explored deeply throughout the show. While *Arcane* positions Jinx as an antagonist throughout the show, Jinx is not framed as inherently evil as most of her violent acts, like bombing the council,[111] are reactive and stem from unresolved trauma. *Arcane* therefore complicates the villainization of Jinx by emphasizing her duality, portraying her as both vulnerable and destructive.



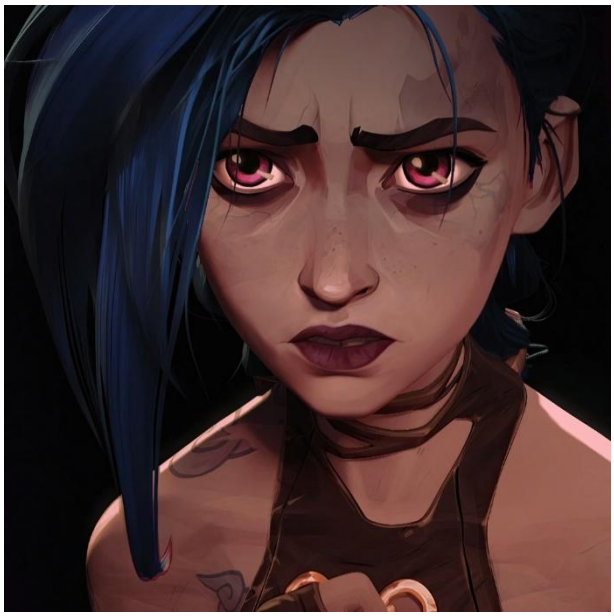
Jinx's model, Arcane[112]

[108] Charrue and Delord, "The Base Violence Necessary for Change," 36:25.
[109] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, "The Dirt Under Your Nails," *Arcane*, Season 2, episode 9, Riot Games and Fortiche. 2024: 1:55
[110] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 83.
[111] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, "The Monster You Created," *Arcane*, Season 1, episode 9, Riot Games and Fortiche, 2021, 35:18.
[112] Thibaut Granet, "ARCANE - Jinx - Modeling & Texturing," Artstation, n.d, https://thibaut_granet.artstation.com/projects/X1aWVw.

Jinx's appearance throughout the first season of *Arcane* is slightly different from her character in *League of Legends*. She doesn't have the crazy eyes that she has in her base skin in the game. She is quite pale and has dark circles under her eyes, indicating a lack of sleep. A later design of her shows her with purple eyes, a result from a drug called shimmer. At this point her design is starting to look more like the one in *League of Legends.*



Powder[113]

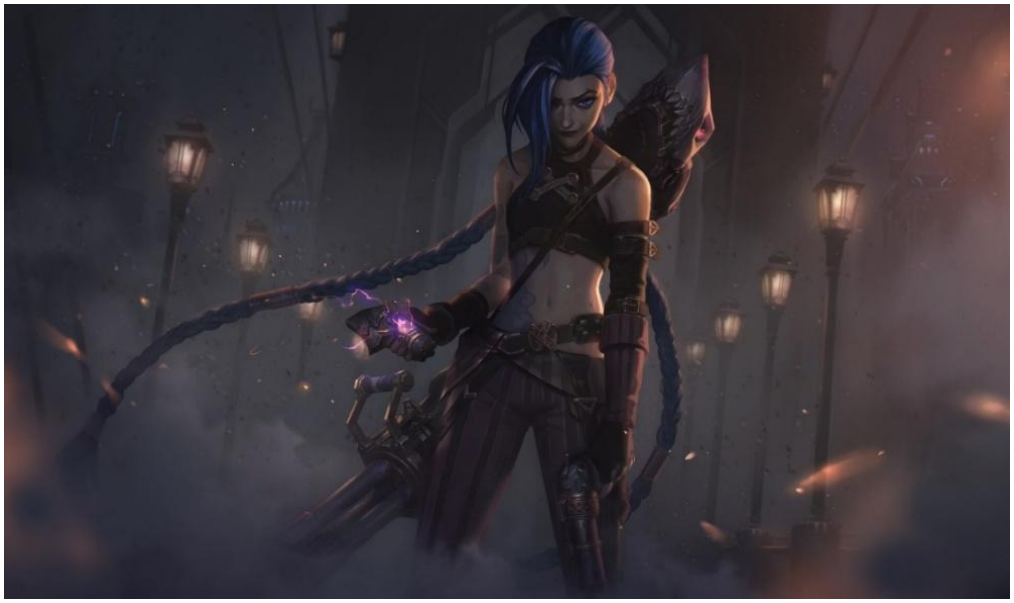


Jinx post-shimmer[114]

Jinx has two skins that are based on *Arcane*, one released in 2021 celebrating the first season of *Arcane*, and one following the second season. The reason for examining these two skins is because they are tied in with the transmedia world, referencing the larger transmedia world and characters being different there. In the first skin, *Arcane Enemy Jinx*, her appearance resembles that of Jinx during the start of *Arcane*, before she used shimmer. She is once standing amidst what appears to be a fight, as she has a bomb in her hand and is surrounded by smoke. She is smiling, but in this case appears more calm and focused, steering away from the idea of Jinx being out of control. She is not depicted as the "wacky" character that her base skin

[113] Contributors to League of Legends Wiki, "Jinx/Arcane," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://leagueoflegends.fandom.com/wiki/Jinx/Arcane.
[114] Contributors to League of Legends Wiki, "Jinx/Arcane."

seems to depict because of the more controlled expression and the lack of "crazy" eyes.



Arcane Enemy Jinx[115]

Arcane Fractured Jinx is the only skin of Jinx where she is not even remotely smiling, instead appearing serious and focused. Her splash art here strays far from the original one, seemingly showing a character with a very different personality. Her voice lines in this skin are also different from her original skin and seem to depict her less as a "wacky" character and more as a person suffering from mental problems. Giving Jinx new voice lines in this skin seems to imply that her personality is indeed different and that this is not the same character as the original one in the game, once again showing the multiplicity of her character.[116] This multiplicity allows for character to have a lot more depth in the game compared to her original version. The following line, for example, refers to how Jinx constantly hears voices in her head.

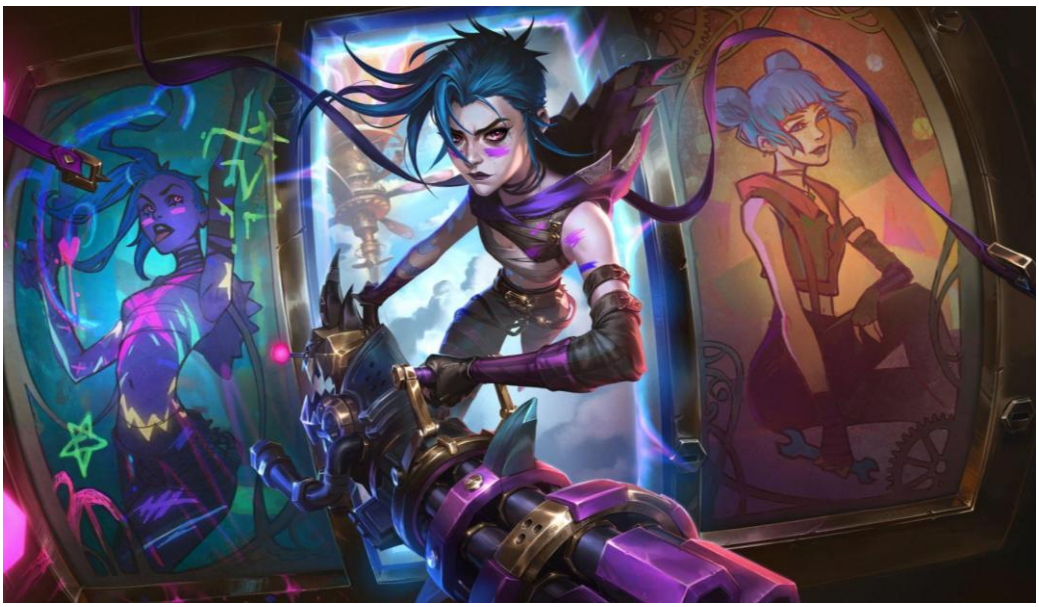
"Can't believe being dead actually shuts Silco up…for the most part"[117]

[115] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.
[116] Blom, *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, 14.
[117] "Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki."

Jinx's troubled mind is further shown through hallucinatory sound effects in Jinx's voice lines and information regarding her past.

"They're always right there…" Hallucinatory sound effects. "…no matter what I do."[118]

Through this different version of Jinx, the player gets to explore her troubled mind that the original version seems to hide, evolving and expanding the portrayal of a character with mental health issues.



Arcane Fractured Jinx[119]

Jinx's most recent appearance was together with her love interest Ekko in the music video for *Ma Meilleure Ennemie* by Stromae and Pomme.[120] The video for this song was released in March 2025, after the finale of *Arcane*. In this video Jinx's character is very obviously portrayed as the one singing, with her lips moving to the lyrics.[121] Two different versions of Jinx can be seen in this video, both versions directly from *Arcane*. One is an alternate timeline in *Arcane*, where the accident with her adoptive father never happened and she lives a happier life as Powder. The other is from a

[118] "Jinx/Audio | League of Legends Wiki."
[119] Riot Games, *League of Legends*, 2009.
[120] League of Legends, "Stromae, Pomme - 'Ma Meilleure Ennemie' (From Arcane Season 2) [Official Music Video]," March 20, 2025, 0:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Rpvluazmc.
[121] League of Legends, "Ma Meilleure Ennemie", 0:51.

scene in *Arcane* where she tried to commit suicide before Ekko stopped her. The video alternates between these versions, showing her alternate version happily dancing with Ekko and switching to her with a messy haircut, tear-stained face and purple eyes from the shimmer. Not at all does she appear as the fun chaos-loving Jinx from the game, instead appearing sad and depressed, lying on the floor. The scenes with Powder show her as carefree and happy. Her eyes are still blue because she never became Jinx and therefore did not take the drug shimmer. While she doesn't appear sad or depressed, she's also not portrayed as the chaotic Jinx from the game, instead providing a different perspective on the character. These two versions of Jinx are very different from the one provided in *Get Jinxed*, showing how the more recent portrayals of the character provide a lot more depth.

Jinx in Ma Meilleure Ennemie, with her alternate version visible in the background[122]

Jinx's original narrative is, following Dunlap's dimensional approach, quite Two-Dimensional. Jinx being "insane" was an important part of her character, with her whole kit revolving around her blowing things up and loving chaos and destruction. The game portrays her as a "fun and wacky" character, not really in a threatening or dangerous way. The game did not however explore this any further. Her portrayal

[122] League of Legends, "Ma Meilleure Ennemie", 0:32.

lacked depth, and the reason for her behaviour was not explored beyond the surface.[123]

Contrary to Jinx's character in the game, *Arcane* created a lot of depth and background story around her character. Instead of just showing her as a "crazy" character, the show introduces her as a child going through traumatic events growing up in a world where her parents died in front of her and her sister abandoned her. It shows Jinx as a child struggling with her emotions and harming herself, which implies that as a child she already had some form of mental illness. Jinx's portrayal in *Arcane* is Three-Dimensional because of the depth and dimensionality of the portrayal. Her mental illness is not just a convenience, but a complex and emotional situation.[124]

Following McKee's levels of context, it is also important to consider when these different versions of Jinx were released.[125] While Jinx as a character in *League of Legends* was released in 2013, the first season of *Arcane* came out in 2021. The difference in portrayals shows how the wider public context over the years changed with improved awareness surrounding mental health in recent years. This can be seen in the refined and deeper portrayal of Jinx's character, especially regarding her mental illness, compared to the Two-Dimensional character that was originally released in the music video *Get Jinxed* and the game *League of Legends*. The more recently released music videos *Enemy* and *Ma Meilleure Ennemie* show, just like *Arcane*, a more Three-Dimensional portrayal of Jinx. They also add some seriality to the transmedia world, unfolding the story of *Arcane* on various media platforms by adding scenes of Jinx and exploring her character throughout the music videos.[126]

[123] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 81.
[124] Dunlap, *Representation of mental illness in video games*, 82.
[125] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis,"14.
[126] Jenkins, "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn."

Viktor as transmedia character

Like Jinx, Viktor's original character in *League of Legends* lacked a lot of depth. This changed because of two reasons: the release of *Arcane* and his rework. With Viktor's rework, Riot released a champion update trailer of the new Viktor. While at the start he can be seen using the cane while walking, he does not appear to need it to support himself as later in the trailer he uses it as a weapon and is also fine walking around without its support. Whie disabled people do not always have constant need of mobility aids, this portrayal of Viktor fails to contextualize why Viktor does not always need the cane. His visual design is the same as his design at the end of the second season of *Arcane*, which is a magically altered human being. There is no brace visible, and there are no signs of physical disabilities.[127]

Viktor in his champion update trailer[128]

This is very different from *Arcane*, where in the first season Viktor appears fragile and thin because of his illness. This is shown through his pale skin and weight loss

[127]League of Legends, "Viktor, the Herald of the Arcane | Champion Update Trailer - League of Legends," December 10, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1s4nlfGUll.
[128] League of Legends, "Viktor, the Herald of the Arcane | Champion Update Trailer," 0:44.

throughout the first season. He needs constant support from his cane while moving and has a brace supporting his right leg.

Viktor's model, Arcane[129]

During *Arcane*, Viktor seems to struggle with his mental health. In the seventh episode of the first season, Viktor accidentally triggers a timer in a bomb and hesitates before disarming it, seemingly considering letting the bomb blow up in his face.[130] Two episodes later, Viktor can be seen standing near the edge of a big drop, slowly getting closer to the edge. As he is about to step over the edge, he gets interrupted by Jayce.[131] Based on these events Viktor appears to be suicidal. Based on Dunlap's framework, Viktor's character in *Arcane* is three-dimensional. Viktor's mobility issues are tied to his upbringing in Zaun, a polluted undercity with scarce resources which lead to an unhealthy environment and not enough medical care.[132] He views himself as a burden mirroring society's view of disabled people as "broken".[133] His disability cannot be separated from his class, considering the fact that his lack of access to

[129]Thibaut Granet, "ARCANE - Viktor - Modeling & Texturing," Artstation, n.d, https://www.artstation.com/artwork/8BWqVw.
[130] Paul Charrue and Arnaud Delord, "The Boy Savior," *Arcane*, Season 1, episode 7, Riot Games and Fortiche, 2021, 24:38.
[131] Charrue and Delord, "The Monster You Created," 9:25.
[132] Contributors to League of Legends Wiki, "Zaun," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://leagueoflegends.fandom.com/wiki/Zaun.
[133] EPIC Assist, "The Biggest Barrier for People With Disability Is How Society Disables Them," July 22, 2021, https://epicassist.org/the-biggest-barrier-for-people-with-disability/.

resources reflects how disabilities in the real world are shaped by class and economic resources.[134]

Viktor is portrayed as a smart man, using his intelligence as his power. In *Arcane*, his disability is a reason for him to try and "fix" himself, to become stronger and compensate for his disabled leg, similar to the specially gifted trope mentioned by Hyler.[135] *Arcane* avoids this trope by framing Viktor's intelligence as an inherent trait that was present before Viktor's disability started becoming severe.[136] In episode nine of season two in *Arcane*, Jayce says the following line to Viktor:

> *"You've always wanted to cure what you thought were weaknesses. Your leg. Your disease. But you were never broken, Viktor. There is beauty in imperfections."*[137]

Based on Jayce's words it becomes clear that Viktor viewed his disability as a weakness and tried to fix it by augmenting his body. This transformation does not, however, "cure" him, but creates new complications, rejecting the trope of "overcoming" disabilities.[138] While Viktor's character in *League of Legends* also emphasizes his pursuit of evolution and becoming stronger, *Arcane* adds more depth to his character by exploring his physical and mental health before he became his current character in the game. With his rework, Riot Games seems to aim for narrative continuity by using *Arcane* to show Viktor's past but aligning his character later in the show with his character in the game. This differs from Jinx, who did not get a rework and remains a different character in game compared to the tv show.

Viktor's idea of augmenting his body to overcome weaknesses aligns with a different character in *League of Legends*: Camille. Camille is a cyborg character that was released in 2016. She chases a superior body by augmenting it with hextech,

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[134] Sigurd Eid Jacobsen, "Social Class, Disability, and Institutional Interactions: The Case of Families With Disabled Children in the Welfare State," *Disability & Society*, July 5, 2023, 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2230349.
[135] Hyler, "Stigma Continues in Hollywood," 2.
[136] Contributors to Arcane Wiki, "Viktor," Arcane Wiki, n.d., https://arcane.fandom.com/wiki/Viktor.
[137] Charrue and Delord, "The Dirt Under Your Nails."
[138] Shell, "An Investigation into the Representation of Disability in Video Games," 18, 19.

similar to Viktor. While she doesn't go as far as Viktor, their ideals about progress and humanity being weak are alike.

"Progress should never be kept waiting."[139] *– Camille*

Camille, League of Legends[140]

Camille can be seen using her prosthetic legs, made of blades, as weapons. Her disability is in this case a residual or partial disability, connecting it to an enhancement and using it as a weapon, making her stronger and more powerful.[141] Camille's prosthetic legs are not the kind of prosthetics people in real life would receive, which is why this would be considered an unrealistic representation of disabilities.[142] These weaponized prosthetics can also be seen as a form of erasure, empowering the disabled character but ignoring the challenges prosthetics can bring.[143] It is however important to keep in mind that Camille is a character in a MOBA game, where fighting is central to the character's use. The characters that are used in this game will always have either physical or mental power, otherwise they wouldn't serve the purpose of

[139] Contributors to League of Legends Wiki, "Camille/LoL/Audio," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://leagueoflegends.fandom.com/wiki/Camille/LoL/Audio.
[140] "Camille," n.d., https://www.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/champions/camille/.
[141] Stasieńko et al., "Fragile Avatars?": Representation of Disability in Video Games, 34, 35.
[142] Shell, "What Do We See: An Investigation into the Representation of Disability in Video Games," 18, 19.
[143] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 87–89.

the game. This portrayal of a strong character with prosthetics also offers disabled people the experience of a world where people with prosthetics can be more powerful than the ones without.[144]

Viktor's rework

Before Viktor's rework, it seemed like *Arcane* was taking a different route with his story, emphasizing the multiplicity of the character and having different versions of Viktor across different platforms. This changed when the rework got released. The rework of Viktor changed his base model and art to his design in *Arcane*, seemingly aiming more for continuity and consistency in his character across *Arcane* and *League of Legends*. This consistency can also be seen in his voice lines. Before his rework, he had few voice lines that mostly focused on change and the perfection of metal. After the rework he got more voice lines, a lot of which focus on elements from *Arcane* like Hextech and the Hexcore.[145] This narrative continuity is, however, not complete, since League Viktor lacks explicit references to his disability, unlike the show. *League of Legends* therefore fails to integrate Viktor's disability into his gameplay.

On Viktor's official wiki page information can be found regarding his abilities and his playstyle game. It also offers patch notes, revealing what Riot Games has changed about the character. This includes all the changes done to him after *Arcane*. Other characters that appear in *Arcane*, like Ekko, Jinx and Vi, did not get any major changes done to them, but Viktor did. His abilities did not get changed drastically, instead keeping the essential idea of them and changing small details like the cooldown duration or how much damage they do. An interesting detail is that two of the abilities also got a different name. His ability Death Ray got changed to Hextech Ray, and his ultimate Chaos Storm changed to Arcane Storm.[146] These new names are much more aligned with his version in *Arcane*, referencing to the show where Hextech is an important part and *Arcane* is the name of the show. While changing his character,

[144] Cole and Barker, *Games as Texts: A Practical Application of Textual Analysis to Games*, 87–89.
[145] "Viktor/Audio | League of Legends Wiki," n.d.
[146] "Viktor/Patch History | League of Legends Wiki," League of Legends Wiki, n.d., https://wiki.leagueoflegends.com/en-us/Viktor/Patch_history.

Riot Games did not use this to put more focus on his mental health or the physical disability that was shown in *Arcane*. The change had the biggest impact on Viktor's visual design. Whereas previously it was clear that Viktor has a brace, this is not visible anymore, diminishing the representation of his physical disability.

A different perspective to Viktor is presented with his skin *Arcane Savior Viktor*. This was released after *Arcane's* second season and is based on his appearance towards the end of the second season. He looks incredibly thin, aligning with his terminal disease which would cause him to lose weight. Just like his base appearance, he has the cane, and something can be seen on his right leg, but this does not appear to be a brace. The skin also has different voice lines, revealing how he was in pain before his transformation.

"I did not know how strong I was, until I was free from pain."[147]

Arcane Savior Viktor's visual design and voice lines could imply that Viktor has some kind of physical disability because of his cane and thin body, however this is not explicitly mentioned or shown through his gameplay or narrative.

Arcane Savior Viktor[148]

[147] "Viktor/Audio | League of Legends Wiki," n.d.
[148] "Arcane Savior Viktor [1820 RP]," n.d., https://lolskin.info/en-us/skin/112024.

Conclusion

The main question of this thesis was *how does League of Legends' transmedia universe shape and evolve the representation of disabilities across its various platforms?* This question was then divided into two sub questions. Firstly, *how does the base game of League of Legends represent disabilities through its champion design, narratives, and gameplay mechanics?* I examined this by looking at the characters Jinx and Viktor. The answer for Jinx is simple: base game Jinx does not appear to be representing any disability. She acts crazy in a fun, quirky way, which can be seen in her visual design, voice lines and gameplay. None of them point towards Jinx having a mental illness apart from some subtle cues. This changes with the skin *Arcane Fractured Jinx*, where she is given alternate voice lines referring to her hallucinations and her trauma. In Viktor's case, he used to have some representation through his brace supporting him and his cane. The brace seems to have disappeared with his rework, and whether the cane is used as a tool to support him is unclear. His gameplay focuses on his evolution, which all together seems to point in the same direction as Jinx: there is no clear representation of Viktor being disabled in the game.

This leads me to the second sub question; *how does the transmedia universe of Runeterra expand and evolve the representation of disabilities across its platforms?* While keeping traits from Jinx in the game, her character in *Arcane* received a lot more background and depth to her personality and mental health, introducing a different perspective to Jinx. Similar versions to this Jinx can be seen in the music videos *Enemy* and *Ma Meilleure Ennemie*, where Jinx's character isn't portrayed as fun and wacky but as grieving, depressed and hurting herself. This is very different from the music video *Get Jinxed!*, which aligns with her character in the game. *Arcane* also added a lot more depth to Viktor's character, exploring his physical disability and terminal illness while tying this to his character development and the unhealthy living conditions growing up in Zaun.

In summary, disabilities in the base game are either absent or minimized, mostly following one- and two-dimensional tropes. While *Arcane* introduced three-dimensional portrayals, this is not translated to the gameplay mechanics of the

characters in *League of Legends*, only showing some representation of their disabilities through skins specifically tied to *Arcane*. The transmedia universe of *League of Legends*, particularly *Arcane*, shapes and evolves the representation of the disabled characters by adding more nuance and complexity to their characters. However, this complexity remains more of an option for players to explore, as the base game retains more superficial characters, prioritizing easy and understandable gameplay.

With this research, I have highlighted how the transmedia storytelling of *League of Legends* added emotional depth and systematic context to some of its disabled characters. The transmedia lens used in this analysis reveals how characters do not have to be tied to one medium, showing how the expansion of their narratives across various platforms allows for more nuanced disability narratives while still maintaining functional gameplay mechanics. Future research could investigate how these narratives impact disabled players and how they perceive the differences between *Arcane's* nuanced disability narratives and *League of Legends'* erasure of some of these details.

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