



VASSAL

Player Handbook

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
~	
Rule Zero / Code of Conduct	4
~	
Play to Lift / Roleplay	5
~	
Consent and Hand Symbols	6
~	
Negotiation Symbols / Out-of-Game and fiftercare	7
~	
Initiating Combat	8
~	
Combat Rules	9
~	
Strike Zones / armor Zones	10
~	
armor Rules	11
~	
Prohibited fictions during Combat	12
~	
factions	13
~	
Pitched Battle	14
~	
Credits	15

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. Rule Zero is a mentality that puts focus on a fun, safe and fulfilling experience as the highest priority, that is collectively shared and nurtured by the community. It is never the intent for any individual or group to “win the game.” The core of Vassal’s existence is the respect for Rule Zero and that all players participate in a way which upholds that vision.

While the following rules seek to provide framework and clarification for how to participate in Vassal, any loopholes or absence within the rules which are exploited may be rejected at any time and place in honor of Rule Zero, 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.

Play to Lift

“Playing to Lift” is a common mentality throughout the LfRP community, and at Vassal, we treat the philosophy of Play to Lift with great importance. While everyone wants to enjoy their own scenes the way they would like to, no one roleplays alone, and we seek create these memorable scenes by helping out one another. It is important to remember that when we Play to Lift we create an inclusive environment and can become the highlight of someone else’s 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 scenes 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) Combination Scene - 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 join A and B’s negotiated scene. The arrival of Player C need not change what was negotiated.

This will happen to some degree at every Vassal Event

It is important to note that with the complex nature of roleplay, situations may arise that clash with your expectations of a scene. It is very important that we allow ourselves to be as fluid as possible as the environment will potentially continue to change around us as a scene progresses. This may cause frustration or disappointment that a scene did not go as planned. With Rule Zero and Play to Lift in mind, remember that the core of the Vassal experience is to have fun in an environment of collaborative story telling.

Consent and Hand Symbols

Understanding consent is the core element of Vassal. Due to the nature of roleplaying, it is important that all participants have access to tools that aid in clear communication and provide them with the ability to identify and verify when consent is given and when it is not.

To achieve this, Vassal operates with a system of Hand Symbols. Any player may voice their concern, respond to a check-in, clarify any confusion, etc. without breaking the immersion of a scene.

ATTENTION : The use of Hand Symbols are highly encouraged in any moment of confusion where clarification is needed!

All Hand 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 LARP.

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



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 cannot 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 and in some situations, further communication may be needed. Below are additional Hand Symbols that are useful for navigating complex roleplay scenes.



“Out of Character” *Fist on forehead, palm facing out*: Used to initiate 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.



“Disengage” *Shielding eyes from sun or view*: Used to avoid or leave roleplay that you do not wish to participate in. It may also be used as a means to “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.

Out-of-Game Areas and Aftercare

fit 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 a place to go for those who wish to exit roleplay for any reason. Each area will be clearly marked and announced before every Vassal Event.

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

Overstimulation
Social/roleplay burnout
feeling mentally, emotionally or physically unwell
feeling unsafe
Bleed-in/out

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.

fit 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.

Initiating Combat

Not every player in Vassal wants to engage in Combat. When Initiating Combat, you must first confirm that the other player(s) have given their consent. ATTENTION: You may never strike anyone who has not given you consent to do so. Below outlines how to identify consent and the appropriate way to initiate combat.

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

Responses

(1) Player(s) brandish their weapon in response. This confirms consent for physical contact, 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 Check-in System as listed on pg 6 or any Negotiation symbols as listed on pg 7 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. Player A finds someone else to roleplay with.

(3) Player(s) does not brandish their weapon but responds with the “thumbs up” Hand Symbol, or says “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 without combat.

Recap: You may never strike anyone in Vassal without clearly observing them giving consent via brandishing a weapon or via giving their consent by participating in Pitched Battles.(see pg 14)

Afterthoughts

Take into consideration why or how often you initiate combat. Just as it is in real life, initiating combat in Vassal may have repercussions for your character depending on the situation. Whether it is a character dispute or a friendly duel, the outcomes may be drastically different. It is possible that everything that occurs during roleplay will be remembered and referenced later.

Combat Rules

Combat in Vassal is meant to provide an immersive roleplay experience, with the primary goal of recreating the look of medieval combat while still adhering to an “easy to play” rule set. Participation in Vassal Combat is another form of Roleplay which can be Negotiated or Improv (see pg 5) All strikes are to be delivered via “Lightest Touch” calibration with calculation, control and player safety in mind.

(1) Strike zones include: the torso, the crown of the head, the arms (including hands) and the legs. Strikes to the crown of the head are to be performed with extra consideration and care for player safety.

(2) Strikes to the neck, face, groin and feet are prohibited and are considered Invalid Strike Zones.

(3) 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 contact with an unarmored Strike Zone. If armor is worn, take 1 armor Point from armor per strike.

(4) If a limb is dealt a Wounding Strike, it is rendered useless 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.

Combat Term Review

- Lightest Touch : A hit that uses just enough force for the recipient to feel the impact, but not hard enough to cause discomfort.
- Strike Zone : A valid target during combat.
- Invalid Strike Zone : An invalid target during combat.
- Wounding Strike : When a Strike Zone has been hit without armor present.
- Casualty : When the correct amount of Wounding Strikes occur.
- Crown of the head : The very top of the head.

Strike Zones

(fig. 1)

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

Red : The crown of the head and torso
Casualty = 1 wounding strike.

Yellow : The arms including the hands and legs.
Casualty = 1 wounding strike on any 2 limbs.

White - Invalid strike zones.
The neck, face, groin and feet.



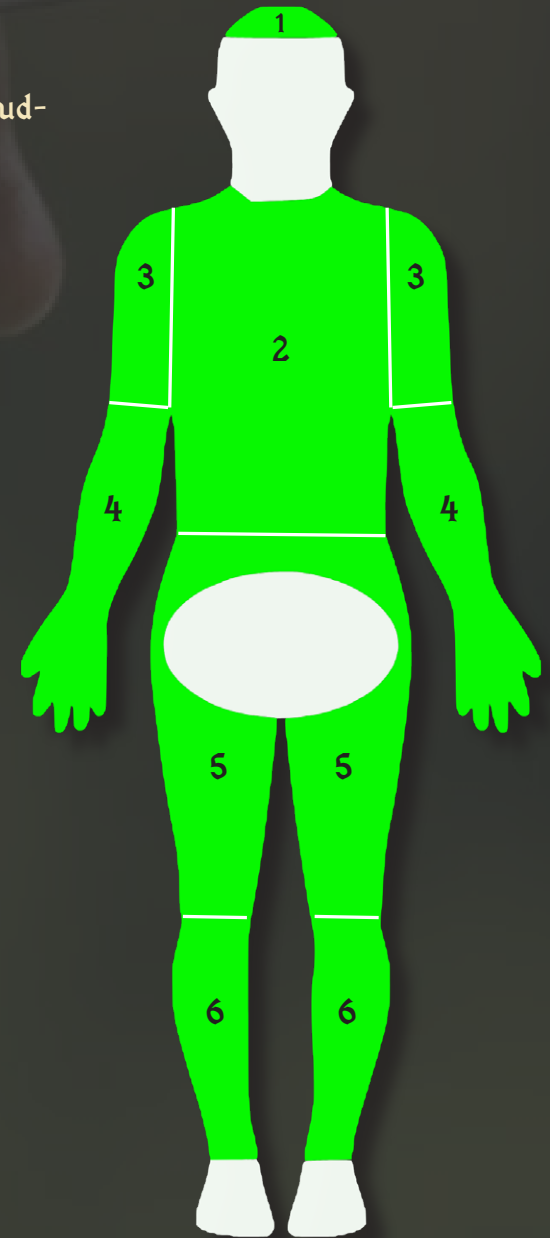
Strike Zones fig. 1

Armor Zones

(fig. 2)

There are 10 Armor Zones in total that are divided into 6 types.

- (1) Crown of the head
- (2) The torso
- (3) Upper arms
- (4) Lower arms (including hands)
- (5) Upper legs
- (6) Lower legs.



armor Zones fig. 2

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.

Armor Tiers

- Light armor consists of leather, gambesons, or any appropriately layered cloth armor, and provides 1 armor Point per piece/Strike Zone covered.
- Medium armor consists of maille ("chain mail") and provides 2 armor Points per piece/Strike Zone covered.
- Heavy armor consists of plate (solid, contiguous, or overlapping) and provides 3 armor Points per piece/Strike Zone covered.

Armor Rules

(1) 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 strike 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 provided are spent. The 4th hit is a Wounding Strike to Player A's torso which results in a Casualty.

(2) While armor can be layered for comfort, "real life" protection, and historical continuity, only the top most layer determines what armor Point protection is granted to a Strike Zone. The outer most 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 provided. 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 of Player A, this is a Wounding Strike that results in a Casualty.

(3) In cases of light tier (Ex: Gambeson) and Medium tier (Ex: Maille) armors that cover multiple armor zones, they will operate as independent 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.

Prohibited fictions during Combat

Below is a list of Prohibited fictions during Combat that should NOC be done at any time. Players may not negotiate beyond what has been outlined as acceptable for Vassal combat. This list exists to remove confusion and also boldly state that under no circumstances are these actions tolerated. Prohibited fictions during Combat include:

- (1) Never strike anyone who has not given you consent to do so. If you are in a situation where you are unsure: refrain, use appropriate Hand Symbols or reread the rules.
- (2) No grappling. This includes people, weapons, shields or anything in another players possession.
- (3) Shields are not to be used as a weapon. You may not “shield bash”, throw or strike with a shield. A shield is a defensive tool and exists in Vassal only to block weapons.
- (4) No punching, kicking, or body to body contact. This includes but is not limited to: shield kicking, hip checking, tripping, shouldering, etc.
- (5) No feinting to Invalid Strike Zones or feinting with other Prohibited fictions. Attempts to manipulate or stun a player in this way is a violation of safety and Rule Zero.
- (6) No arguing or competitive shot calling is allowed. Vassal Combat is not a competitive space. No outcome of combat scenarios will negatively affect a player so it's important to note that nothing will be lost or no punishment will be a result of combat that has not already been agreed upon. There is no point for this and taking combat too seriously or competitively is not appropriate.
- (7) No combat in unsafe areas. If combat moves into an unsafe area (*Ex: dangerous terrain, near a tree or near any non combat approved area*) combat must stop and players should move back to where it is safe to continue.

Factions

In order for players to participate in a Pitched Battle they must form a faction. In order for a faction to form, in-game conditions must be met which represent the real life factors of organizing and supporting an army on campaign. This has been simplified for gameplay purposes. The formation of factions serve to facilitate roleplay between many characters of different backgrounds and professions that are collectively in pursuit of larger ambitions.

forming a faction

Factions are formed in Vassal when Military and Mercantile groups are combined in a united effort. Leaders for both military and Mercantile groups are characters of considerable social and/or economic status befitting their stations. Below shows the requirements that both groups must meet before pursuing the path of forming a faction.

Military (Battalion)

Hire at least 4 combat related players.
(for a total of 5 as a minimum, including the leader)

Mercantile (Operating Business)

Hire at least 1 player as an employee.
(clerk, guard, etc).

Once a Battalion and Operating Business have agreed to unite, they officially form a faction. The faction now has the agency to negotiate Pitched Battles with other factions . factions can change members between (or during) conflicts or disband and are not permanent method of organization; it is simply what is required for players participate in Pitched Battles.

Participation and Classification

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

Ex: Player \bar{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 \bar{f} simply cannot be counted among the players listed for a Battalion or another Operating Business. In the reverse, a player that is hired by a Military player can pursue a business for story or roleplay purposes, but cannot be hired as the minimum employee needed to form an Operating Business.

Pitched Battle

A Pitched Battle is an extension of roleplay that serves to simulate a planned battle event. Only players who have met the requirements of forming a faction may participate (see pg 13). Once a Pitched Battle begins, it has been established that all participants on the field of battle have given their consent to engage in combat, therefore acknowledgement of Initiating Combat (see pg 8) is not necessary. A player may excuse themselves from a Pitched Battle for any reason. “Rule Zero” and “Play to Lift” are present during the entire Vassal experience, including on the battlefield.

Initiating and Negotiating a Pitched Battle

When two or more factions decide that they would like to pursue a conflict, a Pitched Battle may occur. The outcome of the Pitched Battle must then be negotiated and agreed upon. Below are examples of key details that would be discussed during negotiation.

- Whether or not the conflict takes place at all. All factions must consent to be involved.
- 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 , the proposed conflict would then be submitted 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.

Results

When a Pitched Battle is concluded, the result of the battle will decide which pre-determined outcome becomes canon in the Known World. 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.

Vassal is a consent-based LARP and nothing can happen to your character without your consent.



Credits

Vassal LfRP LLC.

Revised 2024

Written by: Rob Nugent and Tom Sturniolo

Layout by: Tom Sturniolo

Vassal Leadership: Nick Brown, Mike Drysch, Chris Hess, Rob Nugent, and Tom Sturniolo

Photography by Lore Keeper

