What Is Last Odyssey?

Last Odyssey is a tabletop RPG that is heavily inspired by Final Fantasy, especially the Final Fantasies between Final Fantasy VIII and Final Fantasy XIII. It is not an attempt to faithfully recreate any of those games, or even to do a pastiche of all of them, but to pull some of their essence out and translate it into a coherent tabletop experience.

What Last Odyssey Is

In Last Odyssey, characters split their time between exploring settlements and dungeons, traveling between them, solving puzzles, engaging in dramatic character roleplay, and fighting in combat.

Last Odyssey is a combat-heavy game.
Players in Last Odyssey are meant to spend a third to half their total play time battling enemies. I understand the concept of combat fatigue, where many players will check out if a combat encounter is too long or repetitive. Therefore, each combat encounter should go by relatively quickly, up to a half hour per encounter with the exception of boss fights, which could be longer. To keep things fresh, the combat system should be relatively complex, and should get more complex as players level up and grow to better understand their characters' potential.

The purpose of combat in Last Odyssey is to both be the stakes that they face and heighten the stakes involved in other parts of play. It should be tough enough that players worry about the consequences of not bringing along enough supplies and receiving a debuff to their statistics from exhaustion. Many of the climactic moments of a campaign, such as confronting a villain or defending a city, should be played out via the combat system.

Travel in Last Odyssey is a non-trivial task.
Last Odyssey has a distinct set of rules for travel that are meant to synergize with the combat system to make a system of travel that feels perilous while also rewarding exploration. Ideally, the travel rules should push players to interact with the campaign setting by making it necessary for them to learn the political and natural geography of each region they visit. However, unlike the combat, the rules burden for travel on the player end should be relatively minimal. The bulk of the effort should take place on the GM side, especially during prep, when Last Odyssey will provide detailed and balanced instructions for creating regions for players to navigate.

Last Odyssey is driven by heroes and villains that are expressive, and endowed with special powers.
In Last Odyssey, every character has a connection to magic, which is powered in part by their natural life force and in part by the power of their emotion. Participating in the drama is necessary for character progression, and can give players an edge in combat through the summoning of Eidolons. Because of the level of investment players will have in their characters, death is not common, but it is also not necessarily voluntary. The only entities in Last Odyssey that can cause character death are Villains and Monsters, which are larger-than-life characters who act as the central antagonists of Last Odyssey campaigns. Both types of antagonists are also magical. Monsters are beings driven forward by raw magical power, while Villains are capable of exploiting magic for their own ends.

What Last Odyssey Is Not

Last Odyssey is not meant to feel realistic.
By this I mean that Last Odyssey's rules are not meant to be "simulationist" in (perhaps slightly outdated) TTRPG parlance. A great example of this is the combat, which much more closely resembles the way combat is simulated in video games than any sort of real-life violence, but this also extends to the travel rules, which are designed to create a sense of space between locations and camaraderie between players much more than they are designed to be a faithful recreation of the mechanics of going backpacking. Some of the things player characters can do in battle might not even be explained within the setting. Eidolons in particular can be easily interpreted as metaphors for the aspects of player characters from which they draw the will to achieve their goals rather than as literal godlike beings that exist in the world, although they can be thought of as the latter, too, if that's what your group would prefer.

Last Odyssey is not a skills-heavy game.
In some games, like Dungeons and Dragons, the results of player actions outside of combat are resolved with skill checks, while in others almost everything that happens in the game is handled by a skill check in one way or another. In Last Odyssey, this is not the case. There is a skill check system, but using it is meant as a last resort. Instead, GMs should ask players to resolve tasks through combat, roleplaying, puzzle solving, and finally skill checks in that order. For example, if the players need to persuade two guards to let them enter a castle, the GM should give the players the option to to learn the password to enter, find a disguise, or defeat the guards in combat rather than asking them to make a persuasion roll. Likewise, if the players do figure out how to obtain the password, they should not have to additionally make a roll to successfully use it, but should just be let in.

Last Odyssey is not a "hardcore" game.
Last Odyssey is as difficult as it needs to be to suit the narrative. Players can circumvent much of the difficulty of combat by summoning Eidolons. Players can also circumvent much of the difficulty of travel by accompanying caravans, purchasing an airship, or riding trains if the GM decides to include them in their game. This is not to say that there won't be difficulty, but that difficulty in Last Odyssey is never an end in and of itself but rather always in service of making the game more compelling to play.

Last Odyssey is not Fabula Ultima
The most obvious comparison this game will invite is to Fabula Ultima, an Italian RPG also inspired by Final Fantasy that also takes heavy inspiration from Ryuutama, to the point of lifting much of its core ruleset. To simply create the Pathfinder to their Dungeons and Dragons would be disrespectful, both to them and their creation and to myself as a

designer. As it happens, I had the idea for Last Odyssey before learning Fabula Ultima existed, but I am unable the circumstances under which my game is released. Therefore, Last Odyssey will also be a deliberate attempt to be a game that Fabula Ultima is not. While some of Fabula Ultima's ideas are replicated in this game simply because they are good ideas (many of which are not original to Fabula Ultima, either), Last Odyssey will stand out in three different ways. First, Fabula Ultima is meant to be a cozy, upbeat game, while Last Odyssey is meant to be tragic and, at times, oppressive (although this doesn't mean the game is uniformly grim. Sometimes, joy is the most tragic thing of all). Second, Fabula Ultima's design focuses on simplicity and convenience, while Last Odyssey's systems will be far more complex and detailed. Third, Fabula Ultima's aesthetic is derived from chibi art, sprite work, and anime-style character portraits, while Last Odyssey (once I start commissioning art) will be much more inspired by art nouveau, futurism, and 3D aesthetics. I will also take some time to play Fabula Ultima before the final release to be sure that they truly feel distinct.

Design Principles

All systems in Last Odyssey should interact strongly with other systems, to the point of usually being necessary.
This does not mean that the players will necessarily touch everything in the rulebook. Not every party will have an Artificer in it, but every party member will have a class. Likewise, Anima is necessary to earn in order to level up, since it is required in order to summon a character's Eidolon. In contrast, a system like Inspiration in Dungeons and Dragons would either have to be expanded and tied to other systems or cut entirely.

Last Odyssey should swing for the fences.
While the Final Fantasy games will signal their continuity via the inclusion of superficial elements like chocobos, moogles, or phoenix downs, the real similarity that those games share with one another is that they are all innovative and maximalist, and in this respect Last Odyssey hews very closely to those games in spirit. Last Odyssey is meant to be a game of significant scope in the sense that I am going to create rules undergirding every aspect of a campaign. Last Odyssey campaigns are also meant to be long. By my reckoning, a campaign that takes the characters from tier 1 all the way to tier 10 will take upwards of 50 sessions to complete. If players host one session every two weeks, that means that an entire campaign will take them more than two years. I am completely fine asking more of players than contemporary games often do, so long as the experience is good enough to justify it.

I am a contrarian at heart, which means I will often do things differently just for the sake of doing them differently. Likewise, Last Odyssey will innovate in ways that are meant to challenge the current design zeitgeist, both in the mainstream tabletop space (that is, Dungeons and Dragons) and the indie space (that is, every other tabletop game). My ultimate ambition is to create a game innovative enough that it becomes something other people compare their games to afterwards. At the very least, I want all of the effort I put into this thing to be worth it.

Last Odyssey should prioritize catharsis, but not necessarily "fun."
I believe that the point of art is to create experiences that bring human beings closer together, and some of those experiences could very well be negative. While I do believe that games should be fun, there is a certain notion of fun in contemporary American culture that I do not want to prioritize that can best be summarized as "giving players everything they want." While the core of role-playing is collaborative improv, the major difference between a game of Dungeons and Dragons and a night of play-pretend is that the former involves the unexpected. At any moment, the dice could disrupt the wish-fulfillment of both players and the GM, and I see this as a good thing. The moment everyone talks about the most in the Final Fantasy series is the part where Aerith is unceremoniously murdered by Sephiroth. This kind of gut-wrenching, player-hurting moment should not only be possible in a Last Odyssey campaign, but likely if the rules are followed as written.

Last Odyssey should be designed for long, complete campaigns.
Final Fantasy games, and JRPGs in general, are notorious for being lengthy. With this in mind, Last Odyssey should be designed for long campaigns that start at tier 1 and go all the way to tier 10. Tier 10 play should not necessarily feel the same as tier 1 play, but it should be just as satisfying, if not more so, and progression should be such that players feel invested for the entire time.

Roadmap

I am writing this entire game myself. After the combat demo is done, I will need people to help playtest it, and eventually, if I ever get to that point, I will need to figure out a way to turn the raw rules into something presentable. The following is not a definitive plan, but is a roadmap of the benchmarks I will be trying to hit when writing this game.

Alpha Stage

The goal of the alpha phase of development is to focus on *completeness* and *functionality*. By the end of this stage, all of the rules for the game should be written down somewhere, and none of them should contradict themselves. There should also be nothing obviously broken or ambiguous in the ruleset, or anything that interferes too much with the play experience.

1. Write the combat rules. I am nearly done with this document already, and expect to be done by the time I post this manifesto. The combat rules are a complete, legible document that contain all of the necessary rules for running battles between characters in Last Odyssey. They also contain rules for character creation. They do not need to be clean or good-looking, but they do need to be precise, organized, and be extensively copy-edited.
2. Write the manifesto. That's this document. The purpose of this document is not ideological per se (although it is in the sense that it determines which ideas I consider and which ones I throw out), but rather to serve as a set of

guidelines that I will follow while designing the game. Later on in the process, I may revise pieces of this document to reflect changes in priorities, but I do not expect to deviate too heavily from the vision I currently have for Last Odyssey.

3. Publish a combat demo. The purpose of the combat demo for Last Odyssey is to allow people to playtest the combat rules and give me feedback. The initial published version of the combat demo will exclusively contain guidelines for using tier 1 characters, but I will continually update it to include rules for characters of all tiers. The combat demo document will also include sample enemies to pit players against in a gauntlet designed to simulate the conditions of actual play, although not necessarily the satisfaction, seeing as RPG combat can be fatiguing.
4. Write travel rules. A complete set of travel rules will include guidelines for GMs to create worlds for characters to play in, as well as moment-to-moment rules for supplies, vehicles, the in-game economy, camping, weather effects, and anything else I deem important.
5. Run combat playtests. While I am writing the travel rules, I will also put time into running playtests, observing them, and reading feedback from independent games in which I am not in the room. In addition to what I release to the public, I will be running plenty of "closed" playtests with volunteers that I know already from playing Dungeons and Dragons in my local area, so while ideally strangers who don't know me (and hence people with no emotional investment in my success) will get to play this game, provide feedback, and in the best case spread word of mouth about this game, that is far from necessary at this stage.
6. Revise combat rules. By this point, I should have enough good feedback from players to make changes to the combat rules. Revisions at this stage may include rewriting systems, changing descriptions of things item effects and abilities, or filling in the blanks in places where the rules need more clarity.
7. Write campaign guide. The third part of the Last Odyssey rules is a guide to creating antagonists, dungeons, puzzles, quests, and other kinds of challenges for players to experience. The campaign guide in the alpha version will also be a "grab bag" for any rules that don't fit into the travel or combat rules but serve to connect different systems together in a more robust way. Once this is done, all of the rules for Last Odyssey should be put to paper.
8. Create and run starter adventure. There is no good way to test the rules for travel until they are integrated with the combat system. The final piece of the alpha version will be a starting adventure that brings characters from tier 1 to tier 3 that showcases everything that has been written up until this point that is meant to test how well everything interacts.
9. Revise travel rules. The starter adventure is also meant to be the first test of how well the Last Odyssey rules integrate with one another, and as such I will allow others to run this adventure and give me feedback on how everything functions. I will then take the time to revise the travel rules to better align with the concept I laid out in the Design Principles section.

Beta Stage

After the alpha stage of writing is complete, the beta stage will involve *refinement* and *integration*. I will take the disparate pieces of the alpha version and put them together into a single rulebook. At the end of the beta phase, I should have a playable, finished game with all planned features implemented and refined to meet the goals laid out in the Design Principles section.

1. Write core rulebook. At this stage, I will take the entirety of the rules I have written and combine them into a single document, out of which all future games should be played. Most of this will be a simple copy-paste job, but the idea will also be to eliminate redundancies and to organize the rules in the manner that prefigures the final product.
2. Write higher-level adventures. After the starting adventure, I will write two more adventures, one for characters of tier 6 and another for characters of tier 9. These will be snapshots of higher level play that test mechanics for things like Monsters, Villains, and obtaining Unique items. I will both run these adventures for my closer playtesters and also release them publicly to solicit feedback from anyone who wants to give it.
3. Revise core rulebook. The feedback from the higher-tier adventures I run should give me enough material to revise the core rulebook. I will specifically be focusing on tweaking the way that systems interact, as well as balancing the numbers so that players feel that the game is fair. The goal of this balancing is that everyone at the table should feel that their character is useful and interesting to play.
4. Write compendium. The compendium for Last Odyssey is a list of equipment, items, travel goods, NPCs, and enemies meant as a companion to the main rules. There are no extra rules in the compendium, but instead ready-made assets for GMs that do not want to create what they put into their own campaigns from scratch.
5. Publicly advertise game. Last Odyssey will be completely playable at this stage in the process. This is the stage in which it will benefit the most from getting a sudden flood of attention from people I would not necessarily trust to understand my vision. I will advertise it on several Discords, make an account on Reddit and post publicly on the largest RPG subreddits, and possibly make a Bluesky account if I feel it's worth it. I will also create a public forum for discussing the game depending on interest, probably a Discord server or a subreddit.
6. Write and run long-term campaign. While the public has its fun creating discourse about my game, I will turn to the task of running a complete campaign. This is an essential milestone, as Last Odyssey is designed to be a game that takes groups from the beginning of character progression all the way to the end. The players in my campaign will be people who have ideally already playtested the game, and thus who I trust to already have a good understanding of its systems. To generate buzz, we will post weekly updates on a blogging platform about what happens during our sessions.

Final Stage

After the beta phase is complete, I am technically done creating Last Odyssey. However, if this game makes enough of a splash and I still have energy and time to put into it, I am going to turn it into a published work that people will pay real money for. Thus, the final phase of development will focus on *presentation* and *gamefeel*. The end result should be

two beautiful PDFs: a core rules document that contains, well, the core rules, and a compendium of enemies, items, villains, monsters, and sample regions and adventures for GMs to use in their campaigns. If I raise enough money, I will ideally create physical books, although with rising shipping costs and probable economic chaos on the horizon this is not necessarily a goal I will be able to achieve.

1. Review the campaign notes. Once my group wraps up our long-term campaign, we will be ready to begin the final round of rules revisions. If we encounter any glaring holes in Last Odyssey's design, or any pieces of the game that still need refinement, I will go back to the drawing board and do more beta testing until things are cleaned up. If not, revisions on the game will be officially declared closed. After this stage, the only edits to the rules should be for clarity and quality of language, as well as the inclusion of developer commentary to help contextualize some of the more complicated or out-there parts of the game. Truthfully, I won't weigh social media consensus very highly at this phase, but instead focus on the input of my playtesters, whether people in the games I've run or people who ran games on their own. After all, the only proof of a game's quality is in the playing.
2. Recruit a core team. While I wish I could say I were a full-package auteur, I do not, in fact, have all of the skills required to publish a game. I am a writer and a designer, but I am also a terrible visual artist and planner. There are three roles that I will need to outsource to at least two other people: graphic design, project management, and art direction. I can probably contribute a little bit to all of these roles, but I definitely need people with visual art and management skills who can help me get over the final hump.
3. Create a Kickstarter. I won't expect the people I ask for art or my central team to work for free, of course. We are making a product meant to be bought and sold. Barring the total destruction of the internet as we know it, the best way to raise funds to make this game will be to appeal to crowdfunding. We will start a Kickstarter (or similar type of endeavor if that platform gets eaten) specifically for the production of rulebook and compendium pdfs that are revised and made with good art. At this phase we will still do public playtests, but these will mostly serve as advertising, as there will be very few truly necessary revisions to the rules if the beta phase is successful. To be clear, the rules for this game will always be available for free. The Kickstarter is meant to give us the opportunity to create something that looks good enough to justify being sold for profit.
4. Publish! If everything goes well, we will have at minimum a compendium and a corebook that can be bought on RPG marketplaces. Depending on public feedback, we may just bundle them together, although the corebook will also contain tools for making items and designing enemies in addition to enough sample enemies to theoretically run a campaign without the compendium.

Looking Ahead

Even finishing the beta phase of this plan will be a massive achievement. I'd be satisfied if I never got past that phase, and just ran campaigns of this game for my friends for the rest of my life, but let's say we do finish the final phase without a major catastrophe occurring. If this game gains enough traction, I might start a Patreon, which will give me a lot more wiggle room to work on projects like this one and actually finish them. If not, then I'll still work on things, but I'll definitely retreat from active engagement with the public if there is clearly no longer any money in it. My team from the final stage might want to stick with me for some of them, or they might end up being too busy to collaborate with me (or just hate my guts), in which case we'll part ways. No matter how this goes, though, I am determined to see this project through to the end of the beta phase. Part of the reason I have no clear timeline for it is because I anticipate running into unexpected roadblocks along the way, and don't want to give myself an excuse to give up if I fail to meet enough deadlines. That being said, if I launch a Kickstarter there will be a clear timeline for delivery, probably around six to eight months after donations are closed.