Heya folks,

Thank you very much for participating in this project.  The goal here is to share information and possibly discussion about a few common features in many fantasy larps.  The end result will be using this information in an article for WyrdCon 2013's companion book.  Needless to say, each participant will be credited in the work under whatever name they'd prefer.

To get started I'd like everyone to state their name or preferred nickname in a color and font they'd like to use for this project, their state or province, country, and the name of the larp they mainly participate in (if any).

If you want to add a url to the part by your name, go ahead.

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If we run out of the color you like, feel free to pick a different font style.

**Topic # 1: Permanent Character Death**

In many games there's a form of permanent death that one player can inflict on another.

Is this a thing in your game? What are the upsides of having it? The downsides? Is it ultimately worthwhile to have in a game or not?

I've actually witnessed several games in action including two of the big ones Drachenfest and conquest of mythodea. Here in australia i have also been part of half a dozen systems. What i have learned from them is that character death must suit the system you want to play.
On a personal level though i find perma death inhibiting. At drachenfest where you die and come back all the time i watched people get into the combat and fighting, people would take risks and do things. At conquest of mythodea where they introduced perma death the year i went i watched people not willing to commit. I'd rather players, try, fail and try again instead of being too afraid to do anything.

*Dying Kingdoms does not advocate or endorse PvP - that is, one PC coming into a violent, harmful and potentially lethal conflict with another PC. The policy is that all PvP must be discussed between players beforehand, and that no lethal action can be taken without the target player's consent. If the player does not consent to PvP, players must find an alternate way to resolve their differences. This policy allows players to invest fully in their characters, to take risks and to share vulnerabilities and secrets with other PCs - they have no worry that these weaknesses will be exploited. We do, however, have a policy that PCs must retire after they reach a certain character point limit - usually achievable through two to three years of solid gameplay. This also encourages PCs to take risks - if they know that their character must one day be retired, they are more willing to engage in potentially lethal situations. It also allows leadership to*

*cycle through different generations of players, for the average power level to stay relatively even and for new players to easily find a way to make a permanent mark on the game. Overall, our player base is quite supportive of both our PvP and character retirement policies (one year, our April Fool's joke was that the retirement policy was being abolished, and there was a tremendous outcry in favor of keeping it!). That being said, Plot Staff is not afraid to impose lethal or potentially lethal situations on our characters. As well, we work hard to provide the PC base with enemies they can unite against - PCs are less likely to engage in petty rivalries in the face of an overwhelming obstacle which affects everyone.*

Permanent Death is a function in Gisido. On the positive spectrum, it adds a sense of realism and a realistic threat to the atmosphere of the game. If a player fears death, they fear negative consequences of their actions. Additionally, there is the ability to lose long-lived PCs to give players a fresh start. Depending on the way deaths are handled in the game's mechanics, dying can be a very serious matter. Player vs. Player disputes and combat can cause a character to quickly meet their end. Sadly, this can happen for malicious, out of game reason,s and can ultimately drive players away from the game.
In my opinion, Permanent Character Death is an important aspect of the game. For, if the rules of death do not apply, what point is there to challenge life?


Permanent death is quite easy to achieve in Chronicles of Demgard. There is a "respawn" system, but it is actually more like an "after spending some time out of game, think up how you survived that last encounter by the skin of your teeth - this also means that you don't get back into game at full power, it is in the rulebook that after this kind of "respawn", you are in a pretty bad shape, like Bruce Willis at the end of every Die Hard movie. This rule is in place to not let minor stuff like hit-and-run robberies, or "to let off steam" battles turn the whole event upside down by removing half the characters. It also gives the medics and healers some additional opportunities to play by mitigating deaths into "severely wounded".
On the other hand, there is an option to die permanently - there are some effects which don't let the character come back the previously mentioned way (like specific kinds of magic or poison), or if your killers make sure you are absolutely positively dead (e.g. acted-out decapitation, or hacked up body, or an acted-out public execution), you will have no more excuses - your character is dead, you can then play a spare character you've previously written up, or get one from the organizers.

We both have it and don't have it as such. First of all - there is no "leveling" xp based system here and we do an awful lot of larps with various settings. While there is one main clan based world where the big ones are happening - there are tons of others. Permadeath is unnecessary when there is no "character sheet" with skill points, except for RP purposes where it is used. In other games like the STALKER larps - permadeath was a fact - if you die, you are dead.

I have attended both cons that had, and didn't have permanent death. And I am both a fan of it and strongly opposed to it depending on the circumstances. Generally I'd say that smaller and PvE oriented cons

(and especially those which are both) do well with permanent
character death. While larger cons, especially those that are very
PvP and battle oriented struggle with it.
As I mainly attend 'wysiwyg' type cons that are almost devoid of
rules (and thus character sheets, xp, levels, etc do not play a role)
I'd say that permanent character death, if it occurs, should be to
further RP in a meaningful way (both from the perspective of the
player soon to be dead  and/or the other players). Otherwise it is
quite unnecessary, as the player merely being severely wounded will
achieve about the same effect if not a better one as it will provide
play for surgeons and whonot. Still, I think most regular cons (that
aren't geared towards PvP battles) should have permanent character
death, simply to be consequential. You just should ask yourself in
every situation where a player hinges on the verge of death if the
game will actually be better for his permanent demise or if him
spending some time with the medics will have about the same, if not a
better effect.
Now on the matter of PvP oriented cons (at least those of large scale
and those that actively want to encourage battles), I am of the
opinion that permanent character death is often more of a hindrance
to good play. Permanent character death in that case often leads to
people being extremely protective of themselves and in the end it
will discourage battles (or fights between players in general) that
are after all the aim of these events. It also will often lead to
people being more intent on winning at all cost out of
self-preservation instead of their main aim being a good looking and
fair fight. Hence such events are often better off with some kind of
respawn mechanic (with or without the option of permanent death in
extreme or unusual circumstances).

We used to have it before the system went belly-up but it really felt like an excuse to off someone's
character if you didn't like them (In Character or otherwise). Having a sense of peril and paranoia and a
struggle to keep your character alive because you have no idea whether or not you'll make it to the end of
the event is kinda neat, it keeps you from getting complacent and it adds intrigue. But, on the other
tentacle, speaking from experience, it (literally) kills weeks, maybe months, worth of effort that you put
into creating that character's garb, mannerisms, and backstory. Permanent death...yeah I could do without
it but it really depends on the setting.

When we created Swordcraft a couple of years ago, it was primarily designed as a Battle Game,
rather than a character driven LARP.  As such we were far more interested in generating
reasons to fight, rather than reasons to keep a cool head.  (We run weekly battle games on
Friday nights, so there isn't much time to develop plots or do anything other than fighting)

Over time we developed our weekend "Swordcraft Quest" events and so the opportunity for more non-combat roleplay became more of a feature of our game. When we started we were the only LARP battle game in Australia, and as such we have experimented with a range of formats and rules for our Quest events.

We had initially been against permanent death for three reasons
1. We wanted people to fight each other as much as possible
2. We were concerned that people might use the mechanic to settle out-of-character scores
3. We didn't want players who had spent a long time and a lot of money on their kit having to create new characters, because of permanent character death.

To still create the option, we emphasised that players could choose to have their own character die permanently, but that it couldn't be done without their consent.

There was pressure from some of our players, who were used to playing more traditional linear LARP adventures to introduce it though, so we created a "ritual circle" for a couple of our events where permanent death could occur. The first thing that then happened was that a bunch of players started to create plot lines to permanently kill (execution after a trial) a character who belonged to somebody they didn't like out-of-character. Some of these players actually set about framing the target character for a murder he didn't commit.

For us this confirmed our concerns with the permanent death mechanic and despite protestation from a number of our players, we removed it from the game.

Now, in our game when somebody goes down in battle they are "incapacitated" and can either be healed in the field or crawl back to a central non-combat town for healing. At times we have also used a "well of souls" from where the dead can return to the world of the living. Always, though there is some kind of drawback from dying (even if it just means walking 15mins back to town).

In regards to the reasons for having permanent character death, to me it depends on the kind of game you are trying to create. If you want there to be a lot of PvP combat and non-combat conflict then I think having it doesn't really work, but if instead you want your game to not focus on PvP combat, but rather character to character interactions, problem solving or player character biased PvE combat  then it provides a way of keeping the peace between players.

I can also see the advantages of permanent character death from an immersion point of view. Unfortunately though I think most LARPs don't want to be too real. If they did, then combat of any sort probably wouldn't happen. For the sensible person it rarely makes sense to attack somebody.

From a fun point of view, having your character permanently die after one scuffle wouldn't be

much chop!  So while it may be less immersive, we think it is more fun to be able to charge in, die, then be back to fight another round.

For the longer plot lines in our game I don't think that not having permanent death has been negative.  It just means you have to find other ways of undermining the schemes of your enemies.  We also set up objectives so that death out in the field does have consequences.  You can't take and hold a fort if your character has died and has to walk 10 mins back to the village.  We also restrict healing in sieges to make them more decisive.

The final point I'll make is about kit.  In a table-top roleplaying game creating a character doesn't take that long.  For my current Swordcraft character I've spent over a year and a half building up my kit.  Armour costs hundreds of dollars and I personally have gone for very distinctive options.  If my character died permanently, it simply wouldn't make sense for me to create a new character with all of the same gear.

In summary I think that permanent character death may have some benefits, but overall I think it detracts from the enjoyment of games where PvP combat is part of the fun, and has the potential to be deal breakers for people who are targeted for out of character reasons.  It also doesn't work in my opinion for games where you spend a lot of time and money building up impressive costume, armour, weapons and other gear.


Permanent death has been a contentious topic in our system for many years. We used to have a whole clan whos sole purpose was "severing" PCs. After a few incidents of bleed the mechanic was removed from the game in favor of less hurt feelings, longer lived characters and more complex RP. The change upset quite a few players who liked having the possibility of a permanent character disposal method. The issue was compounded by the ease of access to methods of returning to life including; spells, first-aid, feigned death, potions, and magical items. This made it very easy to play the "homicidal maniac character" without much fear of any meaningful retaliation. On the plus-side the same "homicidal maniac characters" can't destroy someone's hard IC and OOC work just by playing their character. The mechanic is worth having if your group has great control of bleed, but if not the OOC drama is not worth the satisfaction of killing off that jerk that keeps killing your party and running off.

In Amtgard, there is no "permanent character death".  In our system, once your allotted class lives are spent, you're "shattered" out of the game.  On any given weekly Amtgard park day, there would be about 3 battlegames and you'd have a new set of lives for each.  You could even play a different class if you had the required garb for it.  Other than that, our death comes solely from combat, and is over in 5 minutes or less.  Most amtgard classes have 4 lives to start with under the Rules of Play version 7.7.

Most games around here has some kind of rule for perma death although most of the time they are not really enforced / people not really use it. Although it's not uncommon and in my opinion the better games have it. In games where you don't have perma death you need some kind of

rule that prevents the clusterfuck which comes from the fact that the players respawn. I've seen too many "He is the one who killed me!" conflicts which not just breaks immersion if the setting does not explain why everyone respawns like Jesus on steroids it is also looks stupid. Plus there is the thing that people are more likely to do suicide attacks if the only downside is to rest half an hour in the resurrection area and grab something to eat in the meantime. It's kind of a win/win situation for their point of view while it's bad experience for everyone else involved.

We called it, "severing", and in our system, it was the only way to permanently kill a character. Upsides and downsides are a hard thing to define, as it has mostly to do with perspective. While severing did not happen *too* often, it happened often enough that there was usually some sort of debate going on, or some player would be bringing it up on our forums. However, it is worth noting that the people who were complaining or debating against severing were most often the ones who had been severed at one point or another. I think the largest problem with permanent character death is simply that people do not enjoy losing, and never being able to play your character again is a fairly direct form of such. From a purely mechanical perspective, permanent death is absolutely necessary; it supports suspension of disbelief, it enforces and creates plot, and it almost always results in the player who lost their character putting even more time, thought, and effort into their next one. The only thing I have ever seen taken away from LARP via permanent death has been the character itself. The permanent death of a character was usually taken seriously by the other characters, and it often had a direct hand in rich plot development. All of that said, I do think there is a strong argument against permanent death, and it lies in the fact that LARP is unlike any other form of sport or fantasy entertainment. You did not lose your 20 point paladin whom you have invested hours and hours of sitting at a table, rolling dice and dictating actions. You lost a persona that you not only created, but quite literally put your blood, sweat, and often tears into. In no other fantasy game is there such a real-world connection between your mental, emotional, and physical efforts and what your character is either capable of or responsible for. Losing such an investment in time is the reason that I believe so many were against the mechanic in the first place.

NERO has a permanent death system, by chance and percentage (black and white stones and a bag to draw them from, with more black stones added based on the amount of deaths the character has taken).  At the moment we are currently in a play test whereby, instead of permanently dying the character may return "weakened" (lower build/level) instead.  Additionally, we are playtesting the "return from permanent death" potential.  In my own personal opinion this loses a lot of the angst and woe (not to mention potential YEARS of plot based on loss, sorrow and suffering!) inherent in a game that is all about "life and death".  Much of the "fear factor" that a good plot team needs to go for gets lost without the potential of death.  Without fear the game itself loses its edge and becomes, IMHO, just another F2P MMO, with the character able to re-spawn a bit weaker than it was but easily able to recoup their losses with a bit of time and money.

As Selina has pointed out, NERO does have a permanent death system that has stayed more or less consistent throughout the years (bag draw, 10 stones, increasing percentage

of drawing a "black" stone and perming).  While the percentages haven't changed, the actual number of permanent deaths has dramatically declined from when NERO started until now.  There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is that "dying=losing" to many people, and since "losing =/= fun", people who permanently die very often feel no compelling reason to return to the game (in addition to the fact that the player has to spend the time, money, and effort to come up with new gear and a new character - the previous investment is mostly lost)...and therefore NERO loses an otherwise paying customer.  Therefore, as NERO has progressed over the years, effects that would otherwise cause people to permanently die have significantly decreased, to the point where NERO Cincinnati, a chapter with a player base of 500-ish players, saw no more than about a half-dozen permanent deaths due to gameplay (as compared to people voluntarily retiring characters or "choosing" to permanently die) during its entire 5-year existence.  NERO has moved to the point where permanent death is no longer "realistically" a part of the game at all (barring extreme bad luck), between neutered gameplay, plot teams which are afraid to perm people because they'll lose business, and the on-going attempts from the National organization to generate extra revenue by allowing you to purchase your permanently-dead character's life back.

With Legacy, when we first began, we took some liberal cues from the games which the various creators hailed from; Amtgard, World of Darkness, and in my case about half a decade with the 90's era NERO (As Selina and Rob have both pointed out) and it's break-away off-shoot, SOLAR. so each of founding council had a different take on the issue of Permanent death.  We initially tried the Amtgard approach, but soon found that our players were going into almost every situation with reckless abandon, choosing more often than not to bash their way through problems than to try to figure out puzzles or "role-play" through a tricky encounter.  As we continued working towards a more character development driven game over a kill count session, we tried to implement in permanent deaths to characters as a viable "repercussion" to poor decision making.

Initially, we let Permanent Deaths be a fact of life for all characters in all situations.  This was somewhat mitigated by a "life count" that each character began the game with, and could replinish as they acquired new skills through leveling up.  Unfortunately, some of the younger players who had come in from more PvP driven games were not quite aware of how quickly one could run through lives when trying to play "Last Stand" on every encounter.  Losing 7 PCs in one event, with 4 of them deciding not to come back at all, made us re-evaluate the "Death" system.

We then tried a compromise where a PC could only be "Perma-Death'ed" by other PCs, where monsters, NPCs, and the world in general could only break the PCs bad enough to want to spend a few weeks recuperating at the local hot spring.  This worked out decently when it was used by the staff and game officers to help further plots, but then we had some personal vendettas activate, which caused bad blood

OOG that transferred in some cases from one character when it died to the next character created by the injured player. Eventually, to quell tempers and ease increasing rivalries, Permanent Death became an option under two circumstances which seemed to work better with the game that Legacy of Caern Du'Shael was trying to promote. First, if a player chose to permanently retire the character, they had the option to do so, and "Legacy" one of their Heirloom items to their next character or to a chosen "heir" depending on the item, situation, and backstory. The other option was if the Games Operations Team had a plotline that they wished to pursue that might coincide with a character death or two. If the player was willing, on occasion the character would be killed off, allowing the player options to make a slightly better follow-up character. After I moved away and we had a shift in management, I am not quite sure which method people decided to stay with, but the Permanent Death option added to both a more realistic game, but also a game that brought out both the best and the worst in the player base as they tried to figure out how to use the mechanics to their advantage.

Permanent Deaths are a good way to keep the game interesting as well as to interject a sense of real danger to the game world, but over-using it made things go from it being a risky world, to a why bother leaving the town kind of thing. On the other hand, a lack of Permanent Death as a possible risk for thoughtless actions allows for people to do more super-human, foolhardy stunts with little fear of reprisal.

[Magness] - For IFGS, permanent death is a very rare thing and not ever 100% permanent since a game writer could create a way for your character to return. Basically, our games have a risk rating that is assigned during the sanctioning process (a peer review of any proposed script to ensure it conforms to the rules and certain guidelines). Only games with a high risk rating may even have the chance of permanent death. And if your character did die in a high risk game another game writer could write in a means to revive the character later.

The risk of "permanent" death can be a great thrill for serious games. Taking the chance of losing the time and effort spent on a character can be a huge motivator and the thrill of knowing you could have lost it all is pretty intoxicating. However, rarely have I seen folks who did lose it all come out smiling.

On Terra Nova there is permanent death, but the larp is set in such a way that it rarely occurs from NPC combat, as they won't "finish" the players and will usually leave them where they could be retrieved by healers. PvP can be quite deadly. Character death is thought of neither good nor bad - it happens, and while it can cause some discomfort and a sense of loss to the player to whom it happens, it can also produce great and dramatic moments. However, all players start their characters at a very reasonable and usable level of power and the further acquisition of power by acquiring new skills is very slow so starting up a new character is not a dramatic power shift. Sometimes, death is the new beginning - and players have the option to continue playing their deceased characters as undead NPCs, creating more drama when they fight their former friends (and potentially slayers).

\David - In the IFGS permanent death is a pretty rare thing.  Usually if there is a permanent death one of two things happen, either a game is written to reverse this because the player does not wish for their character to be dead.  Or the player had requested the death since they planned on retiring the character.  So I guess technically the only permanent death in the IFGS is a voluntary one.

*In Living Adventure's main campaign, Rexerit, permanent death does exist, however death overall his handled differently from most games. Resurrections exist in the world, though they are incredibly costly both financially and to the person it is used on. It is also a very rare magic to find.  When any character dies and is successfully resurrected, they age anywhere from 5-20 years. The amount depends on the conditions under which the person was resurrected, if the body was present, and also the luck of the draw.Once characters reach a certain age resurrections no longer work on them. There are also benefits and detriments for all characters based on their race and their age. Characters can also choose to refuse a resurrection.*
*The downside to permanent death is certain players become very attached to their characters and then can lose interest when they die. However, I feel it is a necessity to have in a game otherwise there is no fear of death and dying.*

In Empty Thrones, permanent character death is a very prominent part of the character's lives. Currently, there is no way in game for characters to be resurrected. The Player Base have only successfully brought back one character from the dead, and it was a very complex situation that involved problem-solving and awareness that the probable outcome would be failure. Though the staff have access to information regarding resurrection spells and ways of bringing characters back from the dead, the player base is not aware of the different forms of resurrection. As of right now, all forms of resurrection the staff are aware of are time-consuming and have a high probability of failure. The decision to make resurrection a hidden form of magic was made by the game's creators, and upheld by the current staff.
The reason I, as a current staff member, have decided to uphold the creator's choice is that I see permanent player death as a benefit to any role playing game. Death is hardly the worst thing that can happen to a character in Empty Thrones, but because the players see it as an "end all" to their storyline, it causes them to truly analyze the situation at hand. In Empty Thrones, death cannot be "fixed", it cannot be avoided, and it cannot be denied. Players don't see any of the plot-lines we throw their way as "easy fixers". Even something as simple as a dungeon crawl could be the end of their character. They take their time, they don't rush through games, they talk and spend time making decisions as a group because, if they die, there is no way to bring them back. Their friends can't find a healer and pay money to bring them back. As far as the players know, death is permanent. And that's the way we at Empty Thrones like it.
On a similar note, NPC death is also a very real problem to the players in Empty Thrones. Every major NPC the players kill for their goals is taken very seriously. Recently, in a court game, a major NPC was assassinated; the players took his death very seriously because they understood that even the death of an NPC could change the entire world. It's not just their characters who are at risk of dying, everybody is. And every major NPC the characters kill can't be brought back to life if they discover that their actions were a mistake.
The main point I'm trying to make here is: the very real possibility of permanent character death

shows the Players that mistakes cannot be undone. There is no "fix it" button.

*With regards to the idea of a player inflicting death on another, when initially designing Empty Thrones, we wanted to focus on the "threat of death" - making players really consider their actions, because the possibility of being brought back from the dead was so low. As a part of that consideration, we weighed the idea of including Player-versus-Player combat, and looked at what its inclusion would bring to the game. Ultimately, we decided that having players fighting (and possibly killing) each other was something that would detract from the game, more than add to it. There are already plenty of opportunities for a player's hero to meet an untimely end - increasing the likelihood of that through PvP seemed unnecessary.*

*Regarding permanent death in general - I think this is a very touchy subject for a lot of folks, and with good reason. I'm one of those people that wants the death of my favorite characters in fantasy and fiction to mean something, rather than just being the result of a random encounter with a group of wolves on a forest path. I want to see validation and/or resolution to their story arcs (clearly, I am not a Game of Thrones fan). This made designing Empty Thrones a bit tricky, as we wanted to make sure character death was meaningful, rather than the result of bad luck; at the same time, we wanted to maintain the possibility that characters could (and would) die as a result of bad decisions, to make sure players understood the gravity of any given scenario or course of action.*

*I personally like the inclusion of permanent death, because it does serve to motivate players to play intelligently. I don't think it should happen frequently, or arbitrarily, unless the game is specifically designed to be highly lethal and everyone is made aware ahead of time.*

*We actually went around a long time about this. What it came down to is our thought process was that permanent death needed to happen. We did offer an alternative however. After reaching a certain level you could choose to retire your character. That character would then be unplayable and out of game forever, but it allows you to leave on your terms.*

*The way our permanent death system works in our game is five "free" deaths (allows people to take chances and enjoy the game) but then after that it is a 50/50 chance each time.*

In Underworld LARP we use 2 "free" resurrections per character and then it's a 50/50 flip for permanent death or resurrection from that point on. Lives can be purchased back at a steep cost with points earned via volunteering for the game. Our game has a horror theme set in a fantasy world so danger is every-present. We encourage player versus player conflict as well. These two facts mean that players would constantly be playing new characters if we allowed only a single life and that's not very realistic when you consider costs for costume, etc. I think permanent death is important to a larp because it a) shows that consequences exist, b) character development and a sense of progression for those that witness it and c) stagnation and "power creep" (lots of high levels dominating the game and

making new characters obsolete) are a serious concern for any larp.

Avegost is a monthly political game based in a dark age inspired fantasy setting and the possibility of having a motive to see another character die is not uncommon. Rather then create a rule saying players cannot cause permanent death and make our participants jump through intellectual hoops to figure out why they're not going to try to kill a character that they otherwise would, we have decided to allow player induced permanent death to be endemic to the environment we're trying to create.

Within the rules of Avegost, any player may have his character kill any other player's character at any time without mechanical restriction or community discouragement. Furthermore, Avegost characters are very fragile (very few can be hit more then two or three times to a vital area without dying) making this sort of interaction very mechanically easy to perform.

We feel this is more realistic and encourages player behavior that results in a rewarding experience for participants by keeping them on their toes and adding a greater degree of consequence to every action. Despite the fact that killing another character is mechanically easy and players may often have motives to do so, we've created an environment where actual character death is reasonably uncommon and very meaningful when it occurs. In reality, as in our setting, the irregularity of people killing one another on the streets is not a result of it being an impossible feat to perform. Rather than creating a mandate against characters being violent to one another with no plausible way to explain it in game, we feel it is much more interesting and realistic to let the setting and organic reactions by players regulate player death. For example: a character may be discouraged from killing another player because he's afraid of being caught and brought to justice by a player driven guard force that is made more vigilant out of the player's common desire to see their characters survive in an environment where event organizers have relinquished complete control of their fate.

The criticism that permanent death means players may be less likely to invest their money in costuming and props since they may have to start over at any moment is reasonable. Too volatile of a player turn over would be damaging to the goals of most episodic games. However, with ample creativity in designing a setting with a functional in game society and also creating motives for cooperation, event organizers can have the best of both worlds and create games with realistic approaches to death and allow characters to stick around long enough to be impactive to the setting.

**Permanent character death is possible in Shades of Venaya. This can occur in multiple ways. When a character "dies", they pull a Fate Card. This Fate Card has effects on the character, but none of them cause immediate permanent death. Rather, they might have an effect that causes the character**

to be permanently killed the *next* time they die or cause permanent negative effects if the character is resurrected.

Resurrection abilities are limited in Shades of Venaya to give death a sense of meaning and urgency. The longer a character is dead before they are revived, the harder it is to revive the character. If a dead body isn't found for several hours, it's very unlikely the character could be resurrected. In addition, mutilating a body sufficiency can hinder resurrection efforts. For example, a character who has been beheaded by an executioner's axe would be nearly impossible to successfully resurrect - and it would be a multi-step process (the body would have to be repaired first).

Pros of Permanent Death:
-The possibility of permanent death can add to the feeling of realism or immersion in a game.
-The possibility of permanent death makes taking risks meaningful. In games with revolving door death systems, players have little incentive to avoid dangerous situations.
-As a corollary to the added risk, permanent death can encourage cooperative play.
-Permanent death can potentially slow down the potential risk of "power creep", where established PCs always have an advantage over newer players, by potentially taking powerful characters out of the system. This is only true when powerful characters do not have "outs" for permanent death, which they frequently do in many of the other systems I've participated in.

Cons of Permanent Death:
-Players often invest heavily in their character, especially in long-running campaigns. This investment is on many levels; time, money, and emotions, etc. Losing a character can feel like a lost investment, especially if it happens under deprotagonizing circumstances.
-Unscrupulous GMs or NPCs can exploit poorly written or implemented permanent death mechanics to remove characters they don't like from the game.
-It is difficult to manage having permanent death and making sure it happens in thematically appropriate circumstances. This adds a layer of complexity to GMing for a game that not all GMs may want to deal with.

Is Permanent Death Worthwhile?:

It really depends on the type of game. In a one-shot game, permanent death isn't as much of a concern because players are less likely to have invested heavily, and thus it's much easier to justify the inclusion of permanent death.

In campaign-style games, I would offer a conditional "yes". It depends on your objectives for running the game, your intended audience, and how much you're interested in managing the effects of permanent death on the game.

If you do include permanent death in a long-term campaign, it's wise to include mechanics that make permanent death rare or difficult. Otherwise, you run the risk of characters dying constantly, which can hurt the cohesion of the game. Part of this depends on the size of your player base and

the relative importance of the PCs. In a game with 10 PCs, the death of a single character is much more significant (as a general rule) than it would be in a game with 1000 PCs. In the 1000 PC game, it's much more likely that someone can fill in for whatever role (if any) the deceased character might have had.

The setting is also important; reviving the dead is (probably) much more appropriate in a high fantasy game than in a gritty, modern game. Your mileage may vary.

#Lisa In Starship Valkyrie, there is the possibility of character death.  It is acceptable for plot to kill players, though it's a team game.  Player death usually occurs through inaction (and not deliberately).  It would be a very bad idea, in general, to kill off other players since it is a team game and you need everyone.  One player killing another would not be generally acceptable.

In IFGS, player death could occur, but caused a great deal of bad blood.  I've watched players hunt one another and draw people into the fray.  It was usually at this point, the chapter would polarize and implode.  Usually players drop out of the system entirely because of it. PvP rules were created to prevent other players from aggressing because it got so bad.  It was called the PC Rule of Fairness and it could only be called if you hadn't done something to someone else first.  It was cheesy, but it cut some of the problems.

The only systems I have played where player death could be done and people were okay with it was Live Effects.  This happened rarely and only when characters turned against the bulk of the player base.  There were a few players who bled out from combat and were missed in the fracas.  Mostly, death was not an issue.  Loss of limb was usually the most unenviable consequence.

I have noticed that campaigns tend to avoid character death, in general.  Unless there is a mechanic built into the system, players do not tend to die unless they are terribly inexperienced, go against the team, are just plain disliked and ignored, or do something incredibly dumb.  Even then, depending on the campaign, the above items do not usually result in death.  People get attached to their characters over time and enjoy playing them. If they don't , then they can start new characters.

I think the only way I would be okay with character death is if:
      1) I knew it was inherent in the system;
      2) I knew it was likely or possible based on the system; and
      3) If I was allowed to bring in alternate characters.
The reason I say this is because then I can prepare for alternatives.  I don't want to lose the fee for playing and I want to continue experiencing the event.   I didn't pay good money not to get to do the event.  Unless it is a one shot event, if I wanted disposable characters, I would NPC.

For me the fear of death is an important part of the game. As we play, we try to impersonate a character in a fictional surrounding but we try to do so as realistic as possible. So the permanent death of ones character is just the potential consequence of being in danger.

But there are several aspects one should not forget. For one instance it is the kind of death.

There are many ways to die. Some of them are very unsatisfying, like being killed by a super-mighty-never-dying mage just because he can. But some are just heroic, like give your life to save others or as the price to stop a villain and become a legend. Here l'm a fan of the „victim-rule". One issue of it is that the victim decides, whether or not and how he or she should play the consequences.  So one can just decide, whether this death is acceptable or not.

The other point is the kind of convention.

One can't just go to an enormous battle convention fight hard and survive without a respawn. lf we do so, the convention tends to be a vapid event, where NPCs are afraid to fight properly, because they might kill player characters. Here l even prefer a respawn during the battles like they do at Epic Empires. This way the battles become more vivid and you just do silly, dangerous but epic actions because you know, that you can further participate.
But on small convention it is a different story. Normally the GMs do control the power level of the enemies and it happens rarely, that you lie wounded and forgotten somewhere in the woods. Therefore usually you don't need a respawn for most ramifications can be easily expressed through wounds and healers.

As a GM l would never kill a pc on purpose and if possible always give him a way out, but sometimes it just doesn't work this way. ln this cases the players ordinarily know, that on this event and in this situation  is a potential to die and are ok with it.

In my experience it is more trouble than it's worth. I have only encountered it where it could be intentionally done to/by players. Often leading to rules arguments, and severe emotional drama when it is determined someone is actually killed off forever. It causes the victim to feel personally cheated out of the game.

The argument of "risk" to me falls short when there are so many other things you can do to a character that doesn't throw away the investment the player has in the character; items, levels, "honor", or political situation to name a few.

When you are 'killed' in Ring Game/ Second Age, you just sit down for 15 -30 minutes (depending on who killed you and under what circumstances) and can't talk ot any live players. In a couple cases, you can get 'killed' for the remainder of the game, in which case you continue playing as a random Red Eye Orc, (you get 'orked'). The Menace (dragon) can get orked by the Bard, Lord of the Nazgule can get orked by Mary and Pippen, etc. It's good that most deaths are temporary since that lets people keep playing the rest of the day (games run 3 - 5 hours) and reduces temptations to cheat/throw a temper tantrum. It does reduce the strategic importance of killing a character, but can still be plenty serious - tokens get captured, citadels get sacked, groups get separated, etc.

Without the chance of PC death, there is no RISK in the game. IFGS games generally fall into two categories: Line course and World course, with the line course games being the standard. This means a team of PCs goes from encounter to encounter in a scripted game where the PCs may react in any way they see fit at any time to the situation, the NPCs, or to each other. PC death was brutal in the early years of IFGS, as your beloved character that you spent years building could be killed in an instant - and that was it unless you wrote a game to return that PC or could find a 10th level cleric. Later, a spell was added to the CLERIC class to enable the restoration of PCs at 6th level that included a cost to the PCs.

While PC Death is always an option, game producers usually emphasize to the NPCs that the PCs are not to be killed - especially at lower levels - unless they basically jump onto their own swords or are insanely stupid. Since all games have a RISK rating, PCsk have a pretty good idea of the style and flavor of the game in which they are playing, and avoid high risk games if they prefer.

PC vs PC does happen, but it is rare. IFGS is structured so that teams are required in most events, so **teamwork** is essential. A PC that steals from, attacks, or kills another PC simply will not be included in future activities since the other PCs will avoid that person like the proverbial plague. In addition, we have a rule that the Game Producer can include called "PC Fairness", which allows any PC action against another PC to be rolled back within an hour of that action: it's a complete "do over". As you might expect, this rule is not used in higher risk games.

Knowing the flavor of the game, participants can decide if they would prefer to PC or NPC.

Without game ratings on the flyer, PCs do not know what style or risk of the game.
Without PC Death, there is no risk.
Without some form of protection from PC vs PC action for the lower level PCs and for PCs that do not enjoy high risk games, you have unhappy participants.

**Topic # 2: Railroading or the Linear Main Plot**

It's common in many games for the person or team running things to have a series of mapped out or pre-planned plots, and it's also common for said plots to be enforced rather heavy handedly.

For larp events that you have attended or ran, what kind of form does the plot take? What do GMs do when something unexpected or contradictory to their scheduled plot happens? If you have a larp that isn't subject to railroading, why isn't it?

The 3 of us who run our stargate LARP run it of the seat of our pants. We write a general idea of what the game is about and a few hooks but we react to the players most of the time. Sometimes we are more organised and have specific plots in mind but we never write absolutes.
I personally hate being steam rolled. There is no fun being someone else's story.

*For Dying Kingdoms, we have four styles of events: A weekend long camper, a day game (usually running from about 10 am to 6 pm), a convention game (a politically oriented event lasting 4-5 hours) and a tabletop game (a traditional TT using crossover rules, which allow a greater focus on individual characters). The convention games are usually the most strictly plotted - a cast of NPCs is introduced, an event happens halfway through the game, these are generally not mutable. Tabletops are as fluid or as rigid as the ST running them. Day games and campers are usually some balance between fluid and scripted. There is always a plot doc of some kind, listing the general objectives and 'win conditions' for the PCs, as well as side quests and small encounters. However, I have yet to run a day game or camper in which the end of the game was not revised in some way based on player actions. We emphasize player choice in our game, and maintaining that appearance can sometimes be quite a lot of work. However, our player base is very good at telling us what sort of story they want. And with a talented team of Staffers, being able to revise an ending or a different direction for plot doesn't present a huge difficulty. So, in general - we come prepared with a general framework for the event's overall plot and direction, but often revise it on the fly during the course of the game.*

I've attended events where my functions have had little to no effect on the overall plot. In several instances, towns have been blown up simply because GMs wanted to do something else or because they didn't like the site. The plot team we organized for Gisido has a general track of where we <u>want</u> the plot to go, but we also map each plot hook and twist out so that we have a plan for any situation. It is quite a pain to most people, but if you are lucky enough to have the right crew designing storylines for a game, then you should be well on your way to success.

The larps which I run do not have a pre-written plot - contrary to the gossips and beliefs which come up at every event. Organizers only give the setup and some triggered events which come from outside of the local scope, everything is up to the player's decisions. This is reinforced by the fact that we ask players to share their short backstory, goals and motivations with us, help

them blend it into the game world, and tie these backstories together to form a web of character stories and goals - most conflicts which come up during the game are in fact conflicts between the goals of player characters or factions - the organizers influence during the game is just felt through various information from outside of the local scope (e.g. letters from a remote contact, or a shaman's vision), and the minor impact of the organizers' own characters.

I've seen it happen very rarely. GMs here are far more organisers and arbiters - not plot controlers. In the last big game here, after the usual player treatment of stealing, bullying and all, the NPCs went from protest to armed rebellion, created a socialist republic out of the ashes and emerged as a valid player faction. Does that count?

As the two previous speakers the cons I attend rarely have a well defined, prewritten plot. The organizing team gives the setup, and from time to time they may influence the game world through specific events, both spontaneous and pre planned, but in general it is the players, not a pre written story that shapes the plot. Now as for larps with a pre written plot, GMs should approach it just as a good DM should approach a story driven PnP campaign. There will of course be certain amounts of railroading required. But firstly it should be cleverly disguised from the players that they are actually dancing to your tune in perfect step and secondly you should always be prepared to improvise if things take an unexpected direction. If it is clear the players don't want to go down a certain road at all cost, don't make them. After all, everyone having fun is the primary concern.

A certain amount of set plot is nice, otherwise the players will run around and do their own thing which leads to a certain lack of continuity. It's great to go to an event and have people still talking about political intrigue, or romance, or some deep-seated rivalry.

Most of our events are not "in-game" at all times. There are several games scheduled throughout the day that can vary immensely in the amount of RP. Some games require at least some roleplay, while others are purely combat driven. Some events are all in-game though, and although they are really hard to pull off with our particular ruleset and populus, the ones that do well are some of the best events we ever have. In my area, we have just such an event called Knoblander, which is a large-scale (teams of 100+) 18-hour battlegame that begins at midnight and runs until the next evening. It's (in my opinion) one of the most fun events out there. The plot, to me, is secondary to the epic battle scenarios and nighttime raids on the enemy camps. The way in which this particular event is ran leads you to the same end no matter what path you take to get there. You're given missions to complete and there's an almost endless amount of ways to help your team to victory, so theres no real issue with feeling forced by a written plot. On a regular weekly park day, the games are typically objective based (Ring the bell, capture the flag, mutual annihalation) and some are RP driven, often we refer to those games as "Quests".

In my experince railroading and linear plots most of the time will bite back. Players generally don't like being railroaded, sometimes the will just grumble but sooner or later the time will come where they will try to hijack the plot. Then the organizers either let them have their fun or switch into control-freak mode and try to enforce it. The later is the time when the shitstorm hits and IRL drama ensues. That said, sometimes an organizer have to shepeard the players but if it's too obvious or restrictive then it won't be fun for the players

I can't speak for NERO as a whole on this, just for our wee little corner of it.  At Kaurath we try very hard NOT to "railroad" plot lines whenever possible.  Instead of the more common "encapsulated plot" formula of mostly "throw away" plot filling the weekend (Big Baddy #427, to be met and destroyed by the end of the event, with all of its attendant instant gratification) with touches of major plot arcs, we've flipped it to mostly major and ongoing plot with minimal "filler".  Because of this, most of our ongoing plot is (a) accessible to everyone, whether 1st or 50th level, if they so choose to involve themselves in it, and (b) open ended (generally written n 3 to 5 year arcs) and ever evolving based on both PC and unanticipated NPC actions, reactions and interactions.  Does that mean we don't occasionally end up stuck in a position where the only way to accomplish any goal at all is via rail roading?  No, it DOES happen.  We try to avoid it, but we are just human and sometimes certain things NEED to happen in certain ways for it to "work".  However, we strongly encourage thinking "outside the box" and always hope our players can come up with a different or better way to do something than we, ourselves, may have thought about.  Honestly, we would rather be thrown a major curveball and have to have a quick meeting to work something altogether new and different out than railroad our players, if at all possible.

In LCL, events were thrown for almost any reason conceivable, which was due to the fact that any player could throw an event. Roughly half of the LCL events that I attended very little plot, and were much more in the name of role-play; often there would be some form of plot shenanigans going on amongst players at these events - if it was, it was plot had been organically created among those characters. On the other side of the coin, because any player could throw an event, the plot of an event was sometimes a thinly veiled attempt to further one's own means. Everything from attempting to bring back one's character from permanent death, to throwing a treasure-hunt where most of the players are from the event thrower's character's house or faction. This was hard to avoid, but we were able to control it to some degree with the use of Marshals. Simply put, Marshals were the referees of LCL. They were an Out-Of-Character presence whose entire job it was to ensure the event ran smoothly and with as few ruling calls as possible. So, I suppose the short answer as to how we avoided plot railroading was by taking the power from the event thrower, and by putting it in the hands of an objective third party. Any player could come up with a premise for an event, and were responsible for the organization of NPC's, magical items, loot, and plans for what to do if things went totally wrong. At that point, it was basically up the Marshal for that event for facilitate said plot as they saw fit in accordance with what the Event Thrower intended. It was not a perfect system, but it did save several events from becoming a total mess of self interest.

In regards to NERO, this will vary HEAVILY between chapters, and even inside chapters from plot organization team to team.  As a general rule, plot teams are free to run the organization of their town - including the format and/or existence of plot - as they see fit, as long as they generate sufficient revenue to justify keeping the town in existence (usually, this means making sure you have enough players to pay for the camp rental costs and to cover the percentage of the gate which must be sent to the National organization).  However, the "baseline" for most plot teams seems to be to have an overall "loose" plotline which the players can affect...but what is going to happen at *that particular event* is going to happen regardless of what the players do, because of the logistical outlay required to set up the events.  Between *that* event and the next event, plot teams look at what has happened and revise what may happen at the *next* event to fit the narrative the players have established.

Coming from both a player's as well as a Game Organizer's Point of View, the easiest to set up and evolve games are generally the ones where the G.O.T. would come up with a baseline plot and what we are hoping to have happen by the end of the current session, and how things might fit into the overall arc.  Then after the overall outline has been set up, we get the players into their positions and give them what they need to know to get started (Backgrounds, setting, brief run-down on what they have gotten intel-wise from loose lips) and then let them have at it. Alot of times, groups of characters, as long as they have some goal in mind, will pretty much write their own stories as they think or fight their way through the adventure. The Referees and Marshalls watch how things unfold, and adapt the situation to the changing scene.  So the players choose not to rescue the village, fine let it be destroyed now, but the group won't get the reward for helping to rescue the town (or maybe it was the smart thing, as the village may have been a baited trap, as one group tried to prove and actually spent an adventure weekend eventually proving to the rest of the Legacy populace).  Adapting to the player's changing the world is great, as long as the Operations team is on the ball and willing to listen and work with their  player-base, so rail-roading isn't necessarily needed as long as everyone has fun.

[Magness] - This varies greatly from game to game and from writer to writer, but general I would agree that it is a constant struggle.  As players, we do our best not to try and disrupt the plot flow.  We all know that PCs can derail any adventure and it just isn't much fun to crash the train.  However, good games are written such that there are multiple paths to completion or there are at least compelling reasons the PCs choose to stay on the tracks.  In the end it takes a certain level of cooperation between the game writers and the players to make things run smoothly.

Terra Nova has a large plot arc which will last a couple of years, in which certain things have been set in motion by a prewritten background. Usually, only one thing per year will happen that is prewritten in the story arc (but still it can be solved in many ways, or be left unsolved). A few more things will happen on an event which have been influenced by previous events. But all about them is

open-ended, to every problem there are multiple solutions and exactly how they're done has a huge effect for what happens next. And that's only with the prewritten plot elements which are a minor part of the Terra Nova. A lot of the larp's conflict comes from the clashing worldviews of its different cultures and it's currently evolving towards more of the player-provided content.

\David - In the IFGS we have two different game types, both of which have an overall plot as determined by the writer.  A line course is as you described, a series of encounters that help further along the story.  Then there is a world course that allows everyone to wonder freely.  In both types there is a point to everything and a main story to go along with it.  In the IFGS we do have a motto however and that is, "Never count on the PC to do what you want."  The scripted events are usually pretty open ended and don't typically have a required outcome.  The only requirement is for a certain bit of information to be passed on.  It is not unheard of for an encounter that is supposed to be strict information and no fighting to turn into a fight.  When this happens the GM will call the Game Writer and ask for a change so that the team can continue on.  However if the team runs the risk of losing the game or getting penalized for these actions.

*There are few things I hate in a game more than railroading. Thankfully we have very skilled world runners and plot teams that are fantastic at running. Events typically are planned out and PCs are given the hook. However, our group of players is notoriously unpredictable. They commonly will follow the plot and come up with a plan no one saw coming. Occasionally they'll decide they just don't like where the situation is headed and turn around and leave. A good example of the latter is a portion of the players decided to assassinate a corrupt political official. Instead of sticking around and dealing with the consequences they decided to up and leave on a whim and conquer a pirate isle. The plot team had no idea that was going to be the result and ended up re-writing the next four months worth of plot. The only parts of plot that I could see being considered heavy handed are the consequences of player actions. So, overall plot is very character driven though plot will occasionally try to direct it with the information that is leaked from black market and political connections. In the end it's always the players' choices that will effect what they do on each event. When that clashes with what's been planned the events that were going to occur don't just disappear. They often occur without player intervention and the players occasionally see the results of that. Our plot teams try hard to make Rexerit a living world where the PCs exist and experience what goes on around them and can affect things as they are capable.*

Let me start out by saying that the first game I ran as an Empty Thrones staff member was derailed about an hour into the game. The Players took what we gave them and ran with it; we loved it. We ran alongside them. In Empty Thrones we hold true to the idea that the game is a story of characters. It's okay if the players don't want to do what we plot out for them. It's their story, not ours. Any good narrative isn't about the plot, it isn't about things happening to people. A good narrative is about people happening to things, people causing things, and people doing things. The best games I've played in and run have had a basic outline for plot and have let the players do the rest. Allowing for players to have the freedom to do what they feel their characters would do is important to the enjoyment of both staff members and players. I even encourage NPCs to make world-changing and plot-changing decisions if they feel that it's something their character would do. Since the change in staff of Empty Thrones, it has become a game written by (ex) players and for players. We give them enough structure to help them if

they're lost, and enough freedom to let them spread their wings and fly in the entirely opposite direction.

*Rebecca really hit the nail on the head, as far as Empty Thrones goes. During initial design, we wanted to give players the license to pursue what interested them. If we planned out a big fight scene with a villain, but the players end up negotiating with the villain instead... That's great! The players pursued the course of action that they felt was right (right for the situation, right for the setting, right for their characters, whatever). As someone who has been running games (LARP and tabletop) for years, there is always a bit of stress involved in the players deviating from the intended story, but a really good RPG allows for and encourages that sort of spontaneity.*
*That being said, I do not think there is anything wrong with the GM saying "I want to tell this particular story, because I think it's cool!". The GMs are in that role because they enjoy telling stories, and sometimes they get emotionally attached to a plotline or an NPC. As long as their desire to tell that story, or their attachment to that NPC, does not result in them taking away player choice (ie. railroading), I think it should be encouraged for GMs to get invested in the fruits of their labor.*

*The best way that I've always told my plot teams was to have a skeletal structure for the weekend, but be prepared for the players to completely go off the beaten path. It's very important that you can roll with the changes and be not too stuck on your ideas. You just need to go with the flow.*

At Underworld we take plot very seriously. It's the product we sell, along with immersion. We allow our players to do whatever they like in regards to their own actions or reactions to the stories we tell. If they want to have an armed revolt against their NPC overseers and declare independence, so be it. Railroading kills immersion. If a player does something that's unexpected and "breaks" a plotline, that's the storyteller's fault not the players. Players need to feel they have complete freedom to act as their character would (and should).

**Between games, one of the first things we ask our players is where their characters want to travel next. We allow the PCs to vote on where to go, and once we have that answer, we begin working on an outline for what could potentially happen in the next game. (In the case of a split vote, we've considered running multiple events for a split party, but this has not been necessary yet. Individual characters have left the party temporarily, and when this happens, we talk to those players about what their characters are doing while they are away from the group.)**

**As we've run more and more events, we've learned to lean less on having exact scripts and more on spending most of our hours on designing intricate, believable NPC roles for the PCs to potentially interact with during the event.**

**Once an event starts, we're ready - and willing - to throw out any part of the script that no longer**

makes sense as a result of player actions. The script is, in my opinion, there to create options for the players - not to limit their decisions. Let's say we created a character - a demon in disguise - that is supposed to be the main antagonist for an arc. If one of the PCs is smart enough to realize this character is a sorcerer who is pulling the strings on a big army that is about to invade - and then slits the sorcerer's throat in the middle of the night - that PC just succeeded at an objective, and we're not going to magically take that away. We'll change, adapt, and congratulate the PC on their sorcerer murdering.

On a similar note, any tactic NPCs can use against PCs should be usable by PCs against NPCs as well. Thus, the murdering in the middle of the night is a viable strategy in Shades of Venaya - whenever possible, we encourage our major NPCs to sleep in-game when it is in-character for them to do so. Obviously, if the sorcerer lives somewhere nearby, or can teleport, he's probably not going to sleep in the same area as the PCs - and that's fine, as long as it's what makes sense in-character.

One of my main game design objectives is to make sure that the PCs can do whatever they feel their character *would* do in a given situation. They might choose not to take that option (because they feel like it would ruin the game for someone else or whatnot), but the option should be available. I've seen a number of games where players are punished for taking the initiative and playing in ways the game designers didn't expect - I try to do the opposite. I encourage players to surprise me. I see both the rules and good role-playing as tool kits for players to do awesome things, and many of those things should be beyond what the game masters can accurately predict in advance.

#Lisa Usually in Starship Valkyrie games, plot has a starting set of parameters and events that are going to happen in and around the area.  How the players respond to those scenarios is up to them.  They can choose to entirely ignore the story, and let plot know how they are going to respond.  Sometimes certain things cannot be ignored (a ship firing on yours is unhealthy to  ignore), but in general, the players' responses are anticipated, but not scripted.  Some ships have responded inappropriately and blown up.

In IFGS, games are heavily scripted.  They go through a sanctioning process and are designed to build a scenario and allow players to go through them.  A good sanctioning team will keep the designer from dictating player actions and instead help them to anticipate potential player responses.  The IFGS utilized GMs to help their teams get through the script and provide narration when the production wasn't clear.

I tend to prefer games that have decent scripts, but are flexible in their response to players.  A well designed scenario can push players to their limits.  I tend to find that games lacking in scripts are poorly organized and are difficult to communicate to the support staff. They generally don't run as smoothly.  It causes gaps and misunderstandings. I hate being led around by the nose.  I do like a well thought out environment with lots of opportunities for interaction.

On our events we describe a setting. There are several things that happen or are there no matter what the players do, just because in the setting they are not depending on some adventurers who come there. Moreover we write many side plots which have at least one way to be solved.
And then the players come and destroy or ignore half of it. There is even a saying "The plot doesn't survive the first encounter with the players"
This is the point to become really creative. On one hand the players will always find the logic fail in the story, so you have to make the background as sound as possible. On the other hand they will always find ways you haven't thought of.
As a GM you "just" have to be flexible and react to the players, which is sometimes really tough. Hence you might railroading without even really noticing it.
I have seen some GMs railroading their story no matter what the players were doing and it left many unsatisfied and frustrated, for they couldn't see any impact of their actions. Other GMs have reacted and sometimes completely changed the plot, because the original plan didn't make sense anymore. Usually this is the more satisfying way for both players and GMs. Sure the plot and the outcome changes a lot, but mostly it remains more logical and has a lot different but new potential for following events.

My system allows many different event throwers, making it harder to prevent railroaded plot. However, we do our best by having each event be signed off by the heads of the game, as well as needing multiple sub plots for the players to interact with. Basically, it they don't want to help Bill the Nobel fight Jeff the Insincere, they can go hunt goblins or whatever.

The most important thing to do is make sure the players have lots of options on how to spend their time.

RingGame / Second age is more like capture the flag, so there isn't a GM per se...just team leaders (Wizards) and judges who enforce the rules. Team leaders can only control their teams as much as they can control them, they are leaders by influence. The only time you *have* to do what the team leaders say is you must obey sauron in his/her presence, but even that can be interpreted in unintentional ways if the players want....Judges do sometime change the interpretation of the rules to fit the circumstances and or as the rules evolve, that can create a lot of anger/annoyance/ surprise, but judges are judges. So plot is really more like, where is the ring? have the players arrived at the rendevous place to join the army? What tokens are in play or have been exhausted? which citadels have been sacked? Leaders do try to control this, but it's a lot of herding cats.

IFGS games allow for complete freedom of action for the PCs. While most PCS behave in the expected manner, some do not. The NPCs have been given their character and are allowed to react as they will within the boundaries of the script. The GM for the team provides the support required for the new path the PC(s) have taken, and if they have questions they contact the Game Producer and/or the Watchdog.

**Topic # 3: The gap between new players and experienced ones**

Many fantasy larps take a page from a RPGs and include some variety of leveling system.

In your experience, what are some common benefits and drawbacks of this?  Is it important or productive to have a large divide between the power wielded by high level characters and newer ones?  If such a gap exists, how do organizers typically address or deal with it?

*Dying Kingdoms does not have a leveling situation as such. Attending an event earns the player Character Points, which they can spend on skills, magic power or special abilities. PCs generally start with 10-12 CP, and we have a cap at 100 CP. This has led to an informal breakdown - 20-40 CP characters are low powered, 40-60 CP characters are mid-range, and 80-100 CP characters are the most powerful. We work to maintain balance, that any given 40 CP or 80 CP character will be just as effective as another character with the same amount of CP but different spends. Our retirement cap has contributed more to the success of our game than any other mechanic. A PC just starting knows two things: they will only be able to make one significant mark on the world, but they **will** be able to make that mark. PCs who are higher-powered feel a responsibility to help out and protect the lower level characters, because they know that's where they themselves will be in the not too distant future. And since no single player is able to do everything, this helps fosters an environment where players form teams and work together.*

Level systems- probably the biggest pain in the rear end to PCs. It all comes down to how much power one has in comparison to another, and how effective they are. Ultimately, like it or not, we all wind up looking more at the mechanics of a game rather than its in-game functionality. It is somewhat required to have a difference between a seasoned player and a fresh out of Rule School new addition. One would not expect a freshly graduated student to have the same knowledge and ability in a given career as someone who has had experience of 30 years on top of the schooling.
However, the flaw arises that lower level players aren't as effective as higher powered ones. Thus, the new players are forced into the back while the veterans beat down the monsters and take the loot, leaving the scraps for their supposed 'lessers'.
From what I've seen, and what I try to put into practice, event staff members will organize plotlines and encounters specifically for lower level players. Additionally, I've seen random loot accompanied with these special encounters that boosts the player's abilities (or their funds) to boost their status within the community.

Chronicles of Demgard is very rules-lite, and includes no level-up or experience mechanics. By the nature of the campaign - series of loosely connected one-shot events in different ingame locations - players are encouraged to create new characters for most events, so the ratio of continued characters is quite low, somewhere around 10-20%, and from the nine (ten from 2013/07/05 on) events so far with yearly events, the characters continued for the longest amount of time appeared on three events.
We do have characters of different power levels, but this is either voluntary by the player - e.g.

someone wants to play an apprentice mage - or social power - e.g. power by having half a dozen armed followers.

Like I said - its a system without levels and experience. Physical fitness, available weapons and armour and the players own skills with them rule the day. If you want to be a great warrior - start training with the good guys, then get some gear then train some more and THEN find the exceptional guys and ask them to show you some tricks. The gap is combat experience and gear and both can be bridged fairly quickly, Still there are unicums - fencers, HEMA practitioners etc. who are extremely dangerous on the battlefield, but none of them is superhuman and 2-3 competent average guys can take him out.

As I mentioned during the permadeath topic I mainly attend cons that are using a rules system we call DKWDDK (Du Kannst Was Du Darstellen Kannst, which roughly translates to 'you can do whatever you can portray' or to use the somewhat similar term from tabletop gaming 'what you see is what you get'). As such we do not have levels or experience. As long as you can reasonably portray something you can do it, if you can't, leave it alone. This translates both to skills (to be good at sword fighting, be good at sword fighting; if you can't dig a hole, your character can't either; if you want to use magic, make a show out of it), and to roles (if you want to portray a rich nobleman you should have a fitting costume; if you want to play a dwarf you probably shouldn't be 2,30m; etc). This of course carries the problem of people being inevitably excluded from certain roles, however, larp being an (imo) highly visual hobby that thrives on immersion I'd much rather exclude people from certain roles than have the 'master swordsman' flail helplessly at a rookie, because in contrary to his character sheet he isn't a competent fighter, have a 'conman' who can't talk to people if his life depended on it, etc, because these people will ruin immersion for the rest of the players, and there most likely are other cool roles that they are actually able to portray well.
Getting back to power levels that means that players set them themselves. However higher power levels require certain prerequisites, be it real life skill, theatrical talent, a few friends willing to play your followers or a great costume.

I never kept track of the levels, I thought that particular mechanic was thoroughly broken. However...new players are LARP's lifeblood, so the older players, however experienced and close-knit they might be as a unit, MUST reach out to the newcomers and show them the ropes. We didn't learn from that and we suffered for it to the point where the ruling "council" drove everyone away.

In Amtgard, you gain a level in a class after signing in and playing that class for 12 weeks, and every 12 weeks after that. You may sign in and play as any class you wish each week, but most people at first find one they like and stick to it for a while. Its beneficial to players because it not only gives them something to work to, but it eases them into the class. By the time they reach level 6 (which is the max for all our classes) they know the class inside and out and know how it interacts with the other classes portrayed out on the field. Amtgard has 10 basic classes and they're all quite different. At our large events (not weekly park days) everyone just plays level 6 in whatever class they wish, and its on you as the player to know what you're doing. The real gap comes in the skill of the individual. Our most popular game in Amtgard is called "ditching" and its simply fighting in 2 teams without using classes, armor, or projectiles. Once all of one side is dead, the winning team sends over its first dead player to the losing team, or the losing team gets any new players wanting to jump in. Ditching never ends, and is to many the backbone of Amtgard events.

Level systems in this country are literally non-existent. The last larp that had one casesed to exist a few years ago and even before that levels systems wasn't a big thing. There is not much that a player can gain system wise even if he is a 10 years old veteran. But as Kildar mentioned one can still gain social power and such. Plus IRL experience is something that you can gain. New players are not really comfortable to play with veterans even if system wise there is no difference between them. It's like being the new kid in the school. So you need groups of new or newish players so they can "relax" and have fun even among veterans. "People persons" could help too to introduce and help the new guys.

Growing up in the table-top realm, I have never had a problem, either as a player or as staff, with the idea of levels/levelling. In fact, it makes the utmost sense to me, as the more you do things in life the better you are at them, which is reflected in the ideal of levelling (tougher, stronger, more points to buy new or improve old skills with, etc). IMHO, without this mechanic you may as well be simply an improv actor. Sure, you'll still have fun, but the only progress is your own story and those you interconnect with. Great for theater, not so much fun. Once again, just IMHO and I hold nothing against those who prefer other methods! As long as they're having fun in their own way it's all good, there's room in this world for all types of LARPs and LARPers! We've recently had events with level discrepancies of 2nd level through 55th (APL of 26, overall) and made it work. The key is to always make sure you have something going on for all levels and enough plot "meat" for everyone, from the highest to the lowest, to sink their teeth into.

While LCL did indeed use an XP accruement system, it has been an issue that I have had a hard time finding a side of the fence to sit on. In LCL there was a certain amount of grumbling from newer players about having to work their way up, but it rarely lasted more than a month. I think it is in people's nature to point out inequality, and often to attack it - but we were able to offset both player qualms and the power-level issue with magical items. At almost every event there would be loot of some kind to gain, and often, that loot included one or two (or four in one event's case) magical items that would grant the player using it some skill that was usually too expensive to gain from character creation. This turned out to be the singular thing that actually

made our leveling system work. Allowing a brand new fighter to have an item that gives them the ability to Resurrect can easily change the entire dynamic of an event, and often did. As to whether leveling should even be a thing - I think there is value to giving more to the people that have worked for a year (or years) to keep their character alive. It also reflects how Joe Average knows more at 35 than he did at 20, and I am a big fan of using real-life parallels in LARP whenever possible. Without those magical items, however, it could have been a big problem. Lastly, level cap, level cap, level cap.

The level system in NERO is the source of a tremendous number of game issues.  First, a disclaimer: NERO was never planned to be a "high-level" game where player levels would surpass 20th, and "high-level" play saw players ranging from about 10th-15th level.  At 15th level, for example, a fighter-type character could not physically swing for enough damage to drop an armored new player in a single hit.  They were undeniably more powerful characters, but a group of new players could still pose a threat to them.  Because NERO does not have a level cap, over time, players became attached to their characters and argued for less lethality, and the amount of permanent deaths decreased.  This allowed the APL (Average Player Level) to inflate, significantly.  In addition, people asked for rewards for helping out the game, and those rewards were, among other things, the capacity to artificially inflate your character's level, which increased the APL even further.  At this point, in a game where the starting new player will walk into the game with between 4-8 "hit points", hearing damage calls dealing 20-30 points of damage (with burst damage of 100-200 points) is not whatsoever uncommon.  The group of new players will still swing weapons for between 2-3 points of damage, while the player at level 35 can soak in the vicinity of 100 points of damage; the group of new players poses essentially no threat at all to the high-level character outside of VERY specific circumstances, and if a group of newbies accidentally ends up in combat with a monster sent out by the plot team to engage the high-levels, they're walking (and running, and screaming) dead men.  NERO is a poster child for the phrase "the road to hell is paved with good intentions"; rewarding people for helping is good, and taking pity on players attached to their characters in understandable...but it's has led to a horrible place where the game can quite often be very newbie-unfriendly, and many new player will simply NPC for a year to get the rewards so their character will start play as a higher-level character.  Finally, this is not to say that this disparity between high and low-level character cannot be worked around.  it's is completely possible to run an event where both high and low-level characters have fun.  But it is certainly a barrier to entry for new players, and a stumbling block toward running games where all participants can feel included and useful.  The level system is not *completely* bad for the type of game desired (essentially, live-action AD&D), but the modern implementation by NERO is an active detriment to the game, and a testament to why level caps are necessary.

Hmm, level disparity. What a topic. The issue with level disparity is that there people who do become attached to their characters, myself included, especially after sinking a significant amount of real life time and resources (kitting out I

believe it was called) to make a the character known in the game world.  The level system is supposed to be something of a balancer to the real life disparity in skill that people have while also escaping the limitations of the real world to play a character that someone idealizes themselves to be for whatever reason.  A brand new character should not be able to just "handle" a more seasoned character from word go, but on the same token, the veteran character should not be totally immune to the antics of a newer character should a challenge come about.  It is a double-bladed sword that Legacy tried to work with, wheras characters leveled, they got access to new abilities and tricks to help them survive in the world, such as the ability to wear better armor or call more damage per swing or access new spells, but that didn't make them invincible, untouchable supermen to everyone else in the game world. A few skilled and well equipped low levels could still bring a high level character down. It did not hurt that while we did not implement a "level-cap" as it were, it did become increasingly difficult to keep rising levels in a class after a certain point, and we did plan for things like characters that could "max out' at about level 50.  While we never did get a character that far, or even close to it, before the game folded, that allowed a person to theortically attend every event, be staff, do all kinds of volunteer work for extra build, and still have to play that character for 15-20 years to reach max level.  Yet even with all the skills and abilities, 2-3 level 10 characters could still run around with 2-3 level 2-3 characters, and all of them be useful.  It all depends on how the leveling/learning curve is set up and what kinds of rewards people have to strive to the next level.

The biggest issue that I think hits LARPs is not so much the brand new characters over the overbuffed top end characters, but the ones that sort of sit in the middle, being too high for things geared for the "noobs", yet too green and squishable for the standard fare for the "Elite" veterans.  Having played in more than a few systems, I usually can tell when the game has that cut off point. Sadly, for alot of systems, that is usually at the mark where a player has been coming and paying for about a year, and then they are stuck in that rut for the next 2 to 3 years as they are forced to over-extend to be one of the "big boys'girls" or just burn-out and give up to find something or somewhere that is more rewarding, like another LARP or a newer branch to the LARP where they were already at, in the hopes of becoming a bigger fish in a smaller pond. Thus is life, both in LARP as in the Real World.

   [Magness] - Our games are written with level ranges so that PCs on the same team are generally within a level or two of each other.  However, even with that we often see great differences between the guy who just created his first character and the gal who's been playing for 15 years but started a new character.  Generally we do our best to mentor novice players by including them on more experienced teams at low level.
   The main benefit I see from having a leveling system is the fun of character advancement.  You get to see (and experience) your character gain more power and ability.  The main drawback I see is the power gaps it can leave between characters.  Even characters of the same level can have power gaps

depending on how they are built.

Terra Nova larp uses a skill-based system which already starts characters as quite usable. Everyone can wear any armor as anyone else, and swing any weapon as everyone else for the exact same amount of damage. Some skills are combat-usable, some are not and the leveling is slow. After some 10 years of playing, it would be possible that a character has an advantage against new characters, but by no means is that advantage a guaranteed win - just an edge or some extra fluff.

\David - In the IFGS we have a total of 10 levels.  It takes a couple years for a character to reach level 10 and that is for a good reason.  Level 10 has some very powerful skills, abilities and spells.  In Dallas we only have three level 10s, and all three of them are very scary.  Yet when those who have a level 10 character start a new one they are actually in the same boat as a novice player.  The only there is a gap in player experience and level is because some of these players have been playing for 20 years.  The games that we write are written usually with a certain level range in mind.  So we could have a game meant for 4th through 6th levels and the game will be scaled in combat, puzzles and many others aspects to fit what a 4th through 6th level team can do.

*I've had the benefit of playing in systems that have character levels, as well as one that did not. I feel each one fits a different kind of story. With Living Adventures our main campaigns are designed to run for about 3 years. Over those three years characters will increase in power. Some Living Adventures' games has run have had everyone at a set amount of experience points, regardless of how long they've been playing. With Rexerit we currently have characters that have just reached "Tier 2" (there are a total of 3 tiers possible for this world, each one after an additional 100 xp) and new players that are coming in at "Tier 1." There are two main ways that the level differences are handled. Those below 66% of the highest experience receive experience faster until they catch up to the 66% mark. This allows newer characters to experience the growth of their character but not always feel like the weakest character. The other way that this is handled is while all abilities are purchased with experience, only a certain number of abilities may be "slotted" each event. Those abilities can change from event to event. Typically each character has at least six slots to fill. Abilities that can be slotted can be used a number of times per day or per called reset (marshals determine when resets are called). This way all character have a limited number of special things they can do outside of their normal ability to swing a sword, shoot a bow, or throw magic. Higher tiered characters tend to have more powerful abilities but the fact they are limited keeps lower point characters feeling involved and useful when combat occurs.*

Currently Empty Thrones is going through a rewiring and the leveling system will undoubtedly change within the next few months. However, I can say that Empty Thrones will never go with a "level" system of character progression. Instead, we use points (or XP). A player can use these points (which he or she acquires by attending games/donating goods) to buy maneuvers, skills, mana, magic, or other things. After the rewiring, Empty Thrones will be utilizing a tree system of buying skills. So a player can start off with the most basic of skills, and progress until they're more specific, but more powerful (the ability to use a sword, for example, will eventually branch into specific maneuvers a player can call during combat and will get more powerful as they progress up the tree). Empty Thrones is a very new game, so we have yet to have any characters retire due to our point-cap. However, a point-cap does exist in Empty Thrones. This

way, new players don't feel overshadowed by a 300 point character that can do everything. New players are encouraged in Empty Thrones, and we always encourage our more experienced players to help the new players. There is such a wide variety of options in Empty Thrones to go with when it comes to character creation, that we do not yet have two characters that are the same or encompass the same abilities (though we did recently come frightfully close by sheer coincidence). The gap between new players and experienced players is mostly seen in more social situations in game, where new characters don't understand what is going on and experienced players have a better idea of what the situation actually entails. Luckily, the players of Empty Thrones have no problem sharing information with new players.

*During the design of Empty Thrones, we borrowed very heavily from Dying Kingdoms - their character progression and rules were already established, and they paralleled our idea of how we wanted our game to work.  We didn't go with a leveling system because those are often very rigid - they don't easily allow for a player to dabble in multiple skills, which limits the number of scenarios they are "useful" in.  The "buy abilities as you go" system allowed for a lot more flexibility, so a player could focus on their magical ability for a few games, then switch gears and focus on their combat abilities for a few games, without "falling behind" the power curve.  Obviously, a player that wants to focus solely on combat will find themselves at a disadvantage in a situation that calls for having magic or lores, but the flexibility of the system gives them the chance to branch out*
*With regards to new players versus experienced players - the system also helps to mitigate that disparity.  An experienced player that does not have a particular kind of magic ends up turning to a new player that does, even if they don't have a lot of that magic.  A new player that has invested in the use of shields will have moments to step forward and shine, as will the experienced player who specializes in single-sword combat.*

*This will always be an issue.  You have new players that come in and experienced players that are far from them.  We tried to combat this by giving skills that were useful at all levels which will give the lower players a useful trait even in a high level group.  We also try to focus some of our plot teams to specifically target new players to make sure they enjoy the game.*

I think rules should give structure but they shouldn't be the focus of a larp. A leveling system and the skill sets that come along with it are needed for the same reason that any game has rules, otherwise you will find some players taking advantage of the game (or other players) due to their experience. With that said however, a 300 page rulebook can be intimidating to new players. Streamline and "keep it simple" are the keys to a successful larp.

In Avegost we maintain the convention of a leveling system though we seek to minimize the difference between a long term player and a new player. If we wanted to dress up and play table top strategy games, we could more comfortably do so from the comfort of our homes and could do so less restricted without the limitations of wanting to physically represent everything the players can see.

Instead, we've decided to LARP and we believe LARP lends itself uniquely to creating a sensory experience for participants. This sensory experience is bolstered if characters playing soldiers are actually strong, coordinated, fast, and physically imposing and politicians are convincingly clever, articulate, and intelligent.

To encourage this dynamic, an athletic, skilled, confident, and well armed, new player can very easily overcome the character of any of our most veteran players. Leaders actually have to be able to lead, scouts need to be able to physically find others in the woods, and archers should be proficient with their weapon.

Most of the "leveling" we have is used to simulate the in between game economy and to measure political clout with various regional forces that are not represented by players but as a design principle, new players are just as much of a force to be reckoned with as returning players in every aspect of the game.

Anyone interested in examining American games from this perspective should read Elizabeth Stark's, We Hold These Rules to Be Self-Evident: Larp as Metaphor for American Identity, which can be found in the 2012 Knutepunkt book and should be required reading for every serious American LARPer or event organizer.

In Shades of Venaya, our objective is for starting characters to already feel very competent, and to be able to immediately contribute to whatever aspect(s) of the game they choose to focus on. Characters begin with 250 points - by comparison, the most powerful PCs in the game have approximately 1500, or six times that. While 1500 may sound like a very high number, the ratio is much more favorable to new players than many skill-based systems. Our skill costs also escalate, meaning that buying extra hits, spells, etc. gets progressively more expensive. This helps lower the gap between new players and veterans even further.

In addition, our skills have "soft caps", where they become much harder to raise. For example, our melee damage has a "soft cap" of 3 points on normal attacks. (Special attacks that cost resources are exempted.) A new player could easily hit this amount if the push for it, or possibly even 4. Our 1500ish point veteran characters are hitting for about 6 - only roughly twice the soft cap. This difference, in conjunction with our hit point system, is a small enough margin to be overcome by player skill, proper planning, luck, or any combination thereof.

We use a hit points style system for most of our defenses in the game, meaning that if a character has 10 hit points and they are hit for "3 damage", they then have 7 hit points remaining. There are some other types of defenses, but this type is the core defense in our system, and most other defenses are also limited resources (meaning if you hit them enough they go away).

The reason this is important is because some other systems - such as the pass/fail defensive systems used in some other games - can make it impossible for low level players to damage higher level players or monsters. By having defenses be a limited resource, any character can (theoretically) kill

any other character with a sufficient number of attacks. (There may be extremely rare exceptions, like incorporeal characters, but in these circumstances the incorporeal character should not be able to impact the corporeal character, either, in my opinion.)

A starting character's points in Shades of Venaya are sufficient to buy all the way to the top of at least one skill tree. This means a starting character who chooses to specialize in combat could have one of the best combat maneuvers, or a sorcerer could have access to a powerful spell like Time Stop, Teleportation, etc. This helps new players be useful immediately, even if only in the area they specialize in. Alternatively, those new players are welcome to spread their character points out and be able to contribute in several areas, but to a lesser extent.

Our game has literally hundreds of different skill trees, many of which are not listed in the main rules. Most of our abilities are either regional (and located in regional rules supplements) or included in lore documents that are purchased with lore skills. This expansive system allows for new characters to potentially have skills that veteran players have never even heard of, if that new player has access to a type of lore that no one has seen. For example, we have more than fifty types of sorcery - everything from traditional elements like fire to concepts like time and communication. Every type of sorcery has a full skill tree, but most of these skill trees are in lore documents. A new player might come in as a sorcerer of an esoteric spell type - say, a blood sorcerer - and have skills that no one in the game has seen.

The sheer number of skills does add complexity to the game, but I feel that it's a worthwhile investment in order to allow each character to follow a unique path. I don't believe in the philosophy that players should have to "pay their dues" before they get to contribute or have a good time.

This system allows for veteran players to get a sense of constant improvement, while a new player can still come in and meaningfully contribute - be it through combat, diplomacy, crafting, or casting spells. We have mechanics for pursuing all of the above, potentially to the exclusion of all others; one of the most effective characters we've ever had was a purely political character with no skill at magic or swordplay.

#Lisa because a lot has already been said by most of the others, I would just be repeating most of their ideas.  I have been considering why we have to build characters up over time.  The continuous power build gives people a sense of accomplishment; however, it takes forever to get to that point.  I think it might be interesting for new characters to start at the same level as every other character.  It would be nice to have a competent character right from the get go.   You could retain a skill based system by allowing them to swap out powers.  I could see it happening in systems where there is a maximum build like Starship Valkyrie.

New players will always be at a disadvantage for numerous reasons: they don't know the system, they aren't familiar with their character or its abilities, they don't know how to

maximize what they do have, they don't know the people around them and so will get less social support, they will be unfamiliar with what equipment they may need to support them on course, and they will most likely have less skill in anything that the LARP demands of them like physical combat or lock picking.

I do think a maximum build helps characters from being too disparate in abilities.  I do like that Starship Valkyrie has started allowing new people to play existing characters so that they can get a taste for what an experienced player would build.

The problem that most campaigns recognize is that new players means continued life for the LARP.  You have to bring in new people because there will always be some attrition, even with the best of games.  It's incredibly important to bring in new players and help them acclimate to a new system or they will move on.  LARPs that don't bring in new people die.

For me personally the best system is DKWDDK (german abbr. for you can, what you can act). Mostly because it doesn't have any leveling system. It doesn't make any sense for a forty-years old to play an apprentice and it also seems strange to meet an 18-years old archmage.
But of course you will always have the gap between the experienced gamers and characters and the new ones.
Here on the one hand we prefer making many plots which you can solve or help solving without being super mighty and which therefore are also open to unversed players and chars. On the other hand we frequently see  old characters teaching the new ones and helping them along.

One problem lasts you will always have a difference in experience for the veterans have a lot more connections and knowledge then the newbies. But this belongs also to a sound mixture in a group for the new ones can bring in new ideas to solve the old problems by just not having the classic experience in solving xy.

In a boffer LARP leveling up only serves to widen the already natural gap in skill between new and old players. Without any change in stats, someone who has been fighting in a system for 2+ years can take any new player because they know how to handle a blade.

That is why there is no mechanical gain for those who have been in the system longer than others. No xp or new abilities are gained, but more experienced players will be able to beat new players in combat, have more skills and tricks as a rogue, better accuracy and spell memorization as a mage, and often command higher respect in social situations.

However, we do still have magical items which give players something to work for, though these are stealable meaning a less experienced player can still essentially steal the "level up" that a more experienced player may have bought.

Gap between new and old players is huge - this game has been played for over 20 years! The

game area is huge also, several square miles, so being an old player means not getting lost. The rules are not all written down (more so for Ring Game than Second age) and involve a large amount of custom and shared culture, so it can be hard for newbies to know what's going on. They pretty much have to run with a more experienced player for the day. That said, each game we have newbies play! Experienced players are highly valued for their insight, knowledge of the rules, and knowledge of where the paths/good hiding places are.

Advancing levels is the eventual result of participation in sanctioned events. With more experience comes more reward, more magic items, and more personal knowledge about the system and how to succeed as a PC in the system. IFGS events are structured such that in most cases, the levels within an event are within one or two of each other. Thus in a 1st - 3rd level game, there will be no 5th level PCs involved, and in a 7th-9th level game there will be no 4th level PCs involved. This keeps the level of play reasonable for all participants and prevents anyone from feeling like a useless third wheel on the team.

**Topic # 4: Further Questions**

Is there anything you'd like to say to or ask of the other people participating in this project?  Or to Dave, the guy writing this thing?

*I think many larps ought to take the opportunity to seriously interrogate their assumptions when they write plot, and avoid falling into common tropes and cliches. Games should try to break out of the Euro-centric, Tolkienesque world view and draw (respectfully!) from Asian, African, South American, Polynesian and Native American cultures. Not just monsters - take inspiration from different cultures, and incorporate those into your games as playable nationalities. Play around with morality, and different concepts of good and evil - what if evil correlated with ignorance, and the measure of how good a person was evaluated based on what they contributed to their community? Play around with gender, as well - count up the number of NPCs in your game, and see how many men vs women you have in your scripts (as well as how many male leaders vs how many female leaders). Try writing your NPCs without defining their gender - whether they turn out male or female depends only who ends up playing that character. The strength of larp is our ability to imagine wholly distinct worlds from our own, and we should take that idea and run with it to the fullest extent possible. It's the games which subvert our expectations and defy cliches that we remember the best.*

A **question** to those associated with other games: What makes your game unique? Almost all games appear to be in a medieval fantasy setting with standard RPG races, weapons, settings, and abilities. Do you make a new spin on a classic concept? Have your own special races? Perhaps you have a theme that is uncommon to the LARP genre as a whole?
In Gisido, we flipped dark elves on their head, so to speak. They are friendly and outgoing while the common stereotype is that they are secluded and avoid interaction with outsiders. We also take aspects of real mythology when writing up appearances and behaviors of some monsters. For example, our kobolds are those of german mythology. We also brought in automaton beings as a player race and included some relatively rare (in game that is)

steampunk technologies.

To what makes our game unique:
It's not the setting. Actually, we even purposefully built it to make it easily relatable. It's what we do with it: This "easily relatable" part - with some other factors - is to aid the players in creating their own backstories, setting their own goals and motivations, and from that, we link these together to form the "plot" of the events. This is currently unique or at least uncommon in Hungary, and I'm pretty sure it isn't really common in the international scene either.
The other part which sets it apart from most of the other larp is its rule system - it is very rules-lite and the combat system has no mention of health points or damage values. It can be summarized by basically one sentence: "If you get hit, act accordingly."

Dave: I think the thing that makes my game unique is that we do three rule meetings a year, that anyone is welcome to attend and participate in, and then everyone who wants a vote gets one with no special weighting of votes.  If something doesn't pass by higher than a 2/3rds majority then it doesn't happen.

*Rexerit is by far the most unique Living Adventures game that we've had. To start out with, the players designed the world they play in. We had a three module long "prequel" where this occurred. Also, you will find no elves or dwarves here. Every fantasy race is unique. Most of them are very humanoid, but some are creatures similar to bugs, others are closer related to trees (and become trees as they age and die). Another part that is different from most games is we're not really a medieval fantasy game. Our cultures and societies range from the barbarians that would have evolved shortly after cave men, to cultures found during the renaissance, to the technologies of the Victorian era, to one society that has discovered how to use undead for advanced computing (and has what is the equivalent of smart phones). ([http://www.livingadventures.net/campaigns/rexerit](http://www.livingadventures.net/campaigns/rexerit))*

To Dave- I wish you luck with your book. If you've any other questions, feel free to ask. :)
Seconding this. All the best with your project :)
And likewise if anyone has any questions I  will be happy to answer them.
Third-ing this. Best of luck!
Go kick some ass, Dave. Also,
[http://www.damnlol.com/i/f4b207cec4c57e5c27e79bf38bba88a4.jpg](http://www.damnlol.com/i/f4b207cec4c57e5c27e79bf38bba88a4.jpg), because I love you.
Dave: You're seriously the fifth person to send that to me.
Thank you to everyone for the good wishes and support.

Yes - bring me Hungarian larpfag for the whole spear in the ass thing. Thank you.
Come to our game at autumn and your ass will get more spears than it can handle
No U. Im busy bringing down the government.
Come back when you do it with tanks
Oh I will allright...

As for what makes our game unique, I think there are a number of features that help to distinguish our game:

-When a character purchases the "Lore" skill for a specific subject, we often provide the player with a document related to that lore. This document contains both in-character text written from the perspective of someone in the setting and out-of-game rules information related to the lore. While some other games do this, Shades of Venaya emphasizes this as a core element of play. We have over three hundred lore documents, with 70+ more on the "to do" list.

-Our systems are built to make sense in-character sense in the game world. Any sorcerer worth his or her salt knows where his or her magic comes from, the basics of how it works, and what it costs (from an in-character standpoint).

-For example, our robust "Dominion Sorcery" system allows players to research their own spells by combining basic spells with "keys" that they learn. Dominion Sorcery involves using a part of yourself to cause a Dominion to create an effect. For example, a Fire Sorcerer draws on his or her body heat to pull flames from the Dominion of Fire.

-Our different regions have visually distinct fighting styles with different abilities. For example, the Aayaran Instant Striking Style is modeled after Iajutsu, and it involves abilities for drawing a weapon straight into a powerful first attack. Different styles are intentionally designed to counter one another, allowing veteran duelists to switch styles based on evaluating their opponents' techniques. This also means that you can try to logically guess at someone's capabilities based on your knowledge of their background, since someone who grew up and trained in the city of Terisgard is very likely to know different fighting styles than someone who grew up on a farm on the continent of Vylin Tor.

-We have several special abilities that encourage cooperative gameplay, such as combined spells and attacks between multiple players. We encourage cooperation in nearly all of our systems, even diplomatic skills and crafting.

-Our extremely broad variety of skills, combined with high starting point values and multiple different game regions, allow new PCs to start with skills that even veterans may have never seen.


QUESTION: How do you make magic immersive and believable in your game and does it work in combat, without time freezes or out-of-character game calls?
We used Marshals, who were dedicated Out-Of-Character presences at events. Their entire job was to keep events running smoothly. We also enforced that all players had to learn the magic system before playing, *and* that if you were hit with a spell you did not know, then you had to die on contact. After a month or two, spell clarifications were the least common thing     that stopped our events.


          I find Amtgard to be highly unique.  Our culture is mostly focused on combat, and this makes for some intense battlegames, and highly technical and specialized fighting.  Playing your character isnt something we do all the time, and some dont roleplay really at all and are only there to hit someone.  The beautiful thing about Amtgard is that both styles of player are welcome and will find a huge amount of things to do.  If you just want to fight all day and not even play in a class game, you can do that.  If you want to get into your character and vanquish evil monsters (or hell, BE an evil monster) you can do that

too.  There is no limit to the things you can do without any sort of hard and fast rules that make you play the same way each time.

Something else that makes us unique is our system of awards and knighthood, as well as our system of government.  You can earn awards for all sorts of things from fighting, to crafting, to service to the game.  Eventually, you can become eligible to earn knighthood from your Kingdom, which is something many players aspire to.  The size of your group determines what level of award you may give out, so in order to earn the higher level ones, you'd have to participate and/or compete at the kingdom level.  Amtgard has 15 kingdoms currently, with new ones being formed almost yearly now.  Our officers are elected by popular vote and serve 6 month terms. This applies to Kingdom officers as well as park officers.  The Monarchy has 4 positions: Monarch (group CEO) Regent (Cultural officer) Prime Minister (Group record keeper) and Champion (Game writer and safety officer).  Each of those have several duties beyond the short blurb description I provided.

Magic works really well in our combat.  Some spells are represented by spellballs which are generally made from cloth and a non-rigid core material (rubber bands work great), some are only a verbal component, and others are enchantments that require a cloth strip tied to the bearer that is visible to everyone. You cant move your feet while you cast (some exceptions), and you must be audible within 50 feet.  4 of the 10 classes are magic users, and they all behave somewhat differently.  If you want to check it out and dont want to slog through the entire rulebook, check out **www.amtwiki.net** (if you want to read the rules, you can do so there as well)

Our group is currently in the midst of developing a new ruleset that is set to be finalized in July 2014 (Amtgard Version 8)  that utilizes some different rules than what I've described, but will be WAY easier to learn than the current ruleset is for a brand new player.  If you're interesed, i encourage you to take a look at the V8 rules and see how we as a game are growing.  We are playtesting and providing feedback to the rules committee all the time, so everyone has a chance to get involved in making the new rules.

Dave: Our mages wave their arms around and chant out some spell verbals that typically describe the spell they're casting, then they huck their beanbag and shout the spell name. When done right it makes them more palatable, but I've really been wanting to move our magic system towards one of those DKWDKsomethingorother systems.  Which may be an unrealistic pipe dream given that our players are young and poor.

Getting back to the original question, we made the calls in-character and require some acting.  It works in combat, but it doesn't look that good to outside observers.

*Our calls for most magic is pretty standard. There's an incant, and then the effect. The phys rep for the magic needs to hit the target. This changes with AOE spells where the tags "Radiate", "Chant", and "Emanate" are used. These are used commonly for larger ritual effects or higher magic, and if you hear it (and are either an enemy in the case of emanate, or ally in the case of chant)  you take the effect.*

*Empty Thrones uses a similar system; the magic user must make a declaration/incantation similar to "By the power of Fire, I cast fire bolt" and throws a spell packet (a bean bag).  If the packet hits anyone (whether it was the caster's intended target or not), the person struck takes*

*the effect of the spell. For area effect spells, we use Voice Effects, and the caster usually shouts something along the lines of "By the sound of my voice, I cast fear". Everyone that hears it suffers the effect. For targeted AoE spells, the caster uses the same incantation, but adds "my enemies" or "my allies" to indicate that the effect is targeted to only the named targets.*

*In general, the system works very well in combat; there are occasional time freezes when someone casts an obscure spell, but it's fairly rare.*

*As for making it immersive, we strive for roleplaying through the casting of the spell. In combat, it's as simple as the incantation. Outside of combat, for ritual spells or something like that, we try to encourage people to set up the ritual circle, recite a lengthy prayer/spell, and really try to convey that what they are doing \*is\* magic.*

**QUESTION:** Where are your games usually held (as in, camps, middle of the forest, parks, etc.) and how much is the entry fee? (Optionally: how many players go to a game on average)

*Empty Thrones usually holds single-day games, and utilizes free public parks whenever possible. Occasionally we have used private residences, and when we held an overnight camping event, we used a pay-by-night campsite in the mountains near San Diego. Unfortunately, California can be difficult to find inexpensive, yet immersive/thematic locations to hold games - especially further south, for some reason.*

*As for the number of players, we typically get an average of 20 people, with a good mix of PCs and NPCs.*

*Our games are held in parks for Weekday evening and Saturday events. We use campsites in the mountains for weekend long events (or cabins in the winter). Entry is currently $35 which covers 3 months worth of events, or you can prepay $100 for the whole year. In the summer we average 20-30 people on an event. The winter is closer to 15-20 (unless there's a huge snowstorm, then attendance shoots up for some reason). Our largest events are at conventions where we'll hit around 90 players.*

Good luck, hope I helped, even if only a small bit! As to answers to various questions from other contributors: 1. NERO is mostly "standard" with a few quirks and our chapter has a few extra ones (races/cultures that differ from the rest of the game world, etc); 2. Our chapter is extremely immersive in plot lines and details, with even the "filler" serving to further along our various plotlines, generally speaking, which seems to be the opposite of the more general formula; 3. We play at a campground in Orange CT and meals are included in our pricing (www.nerohartford.com) and, for NERO as a whole different chapters charge different rates, mostly based on their expenditures (camp fees, food, etc); 4. If I missed anyone's question or anyone has any further questions for me feel free to ask away! *smile*

Amtgard is played weekly in public parks in many areas in the US and Canada (as well as a few places worldwide) Regular park attendance is free, and in order to be a "member in good standing" in most areas you need to meet an attendance requirement and pay dues (6$ for 6 months), but this is not

required to play.  Events vary in price but i've never seen one exceed 30$.  Most events serve at least one meal, and sites can be either primitive or very modern.  I hosted an event in a state park group camp that had cabins for everyone who came, modern dining facilities and a swimming pool for a $20 gate fee for the whole weekend.

Usually we rent a campsite, a hostel or houses from scouts. The main requirements are, that the places are outside towns and villages, so we don't have to pay attention to the passers bys, and have a reasonably big forest.
The fee is for PCs between 50-90€ and for NPCs 5-40€ for a 3-4 days event depending on the location, duration of the event and potential board.
In the last con we have organized participated 60 PCs and 40 NPCs. The little conventions I have attended can reach up to 200 participants.

QUESTION: If any of you are in systems with relatively low population, what is your main method of player recruitment? When one cannot rely on the fact that they live in LA, or New York, what does one do increase interest in your system?

When Empty Thrones first started, there weren't any other LARPs like ours in the San Diego area.  There were a few combat-focused groups like Amtgard and Belegarth, but no story- & roleplay-driven games.  We started out by advertising with flyers at a few game stores, as well as posting information about our game on the message boards for some LA-area LARPs that we participated in.
When we finally decided to actively recruit local players, we started holding fighter practices in a couple local parks every weekend.  We started off with 4 fighters, and quickly ended up with regular practices of 12 or more.  This worked spectacularly well - maybe too well at first, as it was just me and one other person writing/running at the time.  The influx of new players made for a lot more work than we expected!  Ultimately, though, those fighter practices worked like a charm, and the majority of the people that found us that way have continued to be heavily involved in the game.

In general, NERO depends on word-of-mouth advertising and the occasional "fighter practice" in a public place to attract interest.  At one time, actual "advertisements" were used, including the article in TSR's "Dragon" magazine (Issue #173) that caused a serious upswing in NERO attendance numbers for some time.  However, mainstream advertising of a larp in the United States is going to be a dicey proposition at best, due in large part to our cultural biases against hobbies not already socially-accepable and/or not sport-related, (see also:
http://www.tor.com/blogs/2012/06/larp-in-film-the-okay-the-so-so-and-the-horrifying), and so actual advertising for the game fell off in the late 1990s.  The best and largest advertisement for NERO currently are the 1 and 2-hour dungeons run by NERO Chicago at the Origins and GenCon Game Fairs; with relatively high production values for a US-based larp, an audience predisposed to like gaming-related things in general, and at events with a

combined total attendance of about 50,000 people, they do reasonably well. Some NERO players and chapters have discussed local TV spots or similar, but run up hard against the fact that, due to generally low standards of appearance in NERO, the activity simply does not film well, which usually scuttles the idea.

Dave: Going to local ren fairs and distributing flyers to our local nerd caves has somewhat increased our numbers.  Mostly it has been a slow accumulation by word of mouth.  We do demos for the scouts and local college, both of which we have a loose affiliation.  It also helps that one of our dedicated staff positions focuses solely on recruitment year round.

Around here the only working thing is word of mouth and convincing specific persons that this is indeed the "best thing ever". Flyers and other advertisement methods doesn't really work here plus as it was said before, a larp could look like shit from an outside point of view. Even if you have better costumes. But it's really important to have at least good photos about the game with good costumes on it, because if someone ask you what is this all about you can talk all you want, it won't really convince them if they can't see it.
Also, don't show just the best of the best, show them the average and the low tier stuff too, because if you show only the best they can easily go "well, I could never get such a costume". Plus you don't want to lie about what they will see in the game. You want them to come back again and again not just play one time.

To what makes our game unique: Several specific cultures flavor the setting and the larp into something unique. We have roles which are both easy and hard to relate to, depending on what its players desire, and we have something for everyone. We're also doing a colonial theme which isn't too common over here. We change terrains both in-game and off-game to get a feel of different places. And we provide awesome and memorable meals.
I'd like to add another thing to what makes Terra Nova unique: it was (and currently is) a meeting point for at least three different kind of larp cultures with emphasis on different aspects of larping. (PvE, factional conflict driven story, nordic/introspective)

To Dave: good luck!

Immersive magic: we found that spells with no ranges in the workbook eliminated many of the time freezes, and immersion is helped by material components and good performance.

Where are our larps held: usually on a private terrain that includes forest and meadows. We camp. Once we were indoors in a hunting lodge for a winter larp. PC prices so far ranged between 50 and 100 kn (approx. $9 - $18), while NPC prices ranged between 20 and 40 kn (approx. $3.50 - $7).

Player numbers and recruitment: Terra Nova is still a new larp, our highest number ever was 32, which we plan to outdo next year. We're currently open to all ways of recruitment. Most progress so far has been done over word of the mouth, doing presentations on conventions and over social networks.

\David - IFGS is a very family oriented type society.  We are based out of Colorado, but our most active chapter is here in Dallas and also the up and coming East Central Oklahoma(ECO) chapter.  We originated actually from a book called Dream Park.  Very good book and I suggest giving it a look, it shows LARP before it even really caught on as an activity.  We also enjoy having people from other LARP groups come and check us out.  We have members now who have been part of the SCA, NERO, Dragonstone, and some other smaller ones.  Look us up and see if there is a local chapter you would like to participate in.

David Wood
Dallas IFGS Chapter President

*Good luck Dave! I hope the answers helped at least a little. If you need any clarification or something rewritten to make more sense just let me know! :)*

*Good luck, I know my answers might not have been very extensive, but if need be I can go back and give more details.  I hope you got what you needed.*

Thanks for the invite and good luck. If I were you I'd bring up the difference between larps in North America and Europe and describe how open people are to larping in Europe as a hobby. North American players are often surprised at the level of costume and photographs from European larps, mostly because of the massive industry there to support it. I'd close with what North America can do to emulate the European model and how to open up larping to more North Americans - Edward Watt, Underworld LARP

**General Comment:**

**Some of the best ideas I've come up with for Shades of Venaya have been inspired by other media. I highly recommend reading books with well-established magic systems (such as Brandon Sanderson's Mistborn series or Patrick Rothfuss' Name of the Wind). In addition, I'd advise looking at console games, pen and paper games, and PC games for ideas. For example, the cooperative attacks skill in Shades of Venaya - which allows two or more characters to create a special attack that they can execute together - was inspired by the classic console RPG Chrono Trigger.**

**In addition, I'd like to encourage my fellow designers to participate in discussions on some of the awesome public LARP forums out there, such as http://www.reddit.com/r/larp.**

I think that most games consider themselves unique in one way or another, and in fact…. they are unique! IFGS is also unique, and in many ways. First, we are not realism Nazis - our Prime Directive is to HAVE FUN! We don't care if your costume is great or is terrible. We like

anachronisms and bad puns and overacting. Second,we allow for nearly full flexibility in the design of PCs and games. Thus we have Steampunk PCs that game with Barbarian fighters and robot PCs from another dimension next to Star Trek officers. We have Sea Elves, Dark Elves, and Elvis impersonator PCs. The variety and imagination of our players is constrained only by the rules that you would expect for any family friendly group: watch your language, reserve adult themes for adult-only games (we have a Naughty Hellfire Club, for example), treat each other with respect and courtesy, act and be safe at all times, no alcohol or illegal substances, and no one *under the influence* may participate. Other than that it's wide open!  :)

http://www.dallasifgs.org