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

Abstract:

This article proposes a methodological framework for the analysis of Player versus Player (PvP) in online games, based on the case study of Player versus Monster Player (PvMP) in *The Lord of the Rings Online* (*LOTRO*). The argument is that although there is a core system of 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. Some of the core systems of PvP discussed include emergent gameplay, the community's attitudes towards player's behaviours, the gameplay mechanics, and players' communication.

Keywords: open world PvP, emergent gameplay, social community's attitudes, free play, negotiated fair play

1. Introduction:

The Lord of the Rings Online (*LOTRO*) 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 game world 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 includes players' strategies as a result of players' 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 *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 gameplay and strategies that players create serves 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, Therefore, by studying how the implementation of relatively simple rules can contribute to emergent behaviour for players, game designers would be able to design better game worlds to facilitate instead of restrict players' gameplay behaviour.

In the next section of this article, I will review studies which have been conducted on relevant aspects of online games and explain how my 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' behavior (Section 3.2.2). Finally, I will conclude my article 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). Jørgensen (2008) investigates the relationship between audio and gameplay from an analysis of PvP Battlegrounds in *World of Warcraft.* Other studies focus on the player's motivations in gameplay (Kahn et al., 2013, Wolf, 2012), and how the players use the virtual spaces in online games (Hemminger and Schott, 2012). My study contributes to the literature by investigating how players engage in *LOTRO*'s open world PvP where emergent gameplay is prevalent. The process detailing how emergent gameplay develops in open game world environments is under-researched. Taylor's (2006) research on the cultural context of *World of Warcraft* such as national identity, age, and the mod scene shows that emergent gameplay is a process and systems of stratification and control rise from the bottom up and 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 behavior in *LOTRO*.

Carr (2012) applied a version of textual analysis by participating in the PvP of *World of Warcraft's* 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 I define 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 behavior to emerge. The process through which players experiment with different types of gameplay dynamics for meaningful and playful behavior to emerge in open world PvP is discussed in Sections 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, and 3.2.6.

In her analysis of audio in PvP battlegrounds in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard), Jørgensen (2008) proposes a framework for the discussion of audio in relation to gameplay. In the framework, there are five audio generators which consist of the player, enemy, ally, game system and gameworld. There is also a division of sounds into internal and external sounds, together with diegetic, extradiegetic, and transdiegetic sounds. Jørgensen's (2008) approach demonstrates that in analysing games, there is a need to divide the features of the game being analysed into its respective components. She also argues for the need to take into account the game's context to fully understand the meaning conveyed by the game component being analysed. In my study, I also divide the discussion of emergent gameplay into different sections, in terms of the gameplay setting (Section 3.2.1), and the types of emergent gameplay strategies devised by the players (Sections 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, and 3.2.6). The discussion of the community's attitudes towards player's behavior is used to contextualise the analyses of the player's emergent gameplay strategies in Sections 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, and 3.2.6.

Kahn et al., (2013) have used a mixture of server-side data and survey data to analyze players' motivations for playing online games and how player behavior reflects such motivations. Wolf (2012) has also analyzed the motivational mechanisms of *World of Warcraft* in relation to the instructional design approach that can be adopted in a highly informal game setting. The social aspect of virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, in the establishment of a virtual community with other players, was investigated by Thimm (2012).

Hemminger and Schott (2012) use a combined approach of questionnaires, participant observations, and interviews to investigate the ways in which players use virtual spaces in online games. For example, players can follow gameplay rules to level up, use emotes and macros to deepen the gameplay experience, and use communication channels for social interaction or to merge real life and game space into a virtual space. Giang et al. (2012) adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to study relationship play among young players (9-12 years old) in the virtual world *Whyville*.

Several studies have been conducted on analysing communication in multiplayer games and virtual world communities. For instance, Drachen (2011) formulated a method using protocol analysis to analyse verbal communication between players. The approach was demonstrated by applying it to the analysis of player communication in various role-playing and pen and paper tabletop games to understand the types of communication between the players in playing different games. Thimm (2012) discussed *Second Life*'s interpersonal social communication, including the verbal interaction in text-based chat, voice chat via microphones and headphones, instant messaging and the internal news system, and non-verbal communication in the form of visual contact between avatars, avatars' gestures and mimicry. Ackermann (2012) described the high social quality of collaboration within a game. She performed research on LAN Party communication and observed multiple player-player interactions, especially verbal and nonverbal communication. While past research has mostly

focused on the social collaboration between the players, there has been a lack of research which discusses how the players interact and communicate with each other in a socially competitive environment, such as PvP.

While previous studies have adopted a diverse range of methods to analyze the textual, social, motivational, competitive, and communicative aspects of the online games and their players, this study will investigate the formation of emergent gameplay in an MMORPG to propose a methodological approach to investigate some of the core components of the PvP of online games. The goal of this study is to show the process through which the open game world supports the players' interaction with the simple rules of the game world 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 to be in charge of their own gameplay activities. In understanding gameplay activities in open game world environments, there will be a greater awareness of how to design specific features of open game worlds to support the players' emergent gameplay. Some core components, which will be discussed in the following sections, include the support for emergent gameplay (Section 3.1), and the *LOTRO* community's attitudes towards players' behavior (Section 3.2). I also provide gameplay examples based on my own gameplay experience in PvMP, and I conclude each section with some basic questions the researcher could ask when analyzing other online games.

3. Methodological approach - Core components of *LOTRO*'s PvMP

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 framework. 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 to use these four components to analyse other digital games. Compared to them, 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 research questions to analyse other games. Boellstorff et. al. (2012) formulate ethnographical methods to analyse virtual worlds which include participant observation, interviews, the capturing of data and data analysis. However, they did not devote 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 behavior but also how my observation of my gameplay elucidates how emergent behavior arises. My research is also similar to Nardi's (2010) ethnographic research as a participant researcher in *World of Warcraft* because I am a participant of *LOTRO*'s PvMP. However, while she focuses on the aspects of "play as aesthetic experience", "the blurring of the distinction between work, play, and the magic circle", "addiction", "mods", "gender" and "culture" 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 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. But if more players are online, Keeps are attacked more often. In this way, the game world'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 game worlds.

The players are not restricted from using the rules of the game to create their own gameplay rules. This constitutes *emergent gameplay,* in which players create conflict and tension between the opposite sides for PvMP gameplay. The game moderators are not interfering with players 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 a 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 game worlds 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: 491) Rules are defined prescriptively as social rules which give value to or devalue certain behaviors. Play is subjective, " an engaging activity in which the player believes s/he has active participation and interprets it as constraining her immediate future to a set of probable scenarios, all of which s/he is willing tolerate" (Frasca, 2007). Not all the consequences of play are enjoyed by players, but at least they are willing to cope with them. (Wolf, 2012: 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 cooldown 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: 4); however, freedom is

not unlimited and the choices are constrained by (social) rules. Caillois (1961: 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: 230) also cautions that "it is common to think that *paidia* has no rules, but this is not the case". Frasca (2003: 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 to withdraw when the odds are not in the player's favor. The group-based open warfare in *LOTRO*'s PvMP is very unpredictable, and sometimes one player dominates in the killing, but at other times is hunted. Players devise many different gameplay strategies. Players can defeat all the players in the opposition among their own NPCs, 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. Ludus refers to a structured form of play and is

present in group play when group leaders implement rules that players have to adhere to such as kinship (for Freeps) or tribal (for Creeps) rules. Ludus also present when group leader coordinates group effort in defeating the opposition.

As 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 devices 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-ones. For instance, some rules that players adhere to during one-versus-one include the prohibition of using skills with a long cooldown (the period of wait time before a spell, ability, or item power can be used again). The use of long cooldown 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-ones to reduce the imbalance. Other negotiated gameplay rules during one-versus-ones 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. Paidia is present in one-versus-ones when the encounter between 2 players is unplanned. During unplanned encounters, players can use any form of strategies and skills which may contribute to more unpredictable and unbalanced gameplay.

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 interests provide the setting for emergent gameplay, in which these strategic locations scripted 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 in which the NPC will always move towards the Lumber Camp (Figure 2). As seen in Figure 2, the NPC's path covers quite a large distance and it also passes by Hithlad Outpost , another *point of interest* that can create conflicts between opposition players. Creep players sometimes patrol around the surroundings of this fixed path to ambush Freep players who are completing their quests. Another scenario where emergent gameplay develops is at quest locations near map-in areas which can create a constant hotspot. For example, Grothum (see Figure 1) is used by Freeps for quests, but Grothum has a Creep teleport in location. Any sightings of Freeps in Grothum will cause Creeps to teleport in and create battles.

Figure 1. Points of Interest in Ettenmoors

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

Other points of interest include the relics found in the two non-conquerable bases which are Dar-Gazag and OST Ringdyr. Not only do many PvE quests start from these bases, but both locations can be attacked by the other side. By defeating the NPC bosses guarding these locations, players can access two relics. These relics have to be carried by the players to their own base to earn a positive effect for all Creeps or Freeps. Relics create emergent

gameplay by giving direct instructions about a goal for players to prevent the relic from reaching the enemy's base. Another point of interest is found in the huge underground dungeons in which players defeat certain elite bosses to obtain other positive effects to the Freep or Creep players. Killing the elite bosses grants the player's side a 30-40% boost to infamy/renown gain. Underground dungeon elite bosses help to create *emergent goals* for the players to prevent the enemy from taking buffs which are positive player effects.

3.2.3 Community attitudes towards player behaviors

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: 158). Fighting with good or bad spirit is a driving force of competition in PvP gameplay. There are rules that govern the player's behavior from the perspective of the social community. The community's attitudes toward players' behavior come from the players themselves, but are also officially influenced by the policies created by the game developers, which govern different aspects of players' gameplay behavior in different domains.

3.2.3.1 Attitudes toward negative behavior

The community's attitude toward player behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior, 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 behavior by engaging in social behavior that promotes etiquette in group gameplay.

Figure 3 A ganker disrupting 1v1 PvMP

YouTube Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gVbDsWWGh0

One of the most negatively perceived behaviors 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 behavior 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 behavior, 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

YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xc2vfA4RZsU

3.2.3.2 Attitudes toward positive behavior

The community rewards player behavior 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 behavior 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 behaviors in group play include the following. One of the most important behaviors to adhere to is for all the players in the group to concentrate their attack or healing on the same target. This behavior 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 same target assist'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 behavior 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. 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 focuses 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 behaviors are unregulated by the game moderators, and it is up to the players themselves to resolve their differences. Fourth, in open game worlds, 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 game worlds are highly unpredictable, in terms of the players' social behaviors. 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 behavior in online games to 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's behavior include the following:

- What are the social rules that govern player behaviors 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 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 behavior encourage more emergent behavior 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 more points in the form of renown (Freeps) and infamy (Creeps) which is the currency system used to increase the players' rank. Secondly, larger scale fights promote the social activities as more players become attracted to participate as they are more fun compared to one-versus ones 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 formation with the Elf Camp as the encampment to fall back, 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 on the same side 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 level of choice that players bring to a game, enhanced by their physical and mental resources (Salen and Zimmerman 2004. Garfied (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 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 device

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

This purpose of the discussion of gameplay 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 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://www.the-rangers.net/joomla/index.php/library/lotro-tips/108-a-guide-to-lotro-monster-play)

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 instance 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 posses 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. "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" (Sweetser, 2008: 3).

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 also 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 game world 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?

3.3 Gameplay Mechanics

These are the gameplay rules that govern the player's gameplay behaviour from the implementation of rules as gameplay mechanics by the game designers. In this section, I discuss how a type of gameplay mechanic which is present influences the player's gameplay behaviour in *LOTRO*'s PvMP.

3.3.1 Ranking System

There is a different ranking (experience) system in the Moors separate from the character level system in the PvE area. Infamy (for Creeps) and renown (for Freeps) are the equivalent of experience points that players obtain through killing other players. Players rank up in the Moors by engaging in Player versus Monster Player (PvMP) gameplay activities

and doing a series of basic repeatable quests (PvE). The player's rank in the Moors ranges from 1 - 15.

Originally, the only way to gain infamy and renown to increase rank was by defeating enemy players, but recently, simple PvE quests were added to encourage players to move throughout the Ettenmoors periodically. This created new hotspots to meet enemy players, and promoted PvMP battles through *emergent gameplay* in different locations. Since the Ettenmoors is structured like a war map, different locations have different strengths and weaknesses. By having players move around the map through the incorporation of PvE quests, tactical advantages or disadvantages can be used in tactical gameplay.

However, the rank experience gained from doing PvE quests has also been changed in another recent patch in such a way that the players have to put in a lot of manual repetitive effort just to gain a small amount of rank experience, compared to that of the experience gained from participating in PvMP gameplay. This is to discourage players from engaging in PvE gameplay activities in the designated PvMP zone and to encourage PvMP gameplay. This has implications in that the engagement with the PvE in the Moors serves as a means to enhance the PvP gameplay activities rather than the other way around.

The amount of infamy and renown gained is equally divided among the group of players. Players who are ungrouped but have also attacked or healed grouped players will also gain an equal amount of infamy/renown. The positive implication of this is that players are encouraged to help other players, which contributes to social cooperative gameplay. The negative implication is that this contributes to playing for easy points, obtained through means such as resurrection point fights. Players can simply tag as many of the other players as possible and let the infamy/renown flow in. This may actually restrict gameplay.

Some of the questions which the analyst can ask when they investigate the relationship between gameplay mechanics and the player's behaviour in online games include the following:

- How do the gameplay mechanics contribute to social cohesive gameplay or socially disruptive gameplay behaviour?
- How do the gameplay mechanics contribute to specific playstyles?
- How do the gameplay mechanics contribute to the player's formulation of single- versus group-based strategies?
- How can the game developers provide a balanced gameplay mechanic such that the players will not overly rely on the gameplay mechanics to win the game, or to have fun?

3.4 Communication between Freep and Creep players

In the Moors, PvMP players from the opposite sides cannot communicate directly with each other via the in-game text chat function. This is to prevent players from abusing the system and ruining the gameplay in PvP. For instance, if Freep players and Creep players could communicate directly with each other in game, Creep spies could tell their Freep player friends where the location of the Creep players was currently at and vice versa. This would contribute to a form of cheating granting an unorthodox tactical advantage to players. In *LOTRO*, PvMP players from the opposite sides communicate indirectly with each other in-game by using specific in-game actions and emotes, and directly using out-of-game mechanisms like *Ventrilo*. In-game actions used for communication must be interpreted in their contexts of use for the meaning to be understood. For instance, during one-versus-one PvP, the in-game actions used by the players involve jumping up and down to communicate the information that the player is ready to start the PvMP (Figure 9).

Figure 9 Jumping is often an in-game action signalling the player's readiness to start the 1v1 fight

On the other hand, the player's in-game action of jumping up and down conveys a different meaning when it is used after a player defeats the other player. There is a phenomenon called *corpse jumping* in *LOTRO*. In *LOTRO*, depending on the contexts in which such action is used, corpse jumping can have positive or negative connotations. It can be used in a light-hearted manner to indicate that one player had fun playing with a friend. Used in a negative manner, corpse jumping can also used by players to communicate their disdain of other players who play by using cheap methods, such as someone who died using an exploit (a form of cheating in online games), repeat one versus one gankers (discussed in section 3.2.3.1), and fight clubers (players who fight each other in a non-competitive manner in designated one versus one areas)

Players from the opposite sides can utilise a number of out-game communication programs such as *Ventrilo*, *Teamspeak 3*, and *Mumble* to verbally communicate with each

other. The use of out-of-game mechanisms for communication between Creep and Freep players is controversial because there may be spies from the opposing side who can report information back to their side. For this reason, out-game communication mechanisms like *Ventrilo* are moderated by the senior players. Specific rules were made to prevent spying in relation to the out-game communication programs such as *Ventrilo*. These rules authorise the senior players to limit the player's abilities to communicate, or in more serious cases, to ban the player if a specific player is deemed to be suspected to be acting as a mole or spy. Emotes are used by Freeps to communicate indirectly with Creeps. When the Freep player kills the Creep player, s/he may use a "cheer" emote to indicate his/her respect for the other player. Emotes can also be used to increase the fun factor of playing. For instance, the "heave" emote can be used by Freep players to perform the in-game action of throwing up something disgusting in front of the other Creep player. Overall, the limited communication between Creep and Freep players is good as communication in the Moors is not needed when the players from the opposite sides are fighting each other. After the battles, the players may log over to talk about fights in a positive or negative way. If players were allowed direct communication, such as in-text chats, some players would troll each other constantly and there will be a chat channel full of insults.

Some research questions that the analyst can ask when analysing communication between PvP players from online games are as follows:

- Can players from the different sides in PvP communicate with each other in-game during the PvP activities, and what affordances does the game interface provide to facilitate or hinder such communication?
- How do players in different online games communicate with each other indirectly during PvP if they cannot communicate directly with each other?

- What kinds of in-game actions can the players from opposite sides perform to communicate with each other? For instance, can they use emotes and can they jump up and down?
- Can the players from opposite sides communicate with each other using the text chat function? How does it affect gameplay behaviour?
- Does the game's user interface promote the player's innovative use of in game actions to communicate to the other players?
- Do players use external out-of-game mechanisms such as *Ventrilo* to communicate with each other during gameplay? How does the use of external game communication mechanisms affect the gameplay?
- Does the use of external mechanisms for communication contribute to issues of cheating in gameplay, such as spying, and how do the moderators of the external communication software regulate such activities which, if left unchecked, may contribute to a negative playing experience?

4. Conclusion

In this study, I have proposed a methodological approach for the analysis of online games by focusing on my gameplay experiences and also observing other players' gameplay experiences in the MMORPG, *LOTRO*. This approach emphasizes some of the core features of *LOTRO*'s PvMP, represented in Figure 10 below. 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 behavior. I

discussed how although the game developers create policies to govern the players' gameplay behavior in different domains, most of the gameplay behaviour in open world PvP is regulated by the social communities in the game world. There are different hierarchies of social rules in the PvMP zone. Social rules formulated by the player community govern the player's gameplay behavior at a lower level. The game developer's policies govern the player's gameplay behavior from a top down perspective. In open game worlds, 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.

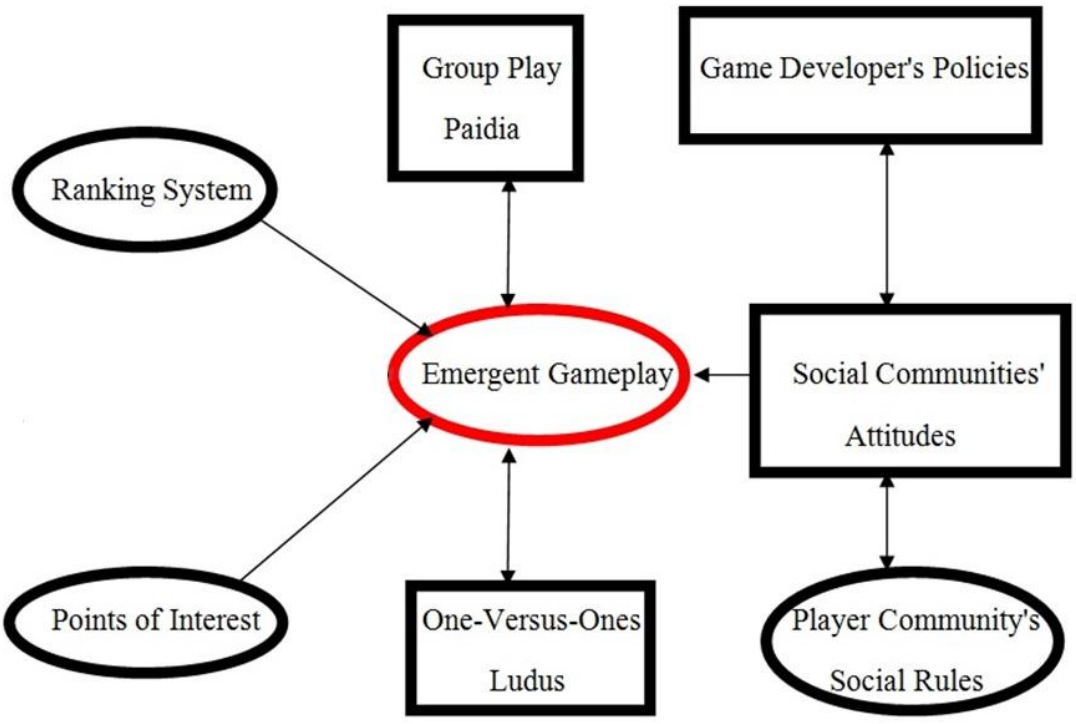

Figure 10 The core features of *LOTRO*'s PvMP

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

emergent gameplay strategies develop to enrich the player's gameplay experiences. Ludus play is more dominant in one-versus-ones 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 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 game world. In the section where I discuss the ranking system of *LOTRO*'s PvMP, I also explain how the ranking system has been designed to encourage players to move throughout the map. The game designers intend for players to tactically adapt to the changing dynamics of the open-ended gameplay in the unpredictable situation of the PvMP region.

The study of some core features of open world PvP will contribute to further our understanding of how the players' interaction with the open world setting, the open game world's simple rules, and the social interaction with the other players through the social rules, result in the formation of emergent gameplay behavior. This understanding would enable the game designers to understand how to analyse other online game worlds, in order to improve the core features of other online games to facilitate emergent players' behavior to emerge. The proposed questions at the end of each sections would hopefully facilitate the further research of other PvP gameworlds

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