Free Play

One of the cornerstones of tabletop RPGs is *free play*, a state of the game in which the actions players can take are not strictly delineated by the rules for system such as combat or the travel round, but rather determined by the context of the narrative and by the rulings made by the GM, and Last Odyssey is no different. The following section is a guide to the mechanics and frameworks that exist in Last Odyssey that GMs can use to facilitate free play while following Last Odyssey's storytelling principles.

Skill Challenges

Sometimes, players will attempt to solve problems in free play by leaning on the innate skills of their player characters rather than on their own creativity or knowledge of the game world. When this happens, the GM should give them the opportunity to initiate a *Skill Challenge.* During a Skill Challenge, the player first declares what they intend for their character to accomplish, and then how they intend to achieve it. The GM then determines which of the player character's three attributes, Body, Spirit, or Mind, best represents their capacity to perform the action at hand. After that, the GM chooses a number called the *difficulty modifier,* which is a number between -7 and 7 that represents how difficult it would be for this character to perform this specific action. All difficulty modifiers are contextual not only to how difficult the action is but how difficult it would be for a given player character to perform it. The only hard and fast rule for determining difficulty modifiers is that they should be consistent with the GM's previous rulings. For example, if walking across a rickety bridge has a difficulty modifier of -4, then walking across another rickety bridge also has a difficulty modifier of -4 unless there are extenuating circumstances. If the GM is uncertain what difficulty modifier to assign to a Skill Challenge, they should choose relative to the scale below:

+7. Trivial. This is a task that the player character can do without difficulty under normal circumstances.
+3. Easy. This is a task that the player character can do without effort, but only under ideal circumstances.
+1. Likely. This is a task that the player character has a minor advantage in accomplishing, whether circumstantial or due to their previous actions.
-1. Unlikely. This is a task that the player character has a minor disadvantage in accomplishing, whether circumstantial or due to their previous actions.
-3. Hard. This is a task that the player character will need to spend significant effort in order to accomplish.
-7. Impossible. This is a task that most ordinary human beings cannot perform.

It should be noted that different player characters will find the same tasks more or less difficult depending on the circumstances and on a character's means. For example, a scrawny scholar weighed down by their pack might find jumping over a ravine to be Hard or Impossible, while an athletic warrior unburdened by armor or equipment will find the same task to be Easy or even Trivial. Only one character can attempt a single Skill Challenge at a time, but the aid of other characters can change the difficulty modifier to be more favorable if the GM deems it appropriate. For example, a character might find it Unlikely to climb up a wall alone, but find it Easy if given a boost by their athletic friend. Difficulty modifiers for the same or equivalent tasks should also not change as player attributes increase. The increased probability of their success also represents an increased ability to navigate challenges that comes from gaining experience as an adventurer. After the GM sets the difficulty modifier and determines which attribute is most relevant to the Skill Challenge, the character's player rolls a 1d10 and adds the result to the difficulty modifier. If the total number is equal to or under the attribute being tested and/or the result on the 1d10 is equal to a 1, then the character succeeds at the action they are attempting. If the total number is above the attribute being tested and/or the result on the 1d10 is equal to 10, the character fails to accomplish their goal.

If a character fails a Skill Challenge, their player may spend a single point of Anima to succeed due to good fortune rather than their innate skill. If their player chooses not to do this, then no Skill Challenges featuring the same attribute can be attempted again by them or any other players. This means that the entire party has at most three chances to succeed at a single task with Skill Challenges alone, and usually fewer. For example, if the party is attempting to get past a door, one of them can make a Mind Skill Challenge to pick the lock, and then another can make a Body Skill Challenge to break the door down. If both of these fail, they cannot be attempted again, and the players must either spend Anima to succeed or find another way to bypass or open the door. There may also be additional consequences for the party if they fail a Skill Challenge depending on the circumstances. This could include the player characters sustaining an injury, being forced into a battle, or losing cr or other resources.

Player characters should not be able to attempt Skill Challenges to do things that are physically impossible for them, such as leaping to the moon or persuading a door to open with cunning argumentation. There are also many tasks that should not count as Skill Challenges at all. For example, locating new knowledge should be a matter of an investigation roll, and anything that counts as a puzzle should be difficult if not outright impossible to brute force with a Skill Challenge. Skill Challenges also cannot be attempted when the attribute being tested is inappropriate for the situation at hand. However, there are a few actions that can always be handled with a Skill Challenge if possible. These are:
Body: Athleticism. Running, jumping, climbing, swimming, and other similar feats of bodily strength are the subjects of a Skill Challenge involving the character's Body.
Mind: Mechanics. Doing mathematics, playing games of strategy, or manipulating a device to do something it wasn't designed to do is a matter of a Skill Challenge involving the character's Mind.
Spirit: Emotion. Whether pretending to feel or genuinely expressing a particular emotion, swaying others by performing it is a Skill Challenge involving a character's Spirit.

Lore

Players will naturally be ignorant of many aspects of a campaign world. There are some aspects of a campaign world, though, whose discovery is not only salient to the campaign but also non-trivial to discover. In Last Odyssey, these

pieces of information count as *Lore.* While traveling the world, players will discover facts of particular import to the campaign. This can include facts about the Antagonists, facts about the history of the world, facts about its culture and people, and specialized academic or scientific knowledge. When players learn these facts for the first time, they should be granted 1 XP for each small piece of Lore that they learn about something, with the total amount of Lore available on a certain topic depending on how important the GM wants it to be. Generally speaking, an adventure-level topic will grant up to 5 XP, a regional topic will grant up to 10, and a campaign-defining topic may grant 20 XP or more. Players are also able to learn more than one Lore statement at a time, but each individual piece is worth 1 XP. By the end of a Lore-heavy campaign, the players will have an extensive Lore bible that they can refer back to when needed. Player characters cannot earn XP for learning the same piece of Lore more than once.

Besides earning XP, the main reason players will want to seek out Lore in Last Odyssey is that it is actionable. Players should record pieces of Lore that their characters know in a diary or somewhere on their character sheets. Later on, they can use relevant Lore that their characters already know to solve puzzles, bypass Skill Challenges, or succeed on investigation rolls. This does not require the expenditure of Anima, the use of XP, or any additional dice rolls. If the players and the GM agree that an item of Lore will help them succeed on a task, it simply does. This aspect of Lore makes it useful for simulating certain forms of player character knowledge that might otherwise be cumbersome to handle. Here are some examples:

Language. The default assumption of Last Odyssey is that player characters can communicate with whatever NPCs they need to. GMs that want to make language a centerpiece of their campaign can represent it as Lore. The more adept the player characters become at a language, the more XP they earn, and the more they can say, write, and understand. This applies equally to living languages and dead ones.

Technology. In some settings, remnants of past technology are scattered around the environment. Learning to use and operate this technology could be a matter of Lore. The more technological Lore the players gather, the more they can use the technology of the ancients, allowing them to solve puzzles, gain equipment, and sometimes even gain advantages in combat.

Ritual Magic. While player characters may innately use the power of Mana, there are certain uses of it that are not immediately available to them. In settings with high magic, or with occult or spiritual elements, certain powers can be invoked by elaborate series of steps that the players can perform. The players should know all of the steps of a ritual to use it, and learning each step will net them 1 additional XP.

Etiquette. High-risk social situations such as courtship or diplomacy will have strict rules around how to behave. If players are not already well-versed in certain matters of etiquette, the GM could represent learning the rules with Lore. Players' relative skill at a given type of etiquette would correspond to the amount of Lore XP they have earned during the learning process.

Exploration. Learning the locations of lost trade routes, ruins, or hidden temples can also count as Lore. In this case, the players would earn 1 XP per clue as to where the thing they are seeking is located, and also earn additional Discovery XP when they arrive. See the Earning Experience section for more details.

Puzzles

In addition to combat and Lore, player characters can also earn XP via the completion of puzzles. In Last Odyssey, a *puzzle* is a task that requires a significant amount of thinking on behalf of the players to solve, as opposed to the player characters solving it within the narrative or through another of the game's mechanics. In terms of XP, each puzzle is divided into *stages,* which are discrete problems that the players have to solve in order to advance to the solution. Each time the players complete a stage of a puzzle, they will earn 5 XP, both as a reward for clever thinking and also to indicate that they are on the right track. Here are a few examples of possible puzzle stages:

Persuasion. When the player characters need to convince someone to do them a favor, this counts as a puzzle. The solution to the puzzle will be an argument that wins them over. GMs should think about what the character being persuaded wants, and what sort of tactics might make them more or less likely to come over to the players' side.

Cryptography. Decoding a message or interpreting a set of symbols using logical techniques (as opposed to translating an ancient language, which would involve Lore) is a classic RPG puzzle. GMs might provide the players with a written sheet of paper to decode, or finding the key to the cipher might also be a matter of discovering Lore.

Object A/Object B. Finding the correct object, piece of information, or person to interact with another object or person in order to create a particular effect is an object A/object B puzzle. Examples include finding the combination for a padlock and figuring out how to douse the fire in a flame trap.

Riddles. A riddle, in its most abstract terms, is a series of obtuse or abstract clues that hint at the players needing to perform a specific action or set of actions. The difference between a riddle and cryptography is that riddles are not meant to be decoded, but rather understood metaphorically or through wordplay.

Hide and Seek. When the players have to figure out the location of a hidden object such as a trapdoor or hidden lever, this counts as a puzzle stage. There should be some way for them to find it based on environmental clues. Noticing these clues can be the subject of an investigation roll if necessary.

To solve a puzzle, players are going to need clues. The GM should allow a single instance of each type of investigation roll maximum representing the player characters' search for clues to a given puzzle. However, this does not constrain the number of clues that players can uncover, but rather the number of clues that their characters are able to uncover without player input. Once the players have asked questions as a result of their investigation rolls, if they want to uncover more clues they should have to do so entirely via free play. For example, if a trapdoor is hidden underneath a rug, and players do not find evidence of it as a result of an investigation roll, they can still do so by narrating how their characters search the rug. There should not be a point at which players are unable to learn more about their environment through additional actions, regardless of the results of any rolls they have made.

In reality, most stages of a puzzle will count as more than one of the examples given in this section, so GMs shouldn't worry too much about strictly assigning a category to each one they create. When creating a new puzzle, the GM should decide how many phases there are in advance, and also come up with at least one canonical solution for each stage. Players should earn the XP involved in completing a stage regardless of how they solve it. This encourages more

creativity in free play, and is also fairer to players who might otherwise grow frustrated with being stumped. In some cases, players may attempt to brute force a puzzle via a Skill Challenge or combat. For example, they may try to defeat a guardian in combat rather than answering a riddle, or use Emotion to persuade someone rather than making a good argument. If the GM deems it possible, all of the rules for combat and Skill Challenges apply as normal, but players will still earn the same amount of XP as though they had solved the puzzle normally.

Abilities Outside of Combat

Player characters, being endowed with the power of Mana, can use their spells to defeat enemies. These same spells will sometimes have utility outside of combat. When necessary, GMs should adhere to the following rules when making rulings about how they function:

The MP cost of an ability is the same out of combat as it is in combat. Players can cast as many abilities at a time as they like.

Any ability that is usable in combat can be cast in a matter of seconds. In cases where time is a factor, the lower the AP cost of an ability, the faster it can be cast. If two characters use an ability at the same time the ability with the lower AP cost is activated first. If they both use abilities with the same AP cost, the effects trigger simultaneously.

The physical effects of an ability are determined by its type. Attacks will damage the environment with appropriate force and scope. In particular, multi abilities will affect all characters and objects in the immediate vicinity (approx. 5-10 feet) of the caster, while single target abilities will affect either a single character or object.

Many class and job abilities are primarily useful as tools of violence. If a player character attacks an NPC with an offensive ability that does damage or inflicts a status effect, this will naturally lead to initiating combat. If they catch an enemy by surprise, the party will get a surprise round against the enemy. Keep in mind that not every NPC has the power of Mana or any sort of combat training. Those who do not are generally not able to defend themselves against a single attack, and will either die or surrender immediately. This tends to grant players a large amount of immediate satisfaction, but the GM should keep in mind that players abusing their power should have consequences later down the line. Even if alienating a village does not lead to dangerous or even lethal blowback, the player characters gaining a reputation for being violent thugs plays directly into the hands of Antagonists, particularly Villains, and should net them Anima when appropriate, as well as giving them additional chances to recruit the survivors and turn them into pawns.

Some class abilities have contextual usefulness out of combat, particularly those that are not directly damaging. While the GM is encouraged to make rulings beyond the scope of what is outlined here, here are some canonical ways that character abilities can be put to use outside of combat:

Lay Trap can be used outside of combat to create a trap with an effective radius of approximately three feet. When a character steps in the trap, the Ranger can attack them as though they had moved into it during battle, initiating a surprise round.

Steal can be used to pickpocket items outside of combat. When a Thief uses this ability, their player rolls a 1d4. If the result is a 4, the Thief is caught, while if the result is a 1-3 then they may steal a single item from their target's inventory.

Hide can be used to successfully hide in plain sight at times when it would be otherwise impossible, so long as the Thief has something nearby that could reasonably obscure them.

Scan may be used by the Artificer outside of battle, and can also be used to identify the effects of items as well as the purpose of any technology that does not require Lore to understand.

Counterspell can be used to negate magical effects such as wards, runes, or illusions if they are present in a setting. Keep in mind that the Sage might not possess the MP to negate every effect.

Prayer can be used at ritual altars to sanctify or cleanse them of dark magic, if such a thing exists in the campaign world.

Job abilities that produce elemental effects are especially useful outside of combat. The discrete effects that an ability produces depends on its elemental type and how powerful it is in combat. In general, abilities that do more damage will hit harder than abilities that do less. The Elemental Bolt ability will leave a mark on a door, while the Elemental Burst ability will loosen its hinges enough to make it easier for players to bash it down. Just like with class abilities, GMs are encouraged to make rulings outside of the scope of the canon ruleset, but here are some ways that elements can be used during free play:

Fire abilities will set flammable objects on fire. It can also be used to boil certain liquids, melt certain solids, and activate certain objects. The heat and size of the flame are greater for more powerful abilities.

Water abilities can douse flame and flood rooms, as well as dampen objects that they are used on. The amount of water created and the force at which it comes out depend on the potency and size of the ability.

Earth abilities will open hairline cracks in rocks. More powerful versions can reveal doorways and cause rockslides to occur on trails.

Wind abilities manipulate air currents in a localized area. They aren't powerful enough to change the weather, but they are powerful enough to push away a patch of fog or toxic gas.

Thunder abilities not only produce painful shocks, but can also power electrical devices and are sometimes amplified by pools of water.

Ice abilities are capable of freezing water and other liquids. At lower temperatures, shocks of cold will also freeze damp objects, which can do a great deal of internal damage.

Wood abilities will summon and bend plants and fungi to their will. They can be used to manipulate roots, branches, leaves, mushrooms, and other natural features.

Light abilities create bursts of light when cast, temporarily banishing darkness and revealing hidden crevices. They cannot, however, do this in a sustained way.

Shadow abilities work the same as light abilities except they create bursts of darkness. Note that neither light nor shadow can fully blind someone unless the ability being used inflicts Blind.

Any status affects inflicted on a character will have an equivalent effect to the one they create in battle, so Paralyze will paralyze them, Blind will blind them, Petrify will prevent them from moving, etc. Status effects inflicted outside of

combat, including Haste and Slow, last for 3d6 minutes per cast. If a battle is initiated while a character has a status effect inflicted on them, it will last for the rest of the battle or until the status effect is cured.