An Analysis of Open World Player versus Player in The Lord of the Ring Online's Player versus Monster Player as a Case Study for PvP Games

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Abstract

This article focuses on the analysis of emergent gameplay, based on a case study of the author's subjective gameplay experience of Player versus Monster Player (PvMP) in *The Lord of the Rings Online* (*LOTRO*). The argument presented here is that although there is a core system of Player versus Player (PvP) which *LOTRO* shares with other online games, each type of online game has a specific kind of PvP system which attracts players to engage in the gameplay. For instance, the open world sandbox type of PvP attracts certain players to play in *LOTRO*'s PvMP. One of the main aims of this study is thus to investigate some of the core systems of PvP gameplay in open world sandbox PvP. In this article, *LOTRO* is shown to offer unique opportunities for studying emergent gameplay in open world games, with particular relevance to PvP studies. Two of the core systems of PvP discussed include the design of the simple gameplay rules to support emergent gameplay, and the community's attitudes towards player's behaviours. The types of emergent gameplay discussed include free play versus negotiated fair play, the players' utilisation of strategies in open world PvP to support collaborative and competitive gameplay, and the changing dynamics of open ended gameplay. It is hoped that the analysis provided in this article would form the basis of future work on a more general framework for understanding PvP in other online games.

Keywords

open world PvP; LOTRO; emergent gameplay; social community's attitudes; free play; negotiated fair play

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1.   Introduction

The Lord of the Rings Online (*LOTRO*)[1] is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) released by Turbine, Inc. on 24 April 2007. It is set in a fantasy universe based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth writings. The main portion of *LOTRO* is Player versus Environment (PvE), which means the player controlled character fights against the computer controlled characters. Player versus Monster Player (PvMP) is another portion of the game*. LOTRO*'s PvMP is open world, and is defined as combat occurring between players in a non-instanced fashion anywhere in the gameworld permitted by the server ruleset (Unknown author, 2011). It occurs in a large open map situated in a region known as the Ettenmoors. In this region, players can either play as their regular PvE player characters, known as Freeps or as Monster Player characters, known as Creeps. Freep is an abbreviation of the Free People of Middle Earth, while Creeps are the enemies of the Free Peoples of Middle Earth, who are bound to the service of the Eye, the Dark Lord Sauron.

Two features are distinctive in *LOTRO*'s PvMP. The first feature is the emergent gameplay which arises from players' strategies as they employ skill and creativity to overcome the imbalance between the Creep and Freep classes. Since the players can devise novel strategies, they can overcome class disadvantages and exploit class advantages. The second feature is that the same PvMP map has been used since the release of *LOTRO*'s first expansion pack, *Shadows of Angmar*. The rationale for choosing *LOTRO* for this case study is the ability for game designers and players to learn how the diverse forms of emergent gameplay and strategies that players create serve as a strong attraction for players to continue playing. Different types of emergent gameplay develop because of the imbalance between Creep and Freep players, and the long-time use of the same map supports the players' emergent behaviour. Unlike most other large multiplayer online franchise such as *World of Warcraft*, *LOTRO*'s PvMP occurs in a completely sandbox environment where players are not restricted from creating their own gameplay goals. *World of Warcraft's* PvP is more structured and occurs in a controlled environment with more explicit gameplay objectives implemented by the game designers. For instance, arena PvP is organized as an on-going tournament that allow for matches that take place in instanced controlled environments, available in 2v2, 3v3 and 5v5 formats. Therefore, by studying how the implementation of relatively simple rules can contribute to emergent behaviour for players in *LOTRO*, game designers would be able to design better gameworlds to facilitate instead of restrict players' gameplay behaviour.

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[1] http://www.lotro.com/en?, accessed 5th October, 2014

In the next section of this article, I will review studies which have been conducted on relevant aspects of online games and explain how this study contributes to the literature. Following that, I will discuss the core components of *LOTRO* and devise some questions that analysts can use when they are investigating the core features of other online games, such as emergent gameplay (Section 3.2), and community attitudes toward players' behaviour (Section 3.2.2). Finally, I will conclude by summarizing the main findings.

2.   Literature Review

Most studies conducted on PvP in online games focus on the social interaction between the players (Carr, 2012; Myers, 2007; Thimm, 2012). Juul (2005) discussed how making small modifications of the (social) rules in online games such as *Counter-Strike* compared to *Quake III Arena* changed the gameplay strategies from being mostly individual to being mostly team-oriented. This study contributes to the literature by investigating how players engage in *LOTRO*'s open world PvP where emergent gameplay is prevalent. The process by which emergent gameplay develops in open gameworld environments is under-researched. For instance, in this study, both the social rules created by the player communities in *LOTRO* and how the simple rules of the gameplay mechanics facilitate emergent gameplay in *LOTRO*'s PvMP are considered. Taylor's (2006) research on the cultural context of *World of Warcraft*, comprising national identity, age, and the mod scene, shows that emergent gameplay is a process: systems of stratification and control rise from the bottom up and may be strongly implemented in player-produced modifications. My research complements Taylor's (2006) research by showing how emergent gameplay facilitates rather than restricts the players' gameplay behaviour in *LOTRO*.

Carr (2012) applied a version of textual analysis by participating in the PvP of *World of Warcraft's* PvP zone, Warsong Gulch. The analyses show that players interpret the game in different ways, which contributes to tension and conflicts while playing. The research also highlights that a range of research strategies, one of which involves the perspective of the player-analyst, is needed to examine the different aspects of the relationship between game and player, from the design and production contexts on one pole to contexts of reception on the other. Carr's approach of the player-analyst is adopted in this study and applied in the discussion of emergent gameplay in section 3.2. Emergent gameplay develops in world PvP which is defined here as open ended sandbox gameplay and is highly unpredictable. In this article, I discuss some of these specific wildly fluctuating variables in *LOTRO*'s PvMP (See for example Section 3.2.6).

Myers (2007) observed and described individual and selfish play within the PvE and PvP contexts of the MMORPGs, *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains*. He argues that cooperative group play within MMORPGs tends

to restrict and transform individual and selfish play. Social cooperative play tends to reduce the diversity of individual play, which undermines the ability of PvP to experiment with game components and processes. He mentions the need to conceptualize online social play as a form of social control. While Myers' study focuses on the restrictions of PvP play, he does not analyze how PvP in open sandbox games can contribute to collaborative and competitive play that enables emergent gameplay behaviour to emerge. The process through which players experiment with different types of gameplay dynamics for meaningful and playful behaviour to emerge in open world PvP is discussed in Sections 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, and 3.2.6.

Previous studies have adopted a diverse range of methods to analyze the textual, social, and competitive aspects of online games and their players. This study will investigate the formation of emergent gameplay in an MMORPG in order to propose a methodological approach to investigating some of the core components of PvP in online games. The goal of this study is to show the process through which the open gameworld supports the players' interaction with the simple rules of the gameworld in order to create many different types of game play activities which may or may not be predicted by the game designers. This research is important to enable us to understand how open world environments function to support the players' autonomy, and their ability to be in charge of their own gameplay activities. In understanding gameplay activities in open gameworld environments, there will be a greater awareness of how to design specific features of open gameworlds to support the players' emergent gameplay.

3.   Methodological approach

3.0   Comparison with other game analysis frameworks

In this section, I compare my methodological approach with some game analysis methods to show the distinctive features of my study. Consalvo and Dutton (2006) developed a qualitative methodological toolkit for the study of games by focusing on four areas - Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map, and Gameplay Log. They use *The Sims* and examples from other game genres to formulate research questions and propose these four components for the analysis of other digital games. This study utilises my gameplay experience as a participant in the PvMP gameplay to understand how emergent gameplay develops in online game through the formulation of relevant research questions. Boellstorff *et al*. (2012) formulate ethnographical methods to analyze virtual worlds which include participant observation, interviews, the capturing of data and data analysis. However, they did not provide an in-depth discussion on how virtual world ethnographic research is different from traditional ethnographic research. In this study, as a participant of *LOTRO*'s PvMP, I show not only how my interaction with the other players in the gameworld contributes to emergent gameplay behaviour but also how

my observation of my gameplay elucidates how emergent behaviour arises. My research is also similar to Nardi's (2010) ethnographic research as a participant researcher in *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) because I am a participant of *LOTRO*'s PvMP. However, while Nardi focuses on the aspects of "play as aesthetic experience" and "the blurring of the distinction between work, play, and the magic circle" in *WoW*, my research focuses on emergent gameplay and community attitudes in *LOTRO*'s PvMP.

3.1. Overview of *LOTRO*'s Ettenmoors

The Ettenmoors is a Player versus Monster Player zone. It consists of a large fully developed region. Players can reach the PvMP area by travelling from any main town in *LOTRO*. All players commence at the safe starting zones in the PvMP region, where players may obtain quests, items, gear, and traits needed for PvMP. The objectives that each player must strive to attain are defeating the players from the opposite side in combat, completing PvE-and PvP-driven quests, and maintaining control of several Keeps and Outposts. In attaining these objectives, players will be rewarded with points in the form of rank experience and commendation currency.

The areas of the PvMP zone provide adequate support for both attacking and defending players in order to encourage the stronger side to attack enemy locations. These locations can vary from a Keep, Outpost, or Non-Player Character (NPC) camps. Each location can be fought over for control and is a common meeting place for both sides. Keeps and Outposts do not remain permanently controlled by the players. When they are Freepside owned, they appear blue on the map, and when Creepside owned, they appear red on the map. The most popular areas depend on its strategic importance and player strength at the time. For example, Outposts are used more often when fewer players are online since they are easy to attack. However, if more players are online, Keeps are attacked more often. In this way, the gameworld's action can be based on what the player population can manage at the time, instead of forcing them into a specific structure. This is one way in which emergent gameplay is supported in open gameworlds.

The game moderators do not interfere with players by telling them explicitly what to do. Emergent game systems empower players by providing them greater game control, the freedom to experiment which contributes to a sense of agency, and less of a feeling of uncovering a path set for them by the designers. Emergent gameplay develops through the definition of simple global rules. It is neither planned nor predicted by the game developers but the game is able to behave in a rational and acceptable way. Emergent gameplay enables the gameworld to be more interactive and reactive, which creates a wider range of possibilities for actions, strategies, and gameplay (Sweetser, 2008).

In the next sections, I will discuss some examples of emergent gameplay in the open world of *LOTRO*'s PvMP. The purpose of this discussion is to enable us to understand how players interact with simple rules in open gameworlds to create emergent gameplay. Aspects of emergent gameplay discussed include "free play versus negotiated fair play", "points of interest," "sustained group fights," "divide and conquer," and "changing dynamics of the open ended gameplay."

3.2 Support for Emergent Gameplay - Solo versus group-based strategies

3.2.1 Free Play versus negotiated Fair Play

"Play activities do not involve rules or at least involve less strict rules than games" (Wolf, 2012, p. 491). Rules is defined prescriptively as social conventions which give value to or devalue certain behaviours (ibid.). Play is subjective, "an engaging activity in which the player believes to have active participation and interprets it as constraining her immediate future to a set of probable scenarios, all of which she is willing to tolerate" (Frasca, 2007, p. 50). Not all the consequences of play are enjoyed by players, but at least they are willing to cope with them. (Wolf, 2012, p. 491). For instance, engaging in PvE quest activities in the PvMP zone is repetitive in the long term. However, Creep players in PvMP are able to tolerate these gameplay activities because completion of a certain number of PvE quests grants the players Creep maps. These maps provide Creep players with new gameplay mechanics by enabling them to transport to a specific location of their choice without any time delay, although the Creep maps have a cool-down time before they can be used again. Creep players are able to formulate diverse tactics based on the Creep maps to fight the opponents.

Play is also an interactive process in which, each time a game is played, different choices can be made which create different experiences (see Section 3.2.6). Play includes the freedom to act and the freedom to choose *how* to act (Adams, 2010, p. 4); however, freedom is not unlimited and the choices are constrained by (social) rules. Caillois (1961, p. 27) defines two ways of playing - *ludus* and *paidia*. *Ludus* involves structured activities with explicit rules (games), and *paidia* involves unstructured and spontaneous activities (play). However, Frasca (2003, p. 230) also cautions that "it is common to think that *paidia* has no rules, but this is not the case". Frasca (2003, p. 230) suggests that "the difference between *paidia* and *ludus* is that the latter incorporates rules that define a winner and a loser, whereas the former does not [define a winner or loser]". Forms of play are placed on a continuum from *ludus* to *paidia*. Ludus is more common in structured PvP where there are explicit rules defining win conditions set by the game designers. For example, *World of Warcraft's* PvP battlegrounds

involve players achieving specific objectives, such as being the first to capture a certain number of flags, in order to win.

In *LOTRO*'s PvMP, free play in the form of *paidia* dominates in group play, making gameplay more unpredictable. To the players, the Moors is essentially a PvP sandbox. There is no balance between and across Freep classes or Creep classes. Since open world PvP does not strictly require fairness (Duke of O, 2013), some players feel that the balance in PvP is more problematic for players who want to keep score, to know that they have won an objectively fair fight. Duke of O (2013) argues that since world PvP is not fair, it is up to the player to obtain strategic advantages by withdrawing when the odds are not in the player's favor. The group-based open warfare in *LOTRO*'s PvMP is very unpredictable: sometimes one player dominates in the killing, but at other times they are hunted. Players devise many different gameplay strategies. Players can defeat all the opposing players in their main base, take them to the open field fights and defeat all of them in the open field, or can resort to a divide-and-conquer strategy (See Section 3.2.5). In large raid groups, players can split up into smaller groups to defend or take Outposts or Keeps or defeat new Creep or Freep players who are engaged in the PvE gameplay.

Compared to *paidia* in group play, where the strong imbalance between Freeps and Creeps creates emergent gameplay, one-versus-one PvMP focuses more on fair play and thus requires balance by the players themselves. There are player designated one versus one zones in *LOTRO*'s PvMP based on the informal agreements set by the community players. Negotiations between players about which rules to follow, such as which skill(s) to use during combat, contribute to more balanced gameplay. Since Freep and Creep players cannot communicate directly in-game, some of them who know each other can communicate out-of-game via external services such as Ventrilo to negotiate the types of gameplay they prefer for a fair fight. This creates a more "structured" form of *ludus* in one-versus-one fights. For instance, some rules that players adhere to during one-versus-one include the prohibition of using skills with a long cool-down (the period of wait time before a spell, ability, or item power can be used again). The use of long cool-down skills during one-versus-one battles will provide an unfair advantage to the player, contributing to unbalanced gameplay. Some high-ranked Freeps even take off their armor and weapons when fighting low-ranked Creeps during one-versus-one fights to reduce the imbalance. Other negotiated gameplay rules during one-versus-one fights prohibit the players from using skills which bestow a positive effect on the player character to increase the character's attributes. *LOTRO'*s PvMP battles are imbalanced unless the players put in the effort to create certain gameplay rules to create a more level playing field during the one-versus-one fights.
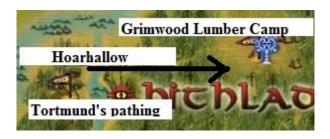
3.2.2 Points of interest

I define *points of interest* (Figure 1) as referring to specific strategic locations in *LOTRO*'s PvMP where Creep or Freep players engage in PvE quests. These points of interest provide the setting for emergent gameplay, in which strategic locations, choreographed by the game designers, serve as the central nucleus for the development of emergent combative gameplay in PvMP. Points of interest include Keeps and Outposts in which players from opposite sides fight for control. Keeps and Outposts grant specific bonuses, such as an increase in offensive abilities, to whichever side that controls them. Another instance when emergent gameplay develops is when Freep or Creep characters need to complete an escort PvE quest. The quest is initiated after the player "speaks" to the NPC. There is a fixed linear path along which the NPC will always move towards the objective (Figure 2). This is a site where players set up ambush for other PvMP players.

Figure 1. Points of Interest in Ettenmoors.

Figure 2. The fixed linear path of the hobbit NPC who needs escort.

3.2.3 Community attitudes towards player behaviours

The social aspects of the PvP players are central to the gameplay experience, and it is hard to avoid being in a community and engaging in actions that affect other players. For instance, Klastrup (2008) surveyed *World of Warcraft* players' PvP social experiences and discovered that while new players experience unfair deaths caused by other players, this can also lead to follow-up actions where the new players seek out other high-level characters for help. Similarly, the social experience can also come in the form of a death penalty caused indirectly by the players themselves. A player can make mistakes in group combat situations which cause the deaths of others. This has social consequences in the gameworld, in which a player's actions can lead to a temporary or even long-term isolation from the group or from desirable guilds in the world (Klastrup, 2008, p. 158). Fighting with good or bad intentions is a driving force of competition in PvP gameplay. There are rules that govern the player's behaviour from the perspective of the social community. The community's attitudes toward players' behaviour come from the players themselves, but are also influenced by the policies created by the game developers, which govern different aspects of players' gameplay behaviour in different domains.

3.2.3.1 Attitudes toward negative behaviour

The community's attitude toward player behaviour that disrupts the social spirit of gameplay in PvMP ranges on a continuum from mild disdain to outright offense, which can result in a ban by the game masters. Player behaviour that disrupts the PvMP gameplay at a lower intensity includes "gankers" (Figure 3). This game term refers to players who disrupt one-versus-one player activities by killing the other player who is almost dead thus stealing their points. As seen in Figure 3 below, the ganker is another monster player character, the warg who uses stealth to sneak up on the two unsuspecting PvPers. Another group of players involved in socially disruptive behaviour are resurrection circle campers. This refers to those players who farm points by repeatedly killing vulnerable players just as they are resurrecting.

One situation of negative behaviour that I encountered in PvMP during group play involved two high-ranked Creep players who held opposing ideologies of gameplay. One of the Creep players was the group leader, while the other preferred to play on his own. When the solo player refused to obey the group leader's orders and insisted on his soloing behaviour, there was a clash and resultant tension between the players as they engaged in verbal attacks. The result was that the group leader eventually left the group to leave the solo player to his own devices. Such an occurrence of a clash between players eventually contributes to an unhappy situation in PvMP gameplay. Although the group gameplay

continued, we learn that it is important to discourage socially disruptive behaviour by engaging in social behaviour that promotes etiquette in group gameplay.

Figure 3. A ganker disrupting 1v1 PvMP. Source:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gVbDsWWGh0

One of the most negatively perceived behaviours in the Moors is "rank farming" (see Figure 4), which has been officially defined by the game developers as

> …the intentional surrender of the player's character to an enemy; resulting in a purposeful defeat and a gain of Infamy or Glory to increase rank. Rank farming is specific to Ettenmoors PvMP (Freep vs Monster Player) and the enemy can be controlled by any player - either the same player controlling the surrendering character, or someone else. (River, 2013)

The intense negative impact of rank farming is highlighted by the game developer's denigration of such gameplay activities, stating that

> …rank farming is an abuse of the game mechanics, and against the game rules. Customer service can identify this behaviour and will take the appropriate action on both accounts involved, based on their findings. (River, 2013)

The game developers indicate that they will ban any player who is found to engage in such behaviour, as rank farming is perceived to be counter to the social spirit of PvMP. Players who engage in rank farming are

considered to be cheating to gain points to rank up in the Ettenmoors. As seen in Figure 4 below, the rank farmer controls both the Freep character on the left and the Creep character on the right on separate player accounts. He farms his own Creep character who has been controlled by himself to be farmed to gain points to increase his Freep character's rank.

Figure 4. A rank farmer with monster player character for farming.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xc2vfA4RZsU

3.2.3.2   Attitudes toward positive behaviour

The community rewards player behaviour that promotes social cohesiveness and the gameplay spirit of PvMP. Players who help others in times of dire need are rewarded with in-game emotes or reciprocal behaviour from grateful players. A Freep player who heals another Freep player nearby, regardless of whether they know each other, may be rewarded with an in-game emote of "cheer," which conveys the player's gratitude. Similar dynamics occur among Creeps and may later shift the game dynamics in favor of players who help others.

Positive behaviours in group play include the following. One of the most important behaviours to adhere to is for all the players in the group to concentrate their attack or healing on the same target. This behaviour is facilitated by the group leader assigning a player, usually a damage dealer, as the "target assist". All the other players will click on the assigned player's target on the user interface to kill the opponent in a collaborative manner. When all the group members are able to collaborate effectively, it will be reflected in the successful execution of

group play. The leader will offer a compliment to reward the group members' collaborative effort. Furthermore, gameplay points in the form of infamy or renown will be gained in a rapid manner.

Another positive behaviour in group play involves achieving the goal(s) set up by the group as a single entity. Setting a goal not only provides an objective for the group players to aspire to, but also contributes to the fun factor of gameplay especially when the goal is challenging. A challenging goal can be set by forming a group with all damage dealing class and no healer type classes. The group then decides to steal a gameplay artefact from the enemy's base. I was personally involved in a group which consisted of all burglar characters. This group setup is unusually challenging because there are no healers to enable the group to regenerate so the group needs to coordinate its efforts to bring down the target rapidly. The burglar group consisted of group members from the same kinship so they were able to understand one another's gameplay roles. At the boss fight, the group members were able to coordinate and disable the other NPCs while the entire group focused their attack on the boss. In this way, the gameplay objective was successfully achieved as the relic was escorted back to the Freep base. Upon achievement of the goal, one of the group members posted the group's achievement in the chat channel for everyone to see which promotes the camaraderie between the group members.

Some of the general principles learnt from the discussion in this section include the following: First, different types of players exist in *LOTRO*, and players with common ideologies often band together to form a social community. Second, differences can exist not only between players in the same social community, but also between different social communities when their ideologies clash. Third, most players' gameplay behaviours are unregulated by the game moderators, and it is up to the players themselves to resolve their differences. Fourth, in open gameworlds, the game moderators will only step in to regulate gameplay behaviour when it adversely affects the social cohesion of the community. From the discussion of the *LOTRO* community's attitudes toward players, I have shown that online gameworlds are highly unpredictable, in terms of the players' social behaviours. Thus, there is a need to have a better understanding of how the social community's rules interact with the game moderator's rules to regulate the players' gameplay behaviour in online games, and thus create a more socially cohesive environment for gameplay activities to take place. Some research questions which the analyst may ask when investigating the community's attitude towards player behaviour include the following:

- What are the social rules that govern player behaviours in PvMP?
- Are the social rules officially sanctioned by the game developers, or informally by the player community?
- How does the presence or absence of specific social rules impact the gameplay of PvP? Does this contribute to increasing the spirit

- of camaraderie in PvP or does the addition of social rules contribute to tension between players?
- What are the different impacts of informal social rules created by the social community as opposed to the social rules enforced officially or indirectly by the game developers?
- Is a balance necessary between social rules endorsed by the game developers and informal rules created by the player community?
- How does the game developers' regulating or not regulating the players' gameplay behaviour encourage more emergent behaviour to develop or contribute to more diverse forms of gameplay?

3.2.4 Sustained group fights

Sustained group fights can originate from any location in the PvMP zone. The spatial location of this type of fight may extend to a very wide range and involve an even larger group of players as the fight prolongs. The duration of such fights may also stretch over a few hours. The purpose of such fights is to prolong the gameplay experience for players.

Sustained group fights are rewarding for several reasons. Firstly, longer fights provide larger gameplay rewards in the form of points for renown (Freeps) and infamy (Creeps) which is the currency system used to increase the players' rank. Secondly, larger scale fights promote social activities as more players become attracted to participate, because they are more fun compared to one-versus one fights which usually last less than a minute. Thirdly, large scale fights require intense concentration as players have to collaborate with one another to act as a single entity. Players who become involved in the experience come out from it feeling a deep sense of satisfaction as they feel a sense of achievement at having able to focus on a group task. These are some of the players' reactions to some positive attitudes in spontaneous group play. Sustained group fights are different from resurrection campers discussed earlier in section 3.2.3.1 in the sense that there is real collaboration involved between players involved in sustained group fights whereas resurrection campers disrupt the social group play by only emphasising on the attainment of gameplay points/rewards.

I was personally involved in such a fight which originated from a resurrection point fight at the River Outpost (See Figure 5). In the fight, all the Creep players formed a strategic formation near the resurrection circle in which ranged Creep players served as the offensive units. The ranged classes were supported by the healer classes. Freep players, on the other hand, took a strategic approach, falling back to the Elf Camp when the action escalated. Freep players commanded a more strategic position by occupying the high ground at the top of a hill, which enabled them to have a more omniscient view of the battlefield. However, Creep players outnumbered the Freep players 3:1, as the defeated Creep players were constantly reinforced at the resurrection point. The occupation of the high ground by the Freep players enabled them to

create a sustained fight by falling back to the Elf Camp to recuperate whenever the Creep forces pushed forward.

Figure 5. A sustained group fight location.

3.2.5 Divide and Conquer

Duke of O (2013) argues that open world PvP is like the real world, which can be cruel and unforgiving in the sense that players with a common goal form large impersonal alliances that can defeat even the most skilled players through their large numbers and resources. Therefore, Duke of O (2013) argues that in world PvP, it is the meta-game which is important. A meta-game is defined by Garfield (2000) as "the way in which a game interfaces outside of itself". Under this broad definition, Garfield includes a wide array of social play phenomena which he divides into four categories: what a player brings to a game, what a player takes from a game, what happens between games, and what happens during a game other than the game itself. The category of "what a player brings to a game" is most relevant to this discussion, and includes the choices that players made about the game, enhanced by their physical and mental resources (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). Garfield (2000) also includes the "peripheral game resources" which refer to optional elements, such as game guides, cheats, and knowledge of play patterns.

In world PvP, the player's ability to organize large networks of like-minded players for group play is arguably more important than the individual player's ability. In *LOTRO*'s PvMP, the divide-and-conquer strategy requires a tactical leader to coordinate the gameplay efforts of the raid group by dividing the players into a few groups to take different strategic locations simultaneously. The Creep group leader brings with

him his experience from the meta-game, where he draws upon his mental or peripheral game resources. His meta-game knowledge may also include his previous experience of reading game guide strategies or the knowledge of play patterns from the previous gameplay experience. I was personally involved in a group where the leader formulated a strategy which involved feint attacking a Keep, which is not the actual objective. The feint attack served as a distraction while the main Creep group utilized the maps to teleport to another enemy-held Keep to attack. This strategy required careful coordination using either an external or internal audio communication service and also required quick and decisive action in which the main group quickly took the Keep while the opposition's attention is distracted.

3.2.6   Changing dynamics of open-ended gameplay

The purpose of the gameplay discussion in this section is to enable us to understand how the implementation of simple rules, such as the dynamic property of Keeps, Outposts and resurrection points that allows them to change sides, interact with the gameplay mechanic of Creep maps to create emergent gameplay. Both the structure of the PvMP zone and the Creeps' gameplay mechanic, such as the Creep maps, are unique. The ability to have unbalanced sides which function totally differently creates diverse emergent gameplay for both Freep and Creep players. For instance, while Freep players have horses to ride around the map, Creep players can obtain maps to teleport around instantly to specific points on the map (see Figure 6).
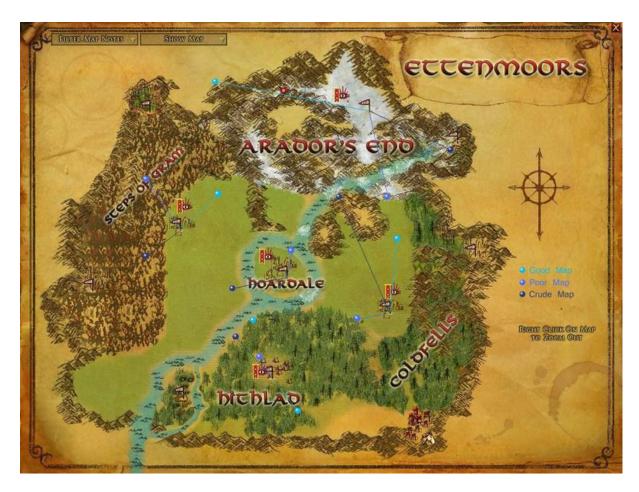
Figure 6. A map of Ettenmoors, with the locations of the crude, poor and good map port sites for Creep players. Source: http://aragornsallies.guildlaunch.com/custom.php?gid=38556&page_id=106460

Creep maps play a major part in creating Creepside identity and also change the entire range of tactics in the Moors. Since Creep maps allow Creep players to travel fast and have direct access to various locations, Freep players must be careful not to fight near these locations if they cannot win the fight. From this perspective, the entire map is tactically different for Creep players. Many diverse strategies have to be created rapidly and discarded later, based on the moment-to-moment changing gameplay dynamics in open-ended PvP. Another consideration involves resurrection locations which are dangerous to fight near if the players want to win, since it will be tough for players to defeat an evenly matched enemy as they do not possess an advantage over the other.

Certain Outpost locations are dangerous to fight near when the player plays on one side. This is because of the gameplay mechanic where the resurrection point will be possessed by players who have captured the Keeps. As seen in Figure 7 below, when a Keep is held by the Creeps, the resurrection point where Creep players respawn after they are defeated will be close to an Outpost. Creep reinforcements will be able

to quickly join the fight at the Outpost. Therefore, the Outpost near the Creep's resurrection point will be a dangerous location to fight near as a Freep when the Keep is held by Creepside. A similar situation occurs when Freep players are fighting around an area where Creep players can use Creep maps to teleport in. Because the PvMP zone has direct tactical advantages and disadvantages due to the constantly changing dynamics, players and group leaders have to constantly change tactics based on the current gameplay situation. This creates a variable form of emergent gameplay in the zone despite the same type of map being used in *LOTRO*'s PvMP.
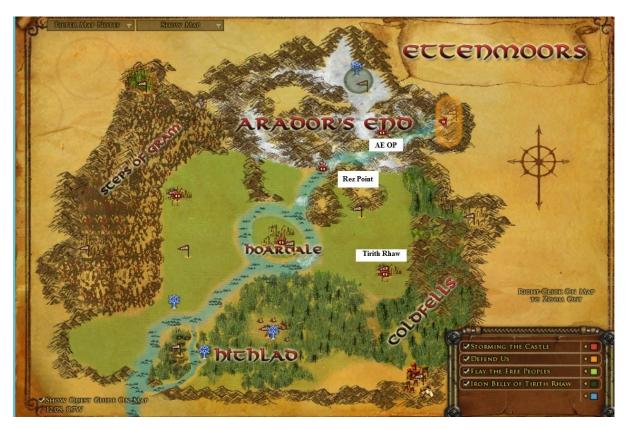

Figure 7. The proximity of Arador's End Outpost to the resurrection point.

Due to the open-ended gameplay in the Ettenmoors, some strategies that specific player classes adhere to will not work when other classes adopt them. For instance, Freep classes which cannot go into stealth or are unable to track other Creep players, such as the Champion class, generally adhere to the strategy of not fighting near a Creep teleport location if a Keep is red (Creepside owned), and when the Freeps do not have enough people (Figure 8). When there is a raid of Creep players out, they usually gather at the Keep or the teleport location, making the teleport location a hotspot of traffic. Any solo player will have a tough time getting a fair fight since multiple Creeps will use the teleport location as a highway back to the action. On the other hand, Freep classes like hunters can track other Creep players, using their tracking

skills as a tactic. They can remain in stealth in specific teleport locations to ambush a greater foe or remain around an area of importance, such as the Creep's teleport point, and quickly use their specific class skills, such as escaping when the action escalates. This creates varied gameplay in the PvMP zone where players can choose to play different characters to experience diverse gameplay experiences, as echoed by Sweetser (2008, p. 3):

> Consequently, the game can be more satisfying and interesting for the players [because] emergent games have high replayability, [as] each time the players play the game, they make different decisions, which change the game as a whole and result in different possibilities.
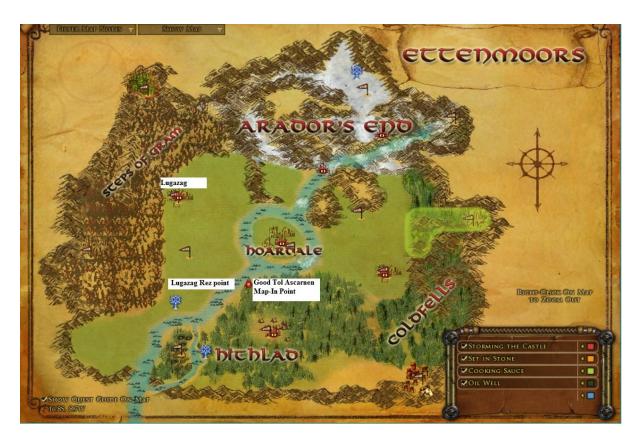

Figure 8. Utilising different class strategies based on the changing map dynamics.

In this section, I have provided detailed descriptions of gameplay in *LOTRO*'s PvMP. Through these descriptions, I have shown how the simple rules, such as the ability of Keeps, Outposts and resurrection circles to be attacked and captured by the players, interact with the gameplay mechanic of the Creep maps to create many diverse forms of emergent gameplay. I have also shown how different player characters, based on their unique skills, can develop different emergent gameplay strategies to interact with the simple rules of the PvMP zone and to

create a diverse gameplay experience. Based on the discussion above, analysts who want to find out how emergent gameplay occurs in PvP can ask the following questions:

- How can the game developers design the game space, e.g., by using points of interest, such that emergent gameplay is encouraged to develop?
- How can the game developers design the world such that sustained group fights can emerge?
- How can the gameworld be designed so that players can utilize multiple strategies through group coordination to capture an objective?
- How can the game players take advantage of the open-ended dynamics of the world PvP to create diverse emergent gameplay?
- How do free play and negotiated players' rules occur in different types of online games?

4. Conclusion

In this study, I have focused on the discussion of emergent gameplay by drawing upon my subjective gameplay experiences and also observing other players' gameplay experiences in the MMORPG, *LOTRO*. This approach emphasizes two of the core features of *LOTRO*'s PvMP which are the emergent gameplay and the community's attitudes towards players. In this article, I started by discussing points of interest, which are specific strategic locations where players engage in PvE quests. From this discussion, we are able to understand how the game developers design the gameplay setting to promote emergent gameplay by using the PvE quests as support for PvMP. Next, I discussed the social community's attitudes towards player behaviour. I discussed how although the game developers create policies to govern the players' gameplay behaviour in different domains, most of the gameplay behaviour in open world PvP is regulated by the social communities in the gameworld. There are different hierarchies of social rules in the PvMP zone. Social rules formulated by the player community govern the player's gameplay behaviour at a lower level. The game developer's policies govern the player's gameplay behaviour from a top down perspective. In open gameworlds, it is the interaction between the game developer's policies, the player community's social rules and the players' gameplay actions which contributes to emergent gameplay in PvMP.

The discussion of the social community's attitudes towards player's behaviour serves to contextualize the discussion of free play in group fights versus negotiated fair play[2] in one-versus-one fights. Free play in the form of *paidia* is dominant in group play. Many different emergent

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[2] Negotiated fair play is defined as instances of play activities that involve less strict rules which arise from the discussion between the 2 players involved in 1v1 activities on how to perform the play activities. The discussion between the 2 players may be implicit for players who are more experienced or familiar with each other or explicit for players who are less experienced or familiar with each other.

gameplay strategies develop to enrich the player's gameplay experiences. *Ludus* play is more dominant in one-versus-one encounters where players aim for a fair fight to pit their skills against another player. From this discussion, we are able to understand how players create their own gameplay rules to overcome their opponents. In the article, I have also provided some specific emergent gameplay strategies which I have encountered through my participation as a player in the PvMP zone. Some of these emergent strategies include sustained group fights, "divide-and-conquer", and leveraging the changing dynamics of the open-ended gameplay. These are the examples of *paidia* play in group battles. However, some of the emergent strategies such as "divide-and-conquer" are also heavily regulated by experienced group leaders who micromanage other players. This indicates that *paidia* in this scenario may tend to move toward *ludus* as players develop their own group rules. These discussions enable us to understand how the players are in charge of their own gameplay activities, producing diverse forms of emergent gameplay by interacting with the simple rules of the open gameworld. Emergent gameplay could be seen as a potentially desirable outcome from a game by MMO designers because by giving more control to the players they will feel more in charge of their own gameplay through setting up their own gameplay goals, rather than experience the feeling of carrying out repetitive and mundane tasks dictated by the game designers.

The study of some core features of open world PvP in *LOTRO* will contribute to furthering our understanding of how the players' interaction with the open world setting, the open gameworld's simple rules, and the social interaction with the other players through the social rules, result in the formation of emergent gameplay behaviour. This understanding would enable the game designers to understand how to analyze other online gameworlds, in order to improve the core features of other online games to facilitate emergent player behaviour. This work may represent a stepping stone towards more helpful or unified methods in understanding MMO/PvP systems which encourage emergent gameplay in terms of the player community. For instance, the proposed questions at the end of each section should facilitate further research of other PvP gameworlds. It is hoped that the subjective gameplay experiences described in this study could form the basis of future work on a more general framework for the analysis and understanding of PvP systems in other online games.

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