



GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF END TIMES: NORDLAND LARP

The guiding principles for the Nordland chapter of End Times LARP are those core, fundamental elements and objectives that our game intentionally aims for throughout both its design and operation. This is in addition to the basic values shared by all EAO games (such as fostering a safe, fun, supportive and inclusive environment for players) and the universal traits of what makes a boffer LARP in general. Collectively, they help distinguish us from otherLARPs, to communicate to prospective players just what they can expect from our game.

THEME & FOCUS

The overarching story of the Nordland chapter focuses on how the approach of the world's prophesied ending affects the newly-established and relatively-isolated coastal hamlet of Neudorf. While players are able to engage in the game in a wide variety of ways (including economics, production, social maneuvering, politics, religion, exploration and, of course, combat), there is a relatively heavier focus on cooperative civilization building, as the budding settlement seeks not only to survive its first few years in this harsh wilderness with few resources or external aid, but also to expand and grow, perhaps even gaining a greater importance in the larger world. There is also a heavier focus placed on roleplaying and story-telling over other game elements.

CONTINUED GROWTH & FEEDBACK:

The one thing you can count on the most from End Times LARP is that it will always continue to grow and improve. We've put in a lot of work to get the game to where it is today, but there's no way that we're ever going to sit back and rest on our laurels. We are constantly working on improvements and additions to the game, from site facilities, to costuming and props, to rules, and a dozen other things between.

For rules in particular, we plan to continue with an annual update between seasons. Expect that in the first few years we are more likely to see larger rules changes to the core mechanics, as we playtest various ideas and seek to correct larger imbalances or issues, but as years go on, we'll be increasingly likely to see more fine-tuning and additions.

Such continued growth relies partially upon community feedback. As these guiding principles are the very identity of this game that we want our players to be able to count on, we won't consider altering one or more of them without very good cause and careful consideration. Beyond this though, we are extremely open to receiving constructive feedback and suggestions about any aspect of our game from our *active* community. This is *their* game, and we very much want to ensure that their voice is heard in it. So we will always give serious consideration to any feedback received, within the limitation of these guiding principles and current resource constraints (which are often lessened when the suggestion comes with an offer to help in its implementation). The expectation is that all feedback should be sent to the game owner, as ultimately it is their decision, in consultation with the relevant team managers and team heads, on how to respond to it.

LORE ACCURATE:

The setting for End Times LARP is primarily inspired by a particular grimdark fantasy world, which we actively seek to bring to life through our game. We always do our best to stick to the established lore of this setting, restricting game elements that might diverge significantly from it (e.g. plot devices used by our marshals, character backstories, etc.). We also place a high importance on adhering to the general and specific aesthetics of the setting, particularly in terms of props and costuming. While it's true that some of our community were die-hard fans of the setting long before joining the game, there is absolutely no expectation for new players to possess a similar wealth of knowledge before their first event. We are always more than happy to work with new players to help them build a character that fits within the setting, and to provide ongoing out-of-game support and resources, and in-game opportunities to learn more by exploring the world during events.



GRIMDARK:

This world mentioned above is one that is particularly grim and dark, and we also attempt to bring that element of the setting to life at our events. So, while there absolutely will be some light-hearted and even humorous elements, expect that players will more often encounter content (themes, storylines, language, props, displays, etc.) that may be dark, disturbing, and/or mature in nature. Good people will die, and evil may seem impossible to truly defeat as characters struggle to simply hold the line against its encroachment. Not that the delineation between good and evil is always so clear. Characters may often find their moral boundaries tested, particularly when forced to choose between the lesser of two evils. While there is absolutely still a place for valiant knights and compassionate souls, even they may find themselves contemplating some unthinkable act if put in a tight enough spot, and perhaps eventually take that first step towards damnation... with each step after it just a little easier. In fact, just how far the characters have fallen into the darkness of the world is loosely tracked by the Corruption game mechanic.

LOW FANTASY:

Fantastical elements certainly exist in the setting, but they're generally not as commonplace as might be seen in a high-fantasy world. For instance, while most citizens of the Empire generally acknowledge the existence of a variety of wondrous creatures (excluding the fabled ratmen, of course), the vast majority of common folk are sheltered from such things and will never even lay eyes on an elf, let alone the likes of daemons, undead, or forest spirits. Likewise, magic is an inherently dangerous and difficult force to master, steeped in hidden perils and generally looked upon by many with a great deal of suspicion and fear. As such, actual spellcasters are exceedingly uncommon and magic is a rare spectacle to witness, talked about in hushed whispers for months to come, rather than the first place most folk turn to for a solution to a problem. While the player characters are likely to experience the supernatural far more regularly than the average imperial citizen, expect that even they will more often encounter challenges that are more mundane or worldly in nature, especially during the earlier seasons.

HIGH STANDARDS FOR IMMERSION:

Since the players are not actually characters living in the game's setting, some amount of imagination is always a key component to any roleplaying game. However, End Times will always strive to provide as immersive an experience as possible. While we will still use physical descriptions of what players experience when necessary, whenever possible we prefer to allow players to actually see, hear and touch what their characters are experiencing. This includes asking that all players and cast remain in-character whenever in public spaces, and removing or concealing anachronistic elements from such spaces. We also take our physical-representation quite seriously, striving to provide props, costumes, structures, food, etc. that are as realistic and accurate to the setting as possible. Note that this is not done at the academic or re-enactor level, for us it is only important that an object or person look the part (e.g. obviously-modern clothing elements are prohibited, but we don't care that your white fabric contains 10% polyester).

REALISTIC:

Along similar lines, while some level of abstraction from reality is always necessary in any kind of fantasy roleplay experience, we do lean further towards the realism end of the spectrum, partially for the purposes of immersion. Much of this realism is intentionally built right into the rules set itself, from combat and healing to production of items. This realism can also be seen in the plot we run at events. There is almost always a purpose behind everything that happens at an event. Sometimes this may just be that such things are very common in the area and we're helping to establish the setting. But most encounters go far beyond that. The Plot team meticulously crafts their plans to tell a complex web of interconnected stories and we generally go to great lengths to ensure that whatever we do makes sense and is realistic both for the setting and ongoing plots.



DIVERSE CHARACTER BUILDS:

End Times: Nordland is intentionally designed to provide a vast array of character options, while still maintaining realism and lore-accuracy. While we do have a class system, it mostly only uses soft caps to guide character progression along the lines of one of the many established archetypes of the setting, while still allowing for a great deal of flexibility within those classes. So even when playing a non-spellcaster human (which account for the vast majority of individuals in Nordland), no two characters ever need to be even close to the same. Moreover, no build is designed to be clearly superior to another (something we seek to ensure through ongoing rebalancing of rules), as every skill and ability is intended to have its use, and will find value in game. The only problem we want players to experience is having too many options to choose from, creating tough choices about what to select.

REQUIRED CORE RULES, EXTENSIVE SUPPLEMENTARY RULES:

Admittedly, the full core rulebook for End Times: Nordland is not a quick read. To attain the above goals of realism and diverse character build options, the game requires a rules system that seems to be relatively more complex than we could otherwise get away with. However, its apparent size and complexity are also somewhat deceptive. The rules system is designed so that players only need to know the universal core game mechanics (safety rules, combat, effect calls, etc.), which are relatively short and straight-forward. Every other part of the core rulebook and its supplements are optional rules that players only need to know if it directly impacts their character. For instance, you only need to know how a skill, trait, spell, or piece of equipment works if your character themselves possesses it. When characters use these game elements in a way that can impact other players, the impact is always communicated through those universal core game mechanics that are understood by all. Additionally, brand new players can get away with not even knowing these before their first game, as we cover the most critical of the core rules during a brief new player orientation before each event. It is also worth noting that some of the more complex rules are designed only for the Nordland chapter of the game, whereas other chapters may significantly pare down sections of the rules that are not as important to that chapter (e.g. between-event actions are planned to be significantly more basic for the Norsca chapter, as that game focusses far more exclusively on what is accomplished at events).

IN-GAME COLLABORATION

End Times: Nordland is primarily geared towards character-vs-environment challenges, where the characters are typically united against external threats and obstacles. In fact, many larger plot objectives are intentionally designed with such collaboration in mind, requiring skills, abilities and resources from different characters working together, instead of any one character being able to do everything themselves. While character-vs-character conflicts are not expressly forbidden, these do not form the basis of the overall story for this game.

OUT-OF-GAME COMMUNITY

End Times aims to foster a tightknit community of cast and players, who are passionate about the game and just as supportive of each other out-of-game as our characters are in-game. We strongly encourage such positive, respectful and supportive interactions on all levels, from checking in with fellow players after difficult scenes, to providing thoughtful feedback to our volunteers. Our game is run entirely by our own community, who generously give of their time, talents and resources to help make this the game that it is. In particular, we ask that the community always trust in our volunteers, particularly the Plot team and Cast, who ultimately are there to ensure players have fun.



OBJECTIVE CRAFTING & PLAYER AGENCY:

Creating challenges for players to overcome and objectives for them to complete is a major component of the plot for any roleplaying game. We try to keep the following in mind when creating such objectives, and want our players to be aware of this on an out-of-game level to help understand decisions by the Plot team.

Immediate vs Long-Term: Characters will encounter a wide variety of different things to interact with at an event. Most of these will have some fairly obvious objectives that they are intended to complete in the moment (e.g. survive this giant spider attack and try to save as many sheep as possible), but that is far from the only option. Some objectives are intended to be completed over an extended period of time, from a portion of an event to multiple seasons (e.g. secure the sheep against future attacks, warn other characters and NPCs, track where the spiders are coming from, scout/investigate, gather the skills and resources necessary to deal with the spider infestation, actually clear out the infestation, deal with other fallout from the spider attacks, develop information/strategies/defences for use in similar situations in the future, compose an epic poem about the deeds of the heroic spider-slayers, etc.).

Collaboration: Many objectives are designed to be completed by a larger group of characters working collaboratively together (perhaps just needing sufficient numbers to assist or sharing information gathered from different sources, but sometimes specific abilities possessed by different characters are required to complete an objective.

Rewards & Consequences: Beyond the intrinsic opportunities to simply participate in roleplay or combat, objectives will generally also have some type of in-game reward for successful completion, along with potential consequences for failure (or choosing not to interact with the objective at all). For example, if the spider menace isn't stopped, they'll probably finish off the remainder of the sheep, which will greatly reduce available meat and wool and eventually impact the town's wellbeing and economy. But if characters are not careful about how they go about it, they may risk being poisoned or even killed. However, stopping the spiders at their source may provide characters with opportunities to loot past victims, perhaps harvest some of the spiders' venom, and earn the gratitude of a shepherd.

Multiple Paths to Success: When designing larger objectives, the Plot team will usually aim to provide players with multiple primary avenues towards completing those objectives, and will at least entertain alternative options that players come up with. Very few major objectives are designed to only be completed one way, though that is not to say that the different paths are identical to each other (these will often present different types of challenges, benefits and risks) or equally obvious to all players.

Difficulty of Objectives: How difficult objectives are intended to be will vary widely and may depend upon different factors. For example, difficulty is often, but not always, scaled to the potential rewards (i.e. the more characters stand to gain, the harder it is to achieve). And the grimdark nature of the game can make even success look bleak at times, where sacrifice is sometimes required just to hold the line, let alone achieve meaningful victory. However, no result is ever planned to be automatic. Plot will never intentionally design a challenge that they expect players to complete if it is reasonably impossible for them to do so. But they will also never design a challenge that is so easy as to not actually be a challenge at all and will rarely intervene to force a success when players don't succeed on their own. Plot will generally drop lots of clues and hints, but try not to spoon feed information to players if they miss something and may not even present a complete list of all potential solutions to them. Instead, characters are encouraged to go out and investigate a problem (using the mechanics available to them in game) and collaboratively determine the best course of action as a group. Characters are encouraged to be creative and smart in how they pursue objectives, while also acknowledging that not everything they try will work (sometimes even good ideas don't pan out). And many objectives can become either more or less difficult than initially intended based on how characters choose to approach them. For example, a player may come up with a particularly clever idea that Plot did not anticipate, allowing them to complete an objective by easier means. Conversely, characters who make critical errors in their planning or preparation may find an objective more challenging to complete (e.g. an individual finds the spider cave but enters it alone to clear out the spiders, or a large group goes into the spider cave but without any light sources, healers, anti-toxins, or weapons/skills that can pierce the spiders' chitinous hides that the characters have noticed resisting most of their attacks in previous encounters, etc.).



Player Agency and Meaningful Results: So, with every objective, there is always a possibility for characters to achieve any result at all along the success-failure spectrum, and the likelihood of achieving more successful results lies largely within their control. In other words, End Times is a strong proponent of player agency. The Plot team are here to collectively tell a story in collaboration with the players, not to tell a story to our players where the ending has already been written. We both want and expect players to explore and help shape the game world (i.e. the sandbox approach to plot design, not the railroad approach). So, we want player choices to truly matter. The Plot team may plan an event or even a season based on what they expect will happen, but will pivot mid-event if players end up going in a different direction than expected. What players choose to do has a meaningful outcome on the story. And the fact that characters can always succeed or fail at an objective, makes those rewards for success and consequences of failure actually meaningful as well. They can own their accomplishments, taking pride in them, instead of knowing they were just a railroaded outcome that Plot was always going to do regardless of player actions.

Non-Objective Encounters: At the same time that character-driven plot is occurring, there are also other stories happening in both the local area and world at large, as not everything revolves around the characters. Just because some of this might be within the power of characters to impact, does not mean that it is necessarily intended as an objective for them to deal with (and thus there are no consequences for them not doing so). Instead, it may serve some other purpose such as exposition, plot development, world/lore building, setting a scene, advanced warning of a future challenge, etc. And some of what characters encounter will simply not be within their power to meaningfully impact, or at least not yet. While we are likely to ensure that a disproportional amount of what characters encounter is 'level-appropriate', particularly in combat, we do not completely restrict what is visible of this larger world to those elements that are completely within the ability of characters to immediately control without extreme risk.

SLOW BURN PROGRESSION:

The Nordland game is designed to track the progress of the hamlet of Neudorf, as it grows from its humble beginnings as a patch of dirt, to perhaps one day a chartered free town of great significance. So too can characters expect to slowly grow in power and influence, as the plot also grows with the town, offering level-appropriate challenges at each step. During the first few seasons, plot is likely to revolve nearly exclusively around local events, where these relatively low-level characters can more realistically play important roles and have meaningful impact in such an isolated, small-town environment, given that every character's skills are vital contributions to the survival and early prosperity of that fledgling community. And one day the game will eventually progress to the point where some characters have become mighty heroes with great renown and influence within certain circles, and as such are able to take more pivotal roles in larger world-spanning plots, such as battling against armies and terrifying monsters in a great storm of chaos that sweeps over the lands and threatens to wipe the very world from existence. But it is a long, winding road between those two points, and this progression is one that is designed to occur very slowly, over the course of many years. There is a long and epic story to tell here, and we don't want to rush it by pushing the narrative ahead too quickly and denying characters the chance to engage in those early chapters of the game, building as much as possible themselves so that they can turn to future players years from now and tell them how this town was built, as they are the ones who built it. So, everything in the game is expected to grow slowly with the story, from the characters themselves, the prosperity of their town, the challenges they face and the enemies that threaten them, to economics, resource availability, scope of the world they can engage with, etc. We're starting at zero, but there's no real limit to how far we can go. When making characters and playing their first few events, it is important for players to remember this. They are not the great heroes yet, but their origin story is just as important as the great deeds they will one day perform. Everything starts somewhere, and this is where the End Times begin...

