



Hide and Lockdown: The Synergy of a Lifetime

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The scent of fresh manure thickens as I close in on my destination: a rural hamlet home to a pair of professional gamers. Clump after clump of tattered vinyl greenhouses roll past. The warm June evening falls to dusk. Soon, the countryside darkens to a blur.



Most foreign fans of South Korean esports will only be familiar with the glitz of metropolitan Seoul and the bustle of seaside Busan, but 64% of the peninsula is in fact just hills and mountains. That includes the rustic village of Toechon, about a 90-minute drive from the capital. Its main point of entry is not a highway tollgate, but a nondescript concrete bridge. It stretches over the grayish-blue Lake Paldang, ringed by verdant hill ridges and whiskers of mist.

“You made it!”

Chin ‘Hide’ Gyeong-hwan greets me at the front door. He seems impressed that I arrived roughly on time. (By some stroke of luck, I’ve managed to avoid taking wrong turns or driving over nearby vegetable furrows.) I step inside the cozy apartment and bow to Hide’s mother and grandmother. They bid me warm welcome before returning to the kitchen. Dinner is in the air.

Hide guides me past the living room where his desktop setup is quietly whirring between a homely upright piano and what looks to be a kimchi refrigerator. The juxtaposition is barely noticeable until he opens the freezer’s top door, which makes it lurch menacingly over his second monitor. On the far end is Chin ‘Lockdown’ Jae-hun’s room. Lockdown looks up from his chair when we approach.

“Hey, you made it!”

It used to be even easier to identify Hide and Lockdown as brothers, but then Lockdown decided to grow his hair out. Still, the relation remains obvious, and not only due to their remarkably similar builds and facial features. Both are effortlessly polite, soft-spoken, and careful with words, even in the comfort of their own home. Hide is far more extroverted, to be sure; he regularly goes out for interviews and guest casts while his younger sibling barely even streams. He’s also the more confrontational and opinionated of the two when it comes to any kind of social interaction. But when the two Chins are together, their personalities seem to almost mesh into one, much like how their plays in the Nexus always come together in perfect sync.

Hide plops down on the double bunk he no longer sleeps in (“I use a mat in the living room since it’s cooler there,” he says), while I take a seat on the floor. For a moment, it feels as if the three of us are back in Busan or Shanghai, lodging together as Tempest’s players and manager. But here on this floor, we are not talking about tomorrow’s picks and bans – we are here to talk about their lives.

Together From the Start



“Our dad used to play StarCraft back when we were in kindergarten,” Hide says. “We grew up watching him play. It was our first game.”

Lockdown’s eyes light up. “I think we played StarCraft almost right when it came out.”

Hide nods with a smile. “Yeah, I remember the two of us going to the mall together with Dad to buy the CD,” he says. “Looking back, we really did play a lot of games together. At first we had only one computer, so we mostly played games we could play together. Like Liero.”

“Dynasty Warriors.”

“FIFA. Winning Eleven.”

“League of Legends.”

“He was very good,” Hide (an ex-Diamond) says, pointing at Lockdown (an ex-Challenger) and grinning sheepishly. “Me not so much. I started first, but he turned out to be better.”

Lockdown brushes it off. “Anyway, we really played a lot of games.”

“StarCraft II customs — the Aeon of Strife-styled ones. And Warcraft.”

“I didn’t like Warcraft that much. I never touched melee. Only customs.”

“Well, I played it a lot,” Hide replies. “And we played pretty much all Blizzard games, every single one. Except World of Warcraft.”

Lockdown smirks at the memory. “Yeah, we basically quit WoW right after creating our characters,” he says, but agrees with his brother that Blizzard games have always been a part of their lives. “[Brood War] is still fun. I still play it every now and then.”

“We played Diablo II right when it came out too,” Hide says.

“I remember going to a friend’s place for a sleepover,” Lockdown says. “We played Diablo until the sun came up.”



Having played games all my life, including all of the titles the brothers mentioned, I've always been interested in how other heavy gamers balance the hobby with "real-life" obligations. Obviously Hide and Lockdown's current occupation as professional gamers not only resolves but completely reverses the problem. Still, I'm curious as to how they dealt with it prior to going professional.

"We did play a lot, but it never really interfered with real life or school," Hide says. "Our grades were pretty decent, too, until we got more serious about gaming. I was around top 20 in middle school."

Middle school is when most South Koreans start to deal with the nationwide social pressure to academically perform; a good amount of the hyper-competitive drive that permeates the populace here is instilled during those three years. Students are thrown into a cruel world where one's GPA directly dictates one's social standing in and out of school, and by extension, overall self-esteem in life. As such, one's class rank holds immeasurable significance for many students and their families. Hide's is considered an extremely respectable placing, given that the average enrollment of middle schools in this province is about 1,000.

What about Lockdown? I ask.

“He was even better,” Hide replies.

“I barely remember, though,” Lockdown says.

Hide smiles. “Just throw out the number.”

“Er... I was top 5,” Lockdown says, then mutters something about whether changing the figure into a percentile would make it sound less boastful. I assure him that no-one would take it the wrong way.

“High school was when our lives shifted more towards games,” Hide says. “My interest in academics faded then, too, so my grades weren’t as good anymore. But still I only played games after school, so it never interfered with graduation. I finished high school without any problems.”

Lockdown took the opposite route. “I pretty much gave up on high school because I had something else I wanted to do.” He points to the corner of his room behind me, where a jumble of instruments are stacked on top of each other. “If you look there, there’s a keyboard, a violin, and a guitar. I wanted to become a composer. My musical interests were pretty wide, so I wanted to become able to use them all. I dropped out after the first semester of high school.”

So how did he end up becoming a professional gamer?

“As I spent more and more time on music, it dawned on me that I wanted to try my hand at becoming a pro gamer first,” he says. “You can only do that when you’re young, whereas age isn’t as important for a composer.”

Taking it to the Nexus



Hide and Lockdown's foray into Heroes of the Storm was largely due to chance.

“Sometime around Heroes’ first closed beta, someone cracked the tutorial file and shared it on the web, so I gave it a try,” Lockdown says. “I might not have kept playing if the tutorial Hero hadn’t been Raynor, but it was, and I really, really like StarCraft.” After realizing he wanted to play the actual game, he made an entire stack of IDs, then applied for a beta key with all of them.

He smiles as he recounts his luck. “Only two applications were accepted — exactly two. That’s how we got to play together. Imagine if I had made only one ID, or if I had gotten less than two keys.”

“We might be serving in the army,” Hide says. “It was pure luck. If I hadn’t gotten to play the [closed] beta, I might have skipped on Heroes.”

“Yeah, we might not even have become pro gamers,” Lockdown replies.

Shooting up the HotLogs Quick Match MMR leaderboards — back then, there was no ranked ladder — the brothers quickly caught the attention of many organizations scrambling to put together Heroes squads prior to the game’s open beta release. While Hide and Lockdown were

best known respectively for their Abathur and Tychus play, both had large enough Hero pools to play any position in a team. No-one was surprised when MVP, one of Korea's most decorated esports organizations, signed the duo in early 2015.

However, MVP was where their run of good fortune screeched to a halt. Soon after debuting together on MVP Black, Hide was transferred against his wishes to Black's sister team, MVP Sky. The brothers had very much wanted to play on the same squad, and were very unhappy with the unforeseen development. Hide left the MVP organization that autumn, and Lockdown followed in winter.

After a few months off the radar, the two returned with a new team; their own team, where they would now always be able to play together. It was christened Tempest.



Lockdown recounts that Tempest's other three members — Kim 'duckdeok' Kyung-deok, Lee 'HongCno' Dae-hyeong, and Park 'Dami' Ju-dalm — were brought in one by one. While all three were known to be mechanically talented, none had any noteworthy achievements at the time.

"They all were brought in because we saw their potential," Hide says. "Watching their games, I felt that they could shine much more if only they had a better team around them."

Tempest turned out to be that better team. In their very first season together, they made it to the finals of the Korean summer championship. Fate would have it that their last hurdle would be MVP Black, who were then considered the best team in the world by a wide margin. Expectations were uniform; not a single expert predicted Tempest to win, or even make it close. While the ragtag squad had done very well to make it this far, this would be where the Cinderella story ended, they said.

But then the underdogs won 4-0. It wasn't just a clean sweep; it was a clean stomp. Every Heroes fan on the planet was utterly dumbfounded at how the best-of-seven played out. Many argued it was a freak accident, and that MVP Black would definitely be able to take revenge in their next encounter.

Wrong again. Two weeks later, Tempest took down MVP Black once more in Jönköping, Sweden, in the grand finals of the Summer Global Championship. The 3:2 score told a different story this time around, but the result was enough to silence all the naysayers. Tempest had become the kings of the world, and they had done it with a style of play that the world had never seen before.

The degree of reckless belligerence displayed by Tempest was as questionable as it was innovative; all they seemed to do was dive the enemy backline over and over as a group of five. If Tempest had failed to prove its viability through trampling over MVP Black with it, the tactical approach would have been heavily criticized, even ridiculed. But Tempest pulled it off, in large part due to Hide and Lockdown's mechanical brilliance. Hide in particular was lauded for his idiosyncratic yet effective interpretation of the Support role: playing like a frontline bruiser instead of a backline healer.



Seo 'OPrime' Hyeong-uk, who served as Tempest's strategic coach for most of 2016, effusively praised Hide's revolutionary style of play. "Hide's teamfight presence as a Support is massive and unparalleled," he said. "No other Support can play so offensively while being perfectly aware of his fundamental duties. Others may equal him as a traditional Support, but Hide brings something entirely new and unique to the table."

Hide explains that his style of play is an expression and an extension of his confidence. "I always play with the mindset that I can perform better than my opponents," he says. "It's about challenging them. It's about putting their mechanics and decision-making to the test."

I point out that his aggressive style often backfires. Sometimes he messes up; other times, opponents abuse his predictable tendencies. Has he ever felt the need to cut back on the aggression?

"No," he replies with conviction. "When it backfires, I just try to learn from it and figure out what I did wrong. I've thought long and hard about this matter, you know — whether or not my style is better than traditional Support play. My conclusion was that mine works better, at least for me."

Lockdown's approach to the game is completely different. "My philosophy is to be flexible, like an octopus — I prefer to adapt to every situation, rather than have one rigid approach." His words reflect his career history; although most of his fame comes from his performances on Assassins, Lockdown is one of the very few players to have filled four different positions in professional play.

"Now if we were twin brothers, man...the plays we could make!"

CHIN 'HIDE' GYEONG-HWAN

It is fascinating how much their approaches reflect their personalities. Both in and out of the game, Hide is more headstrong, proactive, and direct, whereas Lockdown is more flexible, reactionary, and roundabout. I have to ask whether there are any special advantages that stem from playing alongside someone whom one knows and can complement so well.

"Faith!" Lockdown replies.

Hide muses for a moment to provide a better explanation. "He doesn't need to worry about whether or not I'm on the lookout for him, since I always am," he says. "He rarely calls for help when he's in trouble. I guess you could call that faith."

Lockdown smiles. "Heroes of the Faith."

"It's instinctual," Hide says. "I just know where he'll be positioned, even without visual cues. And I never lose sight of him, even in hectic teamfights."

"Don't you think it's just because I stay in the right positions?" Lockdown asks humorously.

Hide laughs aloud and quips back that it's not true. "We've played together for such a long time, so at this point, we pretty much always make the same in-game decisions anyway," he says.

"We've been playing games together since we were born," Lockdown says. "Not just Heroes."

So it's a synergy developed over an entire lifetime that carries across games?

Lockdown nods. “Yeah. But it’s not to the level where you could get to as twin brothers.”

“Now if we were twin brothers, man...” Hide says. “The plays we could make!”

A Family Affair



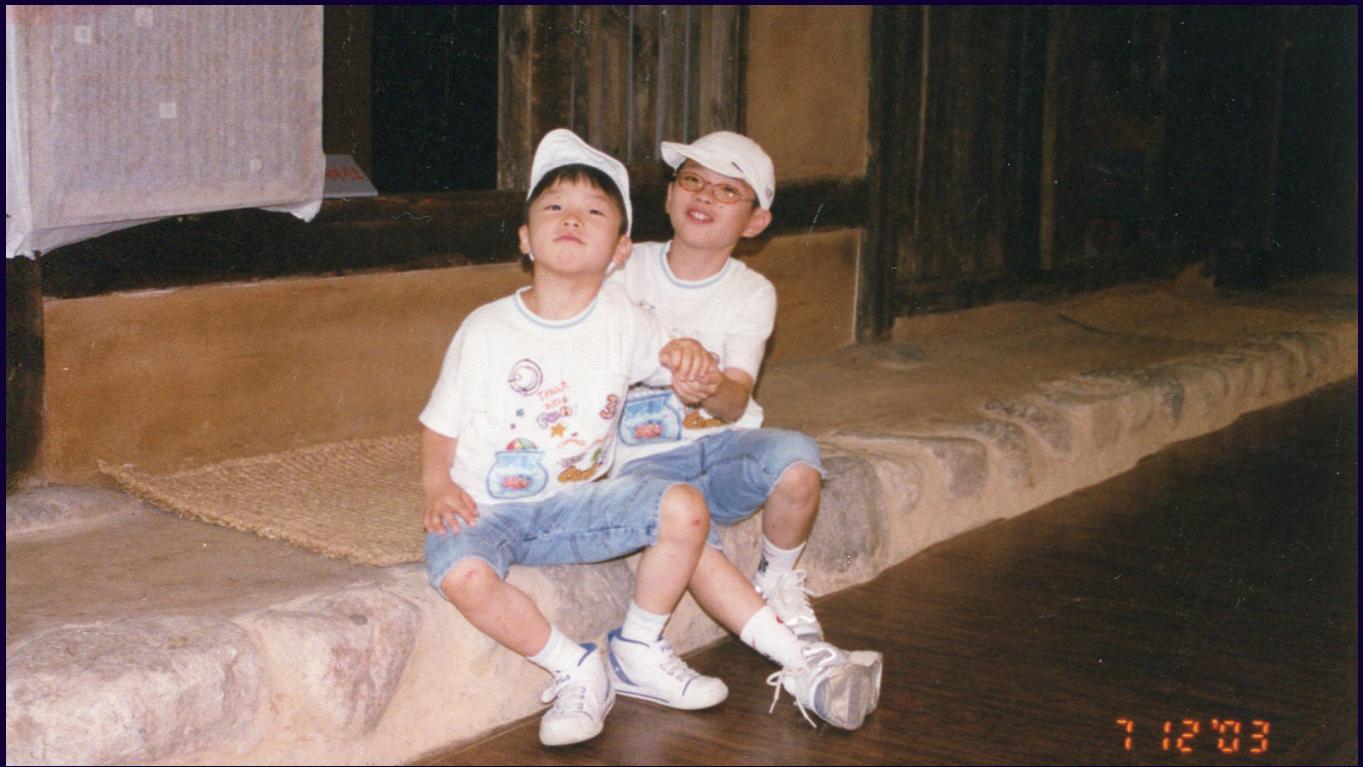
By now the night has deepened enough for my stay to inconvenience the other family members, and I decide to leave the house before I overstay my welcome. Before saying goodbye, however, I share a moment at the kitchen table with Mr. Chin Ga-sang — Hide and Lockdown’s father. Mr. Chin speaks slowly and deliberately in a raspy voice, letting a good-natured smile hang between sentences. I immediately recognize where the brothers acquired their conversational habits.

“I’ve always been open-minded about games,” he says. “As a boy, I frequented arcades.” Mr. Chin then points to a picture frame next to my chair. It holds an extended family photo. “Those are my nieces and nephews. I used to take them out to PC bangs once every month or so. It was a regular outing. We considered it a part of our family culture. Everyone played together, all eleven of us.”

When Hide and Lockdown became professional gamers, the family naturally became their first fans. “When the boys play, the family gathers to watch them on the living room TV,” he explains. “I don’t know all the abilities, but I can read map movements and figure out how well a team is doing.”

It soon becomes clear that Mr. Chin is no mere fan. He knows the latest hero releases (“Mal’thael”), every single HGC caster’s tendencies (“I think that one jokes too much”), and one-off community tournaments that even some Korean pro players don’t know (“Bloodlust, was it called?”). He reads not only the official Heroes Esports website, but also Inven and Twitter. He even knows that B-Step disbanded a few days ago.

“Whether or not I know all of these things isn’t the point,” he says. “What’s important is that the boys know that their parents are interested, that their parents care. I may not be able to play the game with them — I don’t have an account, for starters, although maybe I would have made one if I were still in my thirties — but we can talk about it together. And that’s really important to me.”



It’s pitch black with pastoral darkness when I step outside of the low-rise flat. Hide walks me back to my car, worrying that my drive back might take too long. I insist that I’ll be just fine.

Fiddling with my keys under the parking lot's dim white streetlight, I ask him how he and Lockdown manage to make this trip two times a week. HGC Korea is held offline at the Seoul OGN e-Stadium. It's even further away from Toechon than where I had headed out from.

"Our dad bears the hardship, not us," he says, voice tinged with gratitude. "He drives us all the way."

We exchange the last of our pleasantries, and Hide ambles back homeward. I pull out and roll away. His silhouette minimizes then fades into the night.

Tempest are competing in HGC Korea next weekend. Tune in to playheroes.com/esports at 4:00 a.m. PDT / 1:00 p.m. CEST on Sunday, July 9 to watch them take on Mighty.

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