



Being a Female Gamer & Playing Lord of the Rings Online

Description

As a female gamer, being able to play a game where the female characters/toons aren't dressed as sexual objects is refreshing. To play an elf, a hobbit, or even a human is more relaxing.

BEING A FEMALE GAMER

I began playing *The Lord of the Rings Online* eight years ago through an online class about online games and literature; playing the game was presented as an option. I chose to play, and I made some great friends through the kinship I joined. In fact, a lot of those folks still play and I'm still part of that kinship. I have found through the years that actually many friends of mine who are Tolkien fans play the game; it's always fun to get together and go on quests.

The first character/toon I created is an elf, and she has reached the maximum level for the game right now. I have throughout the years created regular elves, high elves, dwarves, humans, hobbits, and a Beorning. You may have noticed I didn't mention wizards, because unfortunately wizards are not one of the choices.

MY INTRODUCTION TO TOLKIEN

The first time I was introduced to Tolkien's Middle-earth was in high school. I was into reading books by Anne Rice and other gothic writers so *The Lord of the Rings* was a change and ushered in my interest and passion for fantasy fiction. Anne Rice had inspired me to read and write about vampires while Tolkien was the inspiration for writing about elves, dragons, and wizards. After watching Jackson's trilogy, I picked up a copy of *The Lord of the Rings* and read it again for the first time in a long time. Reading it renewed my love for reading and writing fantasy fiction. I grabbed a pen and notebook and began sketching out what would become my first published story.

Writing my M.A. thesis on Tolkien's trilogy gave me the chance to explore more of his legendarium which for me includes the books, movies, video games like *The Lord of the Rings Online*, and even Tolkien Studies classes. His legendarium has made an impact on my life like no other author really has. I think for me personally, the attraction is a combination of Tolkien's world-building and the multitude of characters that readers might relate to in some way. For me, my favorite character tends to change from time to time when I'm reading the books.





ÉOWYN, MY FAVORITE CHARACTER

Speaking of characters, I have to say one of my favorite characters is Éowyn. She defeats a villain near the end of her story without help from her male counterparts; as a female reader this made me smile. She did it herself and didn't wait for a man to come to the rescue. In *The Return of the King*, she and Aragorn are having a conversation about battles and who should be allowed to fight. One of the passages from the conversation I think says a lot about her:

‘Too often have I heard of duty,’ she cried. ‘But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse? I have waited on faltering feet long enough. Since they falter no longer, it seems, may I not now spend my life as I will?’ (*Return* 767).

Those lines spoke volumes to the person she was and how she viewed her life. She wanted the respect of those around her.

Additionally, and as a writer, Tolkien’s Éowyn is the character that inspires me most when creating new female characters because she is strong but vulnerable. Arwen and Galadriel are inspiring in their own way, too, but I think Éowyn was given a character/story arc because she was human while Arwen and Galadriel were immortal (although technically Arwen did give up her immortality for Aragorn). Both Arwen and Galadriel had many more years of life whereas Éowyn wouldn’t have such a chance. Her story allows female readers to relate to someone that is a human in a world of beings like elves, wizards, hobbits, and dwarves.

PLAYING THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

When I began playing the game, I wasn’t worried about the fact that I was a female playing a character/toon in an MMO game. I was happy to be playing a game where my character/toon could visit Bree, The Shire, Rivendell, or Rohan and interact with characters like Aragorn, Legolas, Frodo, or Éowyn. I didn’t even know a toxic environment might exist in a setting where we were interacting with other players. Then “gamergate” happened and as I researched the gaming aspect for my thesis, I realized how much different *The Lord of the Rings Online* is from other games. Yes, I will admit there are people in the game with certain attitudes towards other players. I avoid those players as much as I can and interact with the players I know.

Playing *The Lord of the Rings Online* as a female gamer is interesting because it’s not like other games in how the female characters/toons are dressed. As a female gamer, being able to play a game where the female characters/toons aren’t dressed as sexual objects is refreshing. To play an elf, a hobbit, or even a human is more relaxing, and I feel like I’m on a level playing field in many ways when I play. I have proven that I can handle myself when it comes to battling the foes in the game and the harassment that a female can receive in other games doesn’t happen in this one that much.

MORE TOLKIEN!

The adventure I went on writing and researching my thesis led me to take another adventure this year. In May, I started classes in Tolkien Studies at Signum University. I had heard about the university several years ago when I began following a weekly livestream titled “Exploring *the Lord of the Rings*.” The streamer is the Tolkien Professor, and he uses *The Lord of the Rings Online* game as a tool along with the book for us to learn more about Middle-earth. It’s a fun and educational livestream because the book is discussed and then the places are visited in the game.

I have also joined the Tolkien Society and will attend a virtual seminar in July and a virtual weekend conference called Oxonmoot in September. I will attend virtually Mythmoot, which is a yearly conference that Signum University holds. A goal I have for next year and the conferences is to write, submit, and present a paper on Tolkien.

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