

NPC 101: What to Expect

A general guide to NPCing at Alliance LARP Alberta

When you first arrive on site, there are a bewildering array of things going on. The lead-up to an event is frequently very fast-paced and if you don't know what is going on, it can be hard to get direction as to what exactly you should be doing. This document is meant to ease your introduction to the site and provide a general overview of both how things flow and general expectations so that you aren't caught completely by surprise through the course of the weekend.

If you can arrive on site early to help set up that would be great. Currently, at the LYC we arrive Friday at 2pm and begin set up. Set up takes several hours. The more people, the faster we can get set up done and then relax!

Please bear with us at this time. Lots is going on, prep work etc. We sometimes just don't have a lot of time to chat until we are underway.

If you are a weekend NPC, we provide a meal Friday evening around 7pm. This is usually something quick like burgers, tacos or lasagne.

The weeks leading up to the event

If you let us know early we do a few things to coordinate our NPCs as best we can.

1. We have a Facebook group that is invite only and we add all NPCs to it for the upcoming event. This helps us coordinate as much before as we can.
2. We have a NPC meeting the Sunday before the event held at Myth Games at 3:00pm. We run through the event schedule, what roles people will play (or want to play) and general questions.

We also have a NPC packing list of the basics that you should look to bring with you. It is posted on the Facebook group (both regular and the NPC only group)

Before You Arrive/First Arrival

When you first get onto site you will go to our NPC building. This is the large white building right off of the parking lot. Come to the Western door (would be the one on the left of the building if you are looking at it from the parking lot and check-in as an NPC. There are two things required for check-in:

Membership. This can be purchased at the door (with cash) or with PayPal ahead of time.- Temp membership is \$10, full membership is \$40 and required at your second event (if you pay the Temp membership, you just pay the \$30 difference).

Fees for the weekend: Currently, at the LYC we pay per person attending, whether PC, NPC or staff. We have a reduced rate for NPCs of \$30 plus GST for the weekend and charge PCs \$15 for the meal plan.

Waiver. This can be signed at the door at or downloaded and signed ahead of time. This is mandatory for our insurance. You will not be permitted to enter combat without this filled out.

We also ask that all NPCs pre-register ahead of time so that we have an accurate count of how many people will be eating. This does not require paying or signing the waiver until you are on site, but allows us to make sure that money and food costs balance out appropriately.

This also means that if you aren't going to be able to make it, let us know as soon as possible so that we don't buy food for someone who won't be there. Please text Cory at 403-801-6243 or Abbey at 403-998-9268 if something happens last minute. Don't post to Facebook or the forums, we do not read those once we are on site as set up takes us well into the evening.

At Check In

Once you have paid your membership and signed your waiver, you will be assigned a bunk in the bunkhouse. We cram most of us into the 28 sleeper cabin, so you will likely be sharing with others. Be respectful to your bunkmates. If you have time before lay-on, you can unpack now or you can wait until it gets closer to time to sleep to do so. Regardless, it is a good idea to change into your basic blacks find out if anything is needed to help set up.

Basic Layout

The NPC camp has the following areas:

The Desk. This is the area where Plot and designated NPCs will give out assignments. You will also receive treasure for when you go out from whoever is running the desk in here. It is by the west door.

Makeup Area. The area that has all of the makeup in it. Many of the things that we go out as require some sort of makeup, and this is the area where you can “green up” (or put on whatever other makeup is required). This is the far eastern part of the bunkhouse.

Costume Area. This is the area where the bulk of the NPC costuming is held. Masks, tabbards, etc are kept in this area. This is along the walls where we can find it

“Craft Services table”. This is where we set out snacks, water and other items. We ask that all NPCs bring something to snack on for the group, Veggies, fruits, chips etc. We ask not to bring granola bars (we will supply those) as last year we had so many that were not eaten they ran past expiration.

Etiquette by room

Because we have had upward of 30 NPCs and the NPC cabin can quickly become unmanageable with that many people running around, here are some basic ground rules for each of the above areas:

The Desk

The area where we place the desk is small. For the most part, don't linger in this room since it can get very crowded very quickly. Please don't put things down on the desk itself unless there's a defined area for them: we have to keep it at least roughly organized so that we can find things. Extraneous water bottles, pieces of paper, etc. tend to clutter up the desk and make it unusable.

There is a box/basket that we will put out on the desk for used monster cards, but nothing else should be put down on the desk. Unless you are running the desk or a member of plot then nothing should be taken from the desk at any time.

Makeup Area

The biggest things for this area:

- Keep this area clean! Tidy up after yourself.
- Don't use makeup sponges that have been used by others. (It's a hygiene thing)
- Close up makeup when you are done with it, don't let it dry out.
- Only sit in the makeup area if you are either putting on makeup or helping someone else put on makeup.

Costume Area

The biggest thing here is to keep the area organized. To this end:

- Fold tabards and clothes and put them back where they came from.

- Make sure weapons, armour and packets go back to where they belong.
- Wipe masks clean with a disinfecting cloth and put them back where they came from. The oil from your skin will destroy the masks and we also don't want the next person to catch whatever you have.
- If you borrow someone's personal costume (these are kept separate), make sure you have their permission to take it and make sure it gets back to them.
- If you can tolerate makeup and are going out with someone who is allergic then give them precedence on the masks. This is the same in reverse, some people are allergic to latex in masks.
- If for some reason a mask or an article of clothing needs special attention (e.g., it broke, is filthy because of you rolling around on the ground as part of a character, etc), put it in the supplies laundry basket.

Before Lay-on

Be patient before lay-on: Sometimes we have to rearrange things on the fly, and the NPC you were supposed to play has to change. Have supper, help set up and organize NPC camp.

We will have a sit down during supper and go over the evening agenda. We do this at both breakfasts and dinner. Even if you are not on the Meal Plan, you are expected to be at these meetings. Nothing is worse than having to repeat instructions to individuals after the meeting. The meals are a time to wind down, ask questions and let PLOT know if anything has happened that we need to be aware of.

During the meals and throughout the weekend we will be giving you instructions such as:

"You will be X roleplaying character." Basically you will be going in immediately to do some sort of engagement with the players, usually as something that will add flavor to the world (e.g., a farmer who is down on his luck due to whatever the events are of that weekend or a mercenary who saw something on the road) or for a specific event (e.g., a guard for the Duchess). This will involve doing some role-play for either a set amount of time—usually around thirty minutes—or until something specific occurs (e.g., the Duchess leaves) before reporting back to NPC camp.

"Prep to be XX monster/merchant". Again, we try to have everyone on a schedule (several in fact) that shows what you are and when. We have a white board posted with all this information and we also have it available on the Facebook group.

Lay-On!

Now that the event has officially started, here's some major things to be ready for. This is not a comprehensive guide—each one of these is an essay unto itself—but is meant to be a rapid crash course so that you aren't caught off guard. Talk to one of the senior NPCs or a member of Plot for more information or for any questions.

Marshal on the Field

When we have large battles, heavy RP and cabin raids, a Marshal will likely be present. The Marshal is very visible. We have them in gold/black striped tunics and they have a white headband to show their OOG status. Marshals are there to ensure combat is safe and being done correctly, on both sides. The marshal should not be engaged in OOG chat with players, only there to consult on rules. Marshals also call Holds, Medical Holds and Lay-ons during combat.

Please note that a Marshal's ruling on the field stands! Never argue with a Marshal on the field. We will have time to review any rules etc. back in Monster Camp or at a meal.

General NPCing

We are there mostly to facilitate Plot in telling a story over the weekend. So first and foremost try to follow Plot's directions to help make the event successful.

Makeup, masks, and costumes heavily contribute both the roleplaying atmosphere of the game. Please be mindful of this and if you need help making your makeup look good, then ask.

When you go out you will be given a card that gives you your stats. This will tell you what you can and cannot do. If it isn't on your sheet (e.g., "read and write," "search and steal," or "killing blow" being three big ones) then you can't do it.

Sometimes we just need some "crunchy" encounters and we send out NPCs with pretty basic instructions "You have 20 body and swing 3 Normal, unlimited lives, go have some fun". We will give you some treasure and send you out with a few other NPCs and a Marshal. Follow the Marshal's instructions on the field. If they say it's time to go back in, do so.

As part of your prep you will frequently be taken through those stats by the encounter head, Plot, or by a senior NPC. Let us know if you have any questions.

Unless you have been given specific instruction otherwise then when you have been sent out on your own or in a small group check back at NPC camp after an hour or so (if not before), even if your original task is not complete (e.g., if you have been given 3 lives and they aren't used up, still report back). This way if we need you to do something else or change tactics we can let you know.

If you are going out as a group, please take a radio and earplug. This helps communication both ways.

If you need a break then let someone know and go lie down for an hour or two then come back or spend some time helping clean up the NPC cabin.

Keep it in game! As NPCs we move in and out of character more than anyone else, which makes it especially important that when we are in game (or around those who are in game) that we keep ourselves in game as much as possible or, barring that, stay out of the way of the people who are in game. This includes when PCs can overhear you: Nothing breaks the spirit of an intense piece of role-play like having a bunch of people complaining about their day jobs within ear shot.

Pro Tip: If you are going to the fire pit YOU MUST BE A CHARACTER. Under NO circumstances should any NPC be sitting at the fire pit in a white headband.

Role-playing Improvisation

You will frequently need to make up a character history on the fly for a role that you are going into town with. The PCs will be very curious and frequently pry into things that are outside of your script.

- For this, in the interest of sanity, things that are made up are best when they:
- Fit with what is going on in the world.
- Represent a static state that the players are unable to change.
- Any continuations on the character that aren't anticipated by Plot are deferred.

This is one of the major ways that NPCs—usually without ever intending it—wind up "going rogue" and ending up in a situation that Plot doesn't know about and didn't anticipate. When you go in as a farmer and you are asked about your children, you can easily talk about how they died in the war that recently ended, how they are happy at home, or how they are off selling things in a far-off town depending on what makes sense for the character. These are static positions that the players are unlikely to feel compelled to change (or if they do, best get back to plot quickly). Saying how they have been kidnapped

by an Evil Necromancer™ who will turn them into Death Knights™ if you don't raise enough money to pay the ransom is not.

Similarly, if you go into town as a farmer and they want to purchase wheat (it has been known to happen), just ask that they come by your farm at some indeterminate later time, then tell Plot when you get back that they might have some PCs coming by to purchase wheat.

If all else fails—and sometimes despite your best efforts it will fail (players are very creative in this regard)—it is better to get back to Plot quickly before things get too out of control. Please don't make up or narrate additional plot to try to fill in a perceived story gap. If you don't know, then your NPC persona does not know.

Fishbowls

When you want to do some role-play or there is nothing else going on for you, you can usually get what we call a "Fishbowl." Fishbowls are short non-combat encounters that add flavor to the world or provide information around side plots. They are also a way to keep our PCs entertained when they aren't out fighting things. Talk to whoever is running the desk about going out as one.

When you are given a fishbowl check it out and see if it is a good fit for you. If not, ask for another one and we will see if we can make accommodations.

Dinner Characters

For meals (not just dinner) we frequently go in as "Dinner Characters." These are named characters that you get to make up and then will play every time you go in. This helps add some flavor to the world and provide some consistency. Good examples of these are going to be craftspeople, farmers, and other things of that nature. Talk to one of the senior NPCs about building one of these if it is your first event and we'll make sure the information gets recorded for future events.

Combat: Winning and Losing



There is a lot that can be said about the attitudes and guidelines for combat as an NPC that I'll save for a different article, but one major thing that is an adjustment from PCing that takes some getting used to is the matter of death.

As an NPC you will die. Repeatedly. You will die, walk away, and then come right back to die again. You will "lose" in the sense that the PCs will "beat" you. Repeatedly. This is expected and normal.

It also can take some getting used to. Just be prepared for this: It's part of the nature of the game and, as NPCs, we are there to help the PCs have a good time. That being said, NPCs are also there to have fun and if things are not fun for both sides it can really kill the mood.

Sometimes PCs will die or get dropped by you, but don't equate that with "winning."

Pro-Tip: We always tell our NPCs not to really bother trying to track all of the incoming damage. When you are being hit from all sides and you think the damage is enough, go down.

As well, if you are hit by an effect you do not know what it does you can use the "hand on head" gesture for Out of Game and quickly ask for clarification then get back to fighting.

Terminology

These are some of the specialized terms you will hear around NPC camp.

Lives— These represent the number of times you come in as a given creature. So if you die you will come back into game again until you run out of lives (including your first one) or until whatever other conditions are met.

Respawn—To come back into game after dying. When you respawn it will usually either be from a designated "respawn point" or from far enough away that you break line of sight with the PCs.

Popcorn—A form of respawning. When you die in a battle you go to your respawn point or get sufficiently far away (ask the encounter head or if unsure about which you are doing or how far this is) and come back in.

Waves—A form of respawning. When you die in a battle go to a designated respawn point. When the entire group is back you will go in again as a unit.

"Green Up"—Also "<other color> up" this means you are being asked to get ready to go into game with makeup (and usually tabbard) of a given color. If it's green, for example, then put on green makeup or wear the species-appropriate mask.

Going Rogue—When an NPC—usually without knowing it due to lack of clear direction from Plot or from the Monster Marshal—goes off in a direction that Plot doesn't expect, accidentally or deliberately makes up plot, or otherwise takes the PCs off course.

Mod—Short for a module, these are contained events that the PCs will go on.

Hook—Used as both a noun and a verb. The process of getting a group of PCs to do go somewhere is referred to as "hooking" them. A "hook" as a noun is someone who is sent in to hook (as a verb) a group of PCs.

Pro-Tip: When you respawn, you DO NOT have to "call-in" your respawn if no PCs are near you. If you respawn close (within earshot) to a PC you must announce your respan (usually "I rise from/come from etc".)

Conclusion

This is by no means comprehensive but will hopefully be a helpful guide to what to expect when you first come to NPC an event. Don't worry about having it memorized—this is just a rough guide to help you get started and we'll review/cover all of the details in person both at the orientation as they come up throughout the weekend.

NPCing is a lot of fun and extremely rewarding, so I hope you can join us!

NPC 101: Surviving Your First Weekend as an NPC

Your first weekend as a NPC at Alliance LARP Alberta

Being an NPC at Alliance LARP Alberta is a great way to get an initial feel for the world: It is low-commitment and low-cost \$30 for the weekend and \$15 for meals, comes with free Friday night supper, you get goblin stamps for helping out, and it is one of the best ways to learn the rules of the game and the people playing in it.

It also has a bit of a learning curve. These are some tips for helping ensure that you have a good time and get the most out of your weekend. This isn't a guide to "All Things NPC" (those guides will come later), but just a little bit to get you started.

Dress Appropriately

We play on around 20 acres in everything from snow to blistering heat. Be ready, regardless of the weather, for it to be very cold at night and hot during the day. Bring a long-sleeved black shirt (if you own one) and layers that can go underneath it so that you can keep yourself comfortable. Sturdy gloves are also a good idea, and can quickly become essential in winter.

This also means bringing reasonable footwear. Closed toed shoes or boots with good traction and that are high enough to keep snow out (if it is winter) are your friend, and you'll want to bring extra pants and socks in case the ones you have on get wet.

Some other things that are good to bring:

- Pillow and sheets/sleeping bag (we have beds)
- Chapstick
- Sunscreen
- A (black or brown) ring belt, if you own one (we have spares, but having your own is always useful).
- Extra water

We have a "packing list" for NPCs that can be found on the Facebook groups.

Stay Hydrated

Because we run around so much, it is easy to get dehydrated fast. Drink water and eat/drink things that will replenish electrolytes, vitamins, and trace minerals. We keep these in NPC camp, so make sure that you avail yourself of them. We have lots of water on hand in NPC camp, be it bottled or massive jugs. After every combat encounter you should be drinking at least 500ml of water. Please avoid "energy drinks" and "pop" after combat. Water or Gatorade are your best choices.

Know Your Limits and Assert Them

If you don't stop us, we'll run you pretty hard. From the soft lay-on at 9 PM we will frequently run until 2 in the morning, just to get up at 8 and hit the ground running again.

On the other hand, people will respect your limits: If you need to go to sleep or take a nap, need to spend a few minutes getting hydrated, or want a role that is more/less combat focused due to injuries or anxiety... then speak up. We will try to accommodate preferences where we can, and at a minimum it

is always acceptable to take a break. Just because some of us are crazy doesn't mean you need to be as well.

That said, we do ask that when you need to take an extended break of more than a few minutes you take a break. This means that you go lie down in your bed and take a nap or otherwise engage yourself in a manner that isn't going to distract others who are getting ready.

Ask Questions

Our players and NPCs are very knowledgeable and very friendly. If you don't know what someone is saying, ask! No one knows everything in this game, and no one will expect you to know everything, so ask!

Don't Take It Personally

Especially in the heat of combat, there's a tendency for tempers to run high. You'll accidentally get hit in the head or hit someone in the head. You'll be surrounded by people who are all hitting you simultaneously and not be able to keep track of it all. You'll miss hearing something, or the person you will hearing will not feel a packet land on them

If someone is hitting too hard, let them know. If they persist, talk to Plot or a Rules Marshall and let them know. If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask for a quick clarification.

Conclusions

This guide is meant as a very bare bones guide for those who are intending to come out and is meant to compliment the information on "How to be an NPC" (pages 25—28 of the rule book). We'll also be providing more specific guides as we move forward.

NPCing can be a lot of fun and can be a really great introduction to the game. Some people choose to continue to do it as their primary form of participation, while for others it is done only occasionally. Either way, we hope you will join us!