



The Ten Commandments of Directing a LARP

written by

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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF DIRECTING A LARP

- 1) **NEVER ALTER ANOTHER GM'S DECISION.** No matter how wrong he was, don't cancel out his action, "rewind time", etc. If it's *_got_* to be fixed, do so by patching things up after the fact, not changing reality. (If he killed a critical character, give another character the chance to resurrect him, don't just say he wasn't killed in the first place.) Other players may already have taken action based on the earlier, erroneous decision.
- 2) **ACT AS ENABLERS, NOT REFEREES.** I've see lots of directors plan to thwart some plan of the players that would ruin the way the game is "supposed" to go. The players need to be given as much freedom as possible. The only reason that a GM should hinder a player is because the action he or



she wants to take would harm a large number of other players (in which case you should still let the player do it, but make it hard, and give the other players a chance to stop it).

- **3) NEVER GIVE A PLAYER ABSOLUTE POWER OVER ANOTHER PLAYER.** If I, as the King of England, can fire my Prime Minister at will, then she (my minister) is powerless. Have one player wield power over another is good -- just not absolute power. Best: have each player hold something over the other. Example: the King could fire the P.M., but the P.M. is the mother of the girl the King wants to marry.
- **4) DON'T LET THE PLAYERS LINE UP.** If they're waiting in line to talk to you, then you're a bottleneck, hindering the game. Either get another GM to help you, or stop hamming it up so much -- you're a GM after all, not a player.
- **5) NEVER LET THE PLAYERS LET YOU MAKE THEIR DECISIONS FOR THEM.** Many players will come to you and ask something like, "What do the elders of my tribe say about this?" or "I do a Divination. What does Yelm signify?" I once had a game in which the Nazi leader kept sending telegrams to Berlin to ask what to do. In reply, I sent him extremely nasty replies to the effect of, "You're the man on the spot, you decide. But if you decide wrong, it's the Russian front for you, pal." Thus I was able to put pressure on without actually giving him a clue as to what his best action was. For one thing, I had no idea what his best action was -- I'm only a GM.
- **6) NEVER HELP A PLAYER UNASKED.** In one game, Lawrence Schick (playing Sherlock Holmes) walked into a room and there on the desk was the McGuffin he had been looking for. At the same time Mrs. Moriarty (his archfoe) also stepped into the room. Sherlock didn't want Moriarty to know that he wanted that McGuffin, so he was acting very nonchalant, waiting for Moriarty to leave before he picked up the McGuffin and snuck



out. But a helpful GM walked into the room, saw the McGuffin, saw Sherlock, picked it up and handed it to him, saying as she did so, "Here's those papers you need. Take them." *argh* So of course Sherlock had to pretend he didn't know what she was talking about, which didn't fool Moriarty ... You get the picture. Don't do this.

- 7) **EVERY PLAYER IS THE HERO OF THE STORY.** There aren't "critical characters" and "supporting characters". Everyone is the star. You don't have to be a big important king to be an essential character -- Aragorn and Theoden aren't the heroes of Lord of the Rings -- Frodo and Sam are. Remember that when you're dealing with players. It's all too easy (*sigh*) to think that when Shah of Iran strides up that his problems are more important than those of Leprous Beggar. They're not, of course, and he has to wait in line like anyone else. Of course, if Beggar wants to score points with the Shah by letting him go first, that's Beggar's business.

This is an especially hard rule to remember, because the players try to violate it all the time. You'll be helping someone with a combat (say), and suddenly the King will rush up and demand your assistance, expecting instant acquiescence. Don't fall prey to your natural impulse.

- 8) **BE FLEXIBLE.** The players are going to think of things that never in a million years would have occurred to you. When this happens, don't forbid them -- try to assist them. But do try to think out some of the ramifications first. When they come to you with some brilliant idea, one useful trick is to figure out some reason why it can't be done right this minute. Then, after they've left and before they return, you try to think out the problem, consulting another GM.

Frex, if a high priest comes to you and says that he wants to order all the sun priests to cast a flame spell to set the whole town ablaze, you can say that it's too cloudy right now, or that it will take some time to gather the priests together. This gives you a few minutes of breathing time to figure out the possibilities. Hell, maybe it would be a good thing to burn down the town.

- 9) **BE AVAILABLE.** Nothing's worse than needing a GM and not being able to find one. The most common reason for this occurrence is that something really neat's happening in the next room and you want to see it, so you leave your post. If you absolutely, positively, have to see the cool



thing happening nearby, get another GM to take your spot, or stand somewhere that you're still visible from your normal station.

- **10) TO LIMIT SOMETHING, GIVE IT TO THEM AS AN ABILITY.**
If a player comes to you (this really happened to me) and says, "I need 30,000 francs. Since I'm the prime minister of England, I'll just requisition it for my own private needs." [If I'd let him do this, it would have overthrown the financial basis of the game, in which money was purposely scarce.] I replied, "Okay, the treasury sends it to you, but this will cost you political capital back home, where you'll be perceived as looting the public treasure to line your pockets or on your own private expeditions. The more you take, the bigger trouble you'll get in." Then I handed him a card that let him exchange his own Status for money [Status was, of course, more valuable than money]. He blanched and walked off with the card, and presumably used it wisely, since I didn't see any precipitous drop in his Status.

