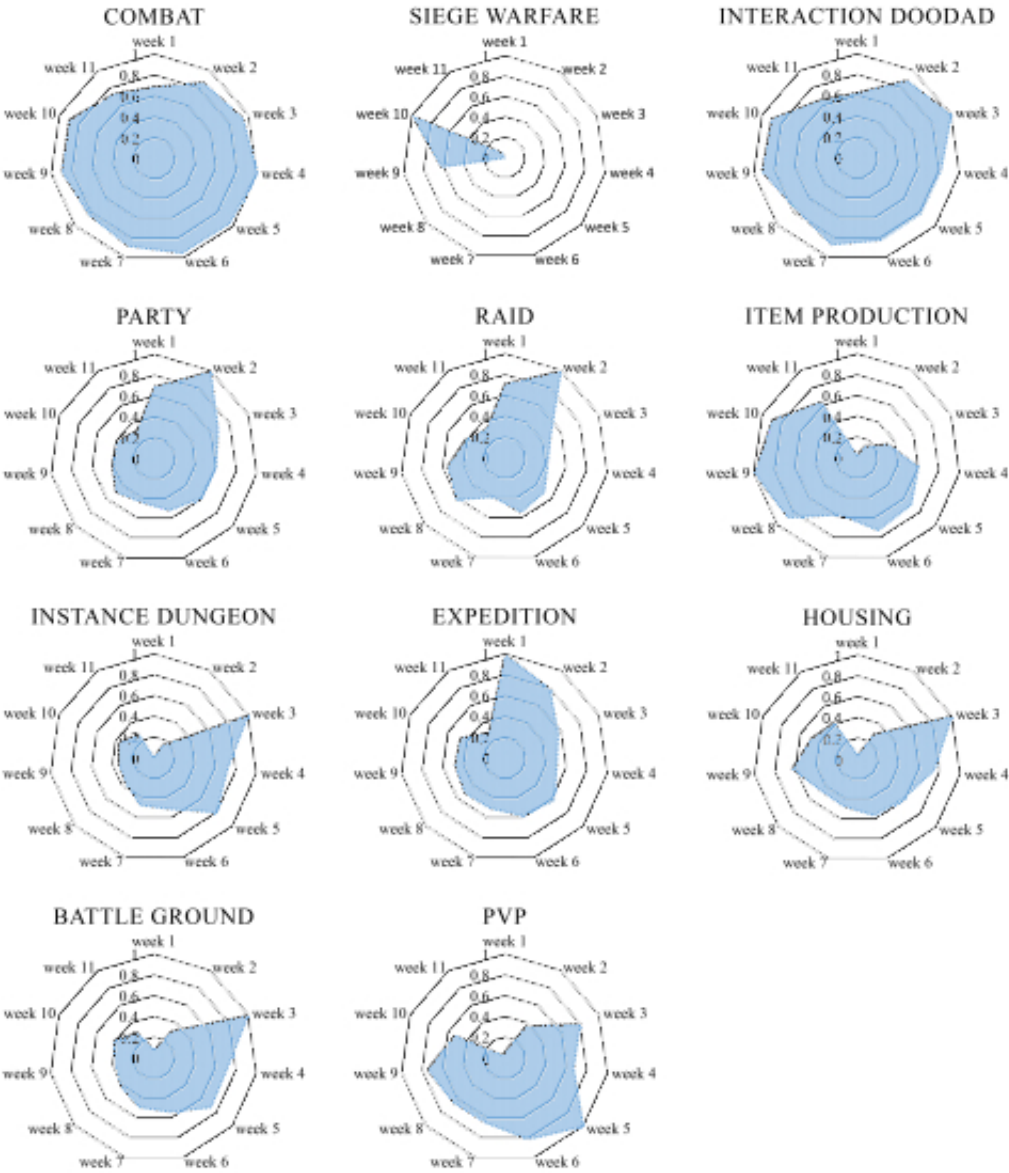


# Virtual end-of-world game shows people aren't likely to resort to aggression

March 14 2017, by Bob Yirka



Radar plot of normalized action frequency per week. Weeks are arranged on the

outer radius in clock-wise order. The further away the shaded region is from the center, the greater the frequency for the corresponding week. Credit: arXiv:1703.01500 [cs.CY]

(TechXplore)—A small international team of researchers has found that when people play a virtual world game, they do not resort to riotous behavior if they know their world is going to end. In their paper uploaded to the *arXiv* preprint server, the team describes an experiment they conducted with volunteers playing a virtual game to learn more about how people might actually behave if it became known that the world was going to end.

Movies and [television shows](#) have depicted end-of-world scenarios as brutish, with people carrying out their most base desires just prior to a given [cataclysmic event](#). But according to the researchers, this may not be how things would actually play out if there really were a threat to our existence.

To learn more about how people might behave when faced with a true Armageddon, the researchers signed up a large group of people to play a virtual world game called ArcheAge—players engage in quests, get to know one another, and engage in a virtual existence. But only for 11 weeks—at that point, the game would end and all evidence of the virtual world and what had occurred in it would vanish. Their world as they knew it would cease to exist, and they knew when it would occur. This allowed players and those observing them (they studied 270 million records), to see how the people behind the avatars would behave.

The researchers report that rather than wreaking havoc, most of the players simply ceased pursuing their quests or anything related to the future. They instead chose to spend their last days communing and

perhaps commiserating with their fellow virtual friends, comrades and associates. There were, of course, a few outliers bent on mayhem, but the researchers report that for the most part, the virtual world became a calm, meditative and peaceful place.

No one can be certain that virtual behavior in a [virtual world](#) might truly mimic human behavior during a real end-of-world situation, but the findings by the team suggest people might be feeling more nostalgic and sad rather than murderous or enraptured by the sudden chance to carry out acts without fear of reprisal.

**More information:** I Would Not Plant Apple Trees If the World Will Be Wiped: Analyzing Hundreds of Millions of Behavioral Records of Players During an MMORPG Beta Test, arXiv:1703.01500 [cs.CY] [arxiv.org/abs/1703.01500](https://arxiv.org/abs/1703.01500)

### **Abstract**

In this work, we use player behavior during the closed beta test of the MMORPG ArcheAge as a proxy for an extreme situation: at the end of the closed beta test, all user data is deleted, and thus, the outcome (or penalty) of players' in-game behaviors in the last few days loses its meaning. We analyzed 270 million records of player behavior in the 4th closed beta test of ArcheAge. Our findings show that there are no apparent pandemic behavior changes, but some outliers were more likely to exhibit anti-social behavior (e.g., player killing). We also found that contrary to the reassuring adage that "Even if I knew the world would go to pieces tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree," players abandoned character progression, showing a drastic decrease in quest completion, leveling, and ability changes at the end of the beta test.

Citation: Virtual end-of-world game shows people aren't likely to resort to aggression (2017, March 14) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2017-03-virtual-end-of-world-game-people-resort.html>

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