



## Player Handbook

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## Introduction

Vassal is a live action roleplaying game (LARP) set in a fictitious setting called “The Known World” which strongly resembles Europe and Asia during the late 14th, 15th, and early 16th centuries. It is a game of people, be they monarchs, knights, merchants, or farmers, and their lives, hopes, and struggles.



Vassal is a consent based LARP. You are in control of your experience and nothing can happen to your character without your consent. The word consent will appear many times within this Handbook. Familiarize yourself with its meaning.

Consent: “Permission for something to happen or agreement to do something.”

Our primary objective is to provide an immersive, consistent historical aesthetic within the framework of a fantasy landscape that facilitates wide-range storytelling. While Vassal consists of elements such as politics and warfare, it is never intended to be a game which is “won” by any group or individual.

All of the events which take place in Vassal are weaved together to create a living, breathing world, and that continuation of story is a core element of the player experience.



## Rule Zero

In Vassal, the most important rule is what we refer to as “the Spirit of the Game,” or more commonly, “Rule Zero.” While Vassal contains inherently competitive elements be they in the political arenas or on the fields of battle, it is never the intent for any individual or group to “win” the game. A crucial piece of Vassal’s existence is the respect for what the game is intended to be and that all players play the game in a way which upholds that vision.

While the following rules seek to provide framework and clarification for how to play Vassal, any loopholes or absence within the rules which are exploited may be rejected at any time and place by Vassal Leadership.

## Code of Conduct

1. Harassment is any behavior that is incessant, derogatory and directed specifically at a player or group. Players may not harass, threaten, embarrass, or do anything to another player that is unwanted. This includes making insulting, offensive, or abusive comments about players, repeatedly making unwanted contact, and making derogatory/hateful comments that are sexual, racial, religious, or related to gender, disabilities or creed. Harassment is an act that ignores the boundaries of consent. There is zero tolerance for harassment.
2. The Vassal community prioritizes player safety above all. If any member of the community is found to be on the ban list of another LfRP community/game, those bans will carry over to Vassal immediately. If any member of the community is found in violation of this, they will be banned from Vassal events. If said bans are lifted, those bans may be reviewed for continuance or termination, as seen fit by Vassal Leadership.
3. Players may not promote or distribute content that is illegal or promote or encourage any illegal activity.
4. While Vassal occurs within a fantasy setting, real world laws and regulations apply at all Vassal events. If something is illegal within the jurisdiction of where a Vassal event is being held, such items in question are illegal within Vassal events. If State or Federal laws are found to be in violation, such actions may result in contacting law enforcement. Such behavior would also incur a ban from Vassal.

## Consent and Hand Symbols

Consent is a key element of Vassal and is present throughout the community and a majority of the game's features. Due to the nature of roleplaying, it is important that all participants feel safe and comfortable with the activity that is occurring at any point during the game.

For that purpose, Vassal operates with a system of hand symbols so that at any moment, a player can voice their concern or respond to a check-in without breaking the immersion of a scene.

ATTENTION : \*All symbols can be used to communicate a player's consent level and well being without a Check-In being initiated by another player. All rules apply.\*

### The Check-In System

This is an introduction to Hand Symbols and their visual & verbal components that will be used while participating in roleplay at Vassal LfRP.

The following is a list of what these symbols look like and how they are applied. All symbols are displayed at chest level. The corresponding colors associated with each Hand Symbol can be said aloud when Hand Symbols cannot be used or for accessibility reasons.



Check-In / Green: At any time a player can initiate a Check-In using the "Thumbs up" symbol or saying "Green". This is a method to check the well-being, consent or safety of anyone at the event.

### Responses to a Check-in: Visual & Verbal



"Thumbs up" / Green: This means "I am ok." Roleplay may continue. This does not mean "anything goes" or "Increase intensity."



"Level hand" / Yellow: This means "I don't know." or "I am not sure." Direct roleplay must stop. This means a player can not tell if they feel good or bad. This should be taken as a "Thumbs down/Red." Ask them if they would like to be escorted to an Out-of-game area and disengage from roleplay.



"Thumbs down" / Red: This means "I am not ok." or "I need help." Direct roleplay must stop. This can be for any reason, explanation not required. Ask them if they would like to be escorted to an Out-of-game area and disengage from roleplay.

## Negotiation Hand Symbols

It is commonplace within the game that roleplay may initiate on a whim. While this is acceptable, passerbys may not be consenting individuals. To help aid in communication between these players, and to not risk the immersion of roleplay, the following “negotiation” symbols may be used.



“Out of Character”: This symbol initiates a conversation or question regarding anything out-of-character/out-of-game. When approached with this symbol, it must be returned to continue contact. The symbol must be held until out-of-character/out-of-game communication ends. If someone does not return the “Out of Character” Symbol, find nearby Vassal Leadership and they will assist you if need be. *\*fist on forehead, palm facing out\**



“Disengage”: This symbol is used by players to avoid or leave roleplay which they do not consent to or do not wish to be a part of. It is also and most primarily used as the means by which players may “pass through” a scene without interrupting. Players who use the “disengage” symbol will not be acknowledged or addressed and may not be treated as if they were present for a scene in which they disengaged from. *\*Shielding eyes from sun or view\**

## Out-of-Game Areas and Aftercare

At every Vassal event there will be designated Out-of-Game (OOG) and aftercare areas. These locations are off limits to any active roleplayers. OOG areas are intended to be free of overstimulation and to be a place to go for those who must exit roleplay for any reason. Each area will be clearly marked and announced before every Vassal Event.

Aftercare areas are similar in nature, but intended to provide a space for players to recuperate after any emotionally, mentally, or physically taxing incidents. The following are examples of why a player may utilize an aftercare area:

Overstimulation  
Social/roleplay burnout  
Feeling mentally or physically unwell  
Feeling unsafe

Aftercare areas will be stocked with water and snacks. If for any reason additional aftercare areas are required, Leadership will add them. The etiquette of an aftercare area is similar to a library; do not invade anyone’s mental or personal space, no talking, and personal phones or electronic devices must be on silent.

A follow up by Leadership toward those who utilize aftercare areas will take place with the consent of those players, to assess their safety and make adjustments to improve the Vassal experience.



## Roleplay

Roleplay falls into two categories: Negotiated scenes and Improv scenes. A “scene” is any roleplay interaction between players. Negotiated scenes are arranged prior to occurring by the consenting, involved parties, whereas Improv scenes are the naturally occurring, unnegotiated roleplay that makes up much of Vassal gameplay.

1. Negotiated Scene *Ex: Player A and Player B determine on their own (outside of the game, early in an event, etc.) to have their characters duel. They may pre-determine a victor/loser to their duel, character deaths, or resolve to have their outcome be left to chance.*

*\*The scene is negotiated between the players.\**

2. Improv Scene *Ex: Player A bumps into Player B at the tavern. They decide to sit down together, play dice, and discuss the current events of The Known World.*

*\*The scene is not negotiated between the players.\**

3. It is certainly possible that scenes will overlap one another and occur at the same time and place. Any number of scenes can be occurring at once.

*Ex: Lord Henry is hosting a feast, which is itself a negotiated scene. During the feast, Players A and B may be entering into their own negotiated scene where they are brokering a trade deal. Players C and D are engaged in an improv scene where they have met for the first time.*

*Player C may then decide to interrupt A and B's negotiated scene. The arrival of Player C need not change what was negotiated.*

*\*This will happen at every Vassal Event\**

## Play to Lift

“Play to lift,” is a common saying throughout the LARP community, and at Vassal, we treat that philosophy with utmost importance. While everyone wants to enjoy their own scenes the way they would like to, no one roleplays alone, and we only create these memorable scenes by helping out one another. It is important to remember that when you “Play to Lift” you may create the highlight of someone else's experience.

## Combat Strike Zones

Combat in Vassal is meant to provide an immersive experience, with the primary goal of recreating medieval combat as closely as possible while still adhering to an “easy to play” rule set. While combat is not staged, theatrical, or “lightest touch,” it also is not meant to be performed with excessive force. Strikes should be delivered with purpose, but not with so much power as to cause pain or injury.



1. Strike zones are viewed as the torso, the crown of the head, the arms (including hands) and the legs.
2. All weapons regardless of their physical properties (length/size, sharp/blunt, etc.) or the method in which they are used to strike (swing/thrust/pierce/slash) deal 1 wounding strike upon valid contact.
3. Even in the case of armor and helmets, strikes to the neck, face or groin are never permitted and are considered invalid strike zones.
4. If a limb is dealt a wounding strike, it is rendered useless. Wounded arms must be held limp at one's side (if a wounded arm is positioned in front of the torso and is struck, the strike is assumed to hit the torso. Wounded limbs are not shields.)
5. Wounded legs may not be used to move, unless assisted by another player. Players should remain standing on wounded legs, and use them as a pivot point. There is no “knee walking” for wounded legs, as commonly seen in other LfRPs.
6. A casualty occurs when a wounding strike is delivered to the crown of the head, torso, or by the loss of any two limbs.



## Strike Zones & Armor Zones

There are 6 strike zones in total. These include: the crown of the head, the torso, the arms (including hands) and the legs.

Red - Casualty = 1 wounding strike.

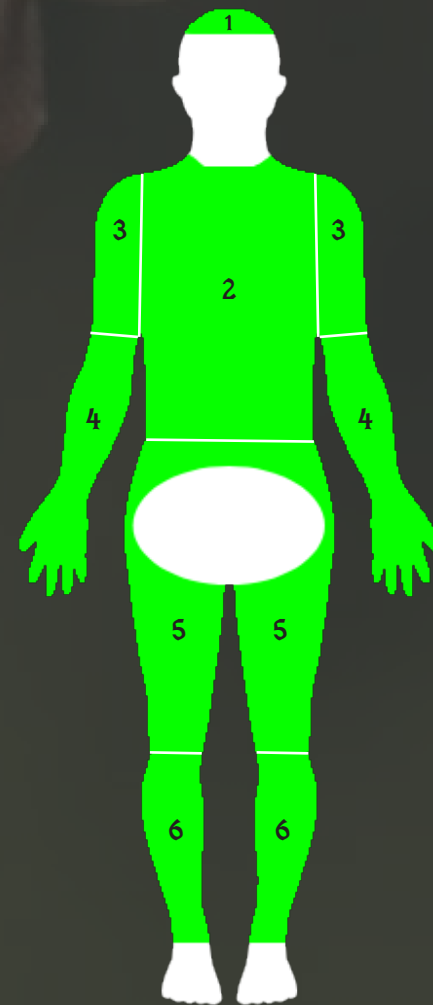
Yellow - Casualty = 1 wounding strike on any 2 limbs.

White - Invalid strike zones.



There are 10 armor zones. These are: (1) the crown of the head, (2) the torso, (3) upper arms, (4) lower arms (including hands), (5) upper legs and (6) lower legs.

The tier of armor that is worn in each zone will determine how many armor points that zone has.



## Armor Rules

Armor in Vassal operates within 3 tiers: light, medium, and heavy. While any damage to an unprotected zone incurs a wounding strike, armor provides protection which will be referred to as armor Points or AP.

1. Light armor consists of leather, gambesons, or any appropriately layered cloth armor, and provides 1 armor Point per piece/strike zone covered.

2. Medium armor consists of maille ("chain mail") and provides 2 armor Points per piece/strike zone covered.

3. Heavy armor consists of plate (solid, contiguous, or overlapping) and provides 3 armor Points per piece/strike zone covered.

4. When armor is struck, it loses 1 armor point. When the armor points are spent, that armor no longer provides protection for the strike zone it protects. Any following damage done to that area is now treated as if no protection is being provided and a wounding strike will occur.

*Ex: Player A is wearing a metal breastplate and is hit 4 times upon it by Player B. The first 3 hits protect Player A but now all 3 armor points the breastplate provides are spent. The 4th hit is a wounding strike to Player A's torso which results in a casualty.*

5. While armor can be layered for comfort, "real life" protection, and historical continuity, the layering of armor does not provide additional armor point protection to a strike zone. The highest tier armor over a strike zone takes priority as the protection given.

*Ex: Player A is wearing a metal breastplate over a gambeson and is hit 4 times upon it by Player B. As per the previous example, The first 3 hits protect Player A but spend all 3 armor points the breastplate provides. The 4th hit is a wounding strike to Player A's torso resulting in a casualty. Player A is not granted a fourth armor point from their gambeson which is worn underneath the breastplate.*

*However, Player B may choose to "bypass" the breastplate and strike Player A upon the gambeson in an exposed place on the torso where the breastplate does not protect. The gambeson's 1 armor point is spent and if player B delivers another strike to the gambeson-covered torso, the strike results in a casualty.*

6. In cases of light tier (*Ex: Gambeson*) and Medium tier (*Ex: Maille*) armors that cover multiple armor zones, they will operate as independant armor per zone they inhabit.

*Ex: The gambeson covers the torso, upper arms, lower arms and upper legs. Each armor zone would have 1 armor point each.*



## Combat During Roleplay

In Vassal, combat may occur during roleplay. However, not every player in Vassal wants to engage in combat, either at that moment or indefinitely. When initiating combat during roleplay, you must first confirm that the other player(s) have given their consent. **ATTENTION:** You will never strike anyone who has not given you consent to do so.

When a player seeks to initiate combat during roleplay, they will brandish their weapon. (*“Brandish” is any form of un-sheathing, equipping or holding a weapon in a manner that gives off a stance of aggression.*)

### Responses

1. Player(s) brandish their weapon in response. They give their consent, combat may commence.
2. Player(s) does not brandish their weapon, hence they do not give their consent to engage in combat. Combat does not commence, un-brandish your weapon and disengage.

*\*Players may use any responses from the Ok check-in system as listed on pg 5 or any Negotiation symbols as listed on pg 6 of this handbook.\**

*Ex: Player A brandishes their weapon, Player B gives the “disengage” symbol and walks right by Player A. Player A finds someone else to roleplay with.*

*Ex: Player A brandishes their weapon, Player B gives the “thumbs down” hand symbol, Player A offers to escort Player B to “OOG” area.*

3. Player(s) does not brandish their weapon but responds with roleplay instead, a “thumbs up” symbol, or “Green.” In this condition you still may not strike them, but they wish to engage in roleplay of some kind.

*Ex: Player A brandishes their weapon, Player B gives a “thumbs up.” Roleplay continues, Player B begins to talk Player A down or has a dialog with them.*

Recap: You may never strike anyone in Vassal during Roleplay unless they respond by brandishing their own weapon.

### *\*Afterthoughts\**

Take into consideration why or how often you initiate combat during roleplay. Just as it is in real life, initiating combat in Vassal may have repercussions for your character. Whether it be a negative impact on your character’s reputation or if you brandish your weapon and are defeated, you may incur a “recovery” penalty which will put your character in a “time-out” of sorts while they recover from their wounds. Overusing this roleplay mechanic is not recommended.

# Factions and Warfare

Ø1/Ø2

In Vassal, for players to wage war they must form a faction and engage in pitched battle with another faction. However, for pitched battles to occur, conditions must be met which represent the real life factors of organizing and supporting an army on campaign.

War was a combined effort from peoples of various walks of life and had many moving pieces. While simplified for gameplay purposes, Vassal intends to recreate this in a way which facilitates further mutual roleplay between characters of different backgrounds and professions.

## forming a faction

Factions are formed in Vassal when Military and Mercantile are combined in a united campaign effort. Leaders for both military and mercantile are characters of considerable social and/or economic status befitting their stations. Factions can change between (or during) conflicts and are not necessarily a “set-in-stone” method of organization; it is simply what is required for the road ahead.

### Military

fi military leader must enlist at least 4 other players (for a total of 5, including the leader) to form a Battalion.

### Mercantile

fi mercantile leader must hire at least 1 employee, (clerk, guard, etc) to form an Operating Business.

Once a Battalion and Operating Business have agreed to unite, they officially form a fraction. The faction now has the agency to negotiate consensual conflict with other factions.

fis Battalions are eligible for battle, but cannot initiate, they can be allowed to fight in a conflict if taken under service by one of the participating factions. This is how in-game mercenaries would operate.



# Factions and Warfare

02/02

## Participation and Classification

For the sake of organization, participating players must be listed as either a Military or Mercantile component. However, this does not limit their gameplay opportunities.

*Ex: Player f is counted among the hired employees of a Mercantile Leader but, this does not disqualify them from participating in a battle. They may participate, but Player f simply cannot be counted among the players listed for a Battalion or another Operating Business.*

## Pitched Battle and Warfare

When two factions agree to conditions, Pitched Battles may then occur after approval by Vassal Leadership. While war in its nature is often competitive, Vassal uses battle to tell a story. Players may certainly feel engaged and motivated by combat, but the goal is never to “win the game” and thus, conditions for the war (victory and defeat conditions for both sides) must be agreed upon prior. The faction which war is being declared upon always has the option to refuse the proposed conflict.

Conflict is always a negotiated, consensual event between factions. This includes the following:

- Whether or not the conflict takes place at all.
- The conditions of victory and defeat for factions involved (changing of borders, transfer of titles and land, etc.)
- What types of battles will occur, when and why.
- Choosing a battle scenario (such as limited resurrection battles, “king” or “leader” battles, capture the flag, etc.)

Once conditions are agreed upon by the participating factions, all wars in Vassal must be proposed to Vassal Leadership for approval. This approval can take place out of game or during gameplay; so long as conditions are reviewed and approved by Vassal leadership.

## Combat During Pitched Battles

Pitched Battles are large-scale affairs which take time and preparation. Due to their nature, Pitched Battles largely differ from combat during roleplay in terms of consent. There is no rule regarding the brandishing of weapons to determine eligibility to fight. A player's presence upon the battlefield is their confirmation of consent to participate in Pitched Battles.

A player may still excuse themselves from battle for any reason. With the use of appropriate hand symbols, the player may exit the battle at any time and for any reason.

During Pitched Battles, in whatever form they may take (timed battles, resurrection-based, etc.), it should be noted that no player characters are killed when defeated. While players may still act as their characters to any capacity during combat, casualties are more or less assumed to be the many faceless soldiers present within the story. Player deaths may occur if decided upon by a player themselves, but it is never the standard. Vassal is a consent-based LfRP and nothing can happen to your character without your consent.



While Pitched Battles are a more competitive avenue for combat, Rule Zero and "Play to Lift" are still prioritized on the battlefield. It is important to remember that even during war, you are fighting as a way to tell a story and immerse yourself in an experience. Ensure your opponents are given the same opportunities.





## Credits

Vassal LARP LLC.

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