
Guild Camp XIV

“Boot not summer!”

Welcome to Guild Camp XIV! You are going to take a game from initial concept to run in two weeks. This is a significant commitment; you’ll probably be spending two to five hours a day working on your game, plus plenty of extra time on weekends and other select days.

Things You Will Need To Do

- Form a GM team.
- Get a basic concept for a game.
- Decide on the game’s length and size.
- Fill the game with plots and characters.
- Detail plots and mechanics, balance resources.
- Write the sheets.
- Write all the other stuff (rules, abilities, items, signs. . .).
- Write and send an application.
- Cast your game.
- Print and hand out your game.
- Set up your game.
- Run your game.

For Guild Camp, your game probably wants to be two to four hours long. In a four-hour one-night, characters usually spend the first hour or so getting to know each other and the last hour or so running around frantically (assuming the game has critical mass of plot), so most plots only need to provide a couple hours of entertainment. In a two hour game, there is even less time. Everyone should probably have about one thing to get done (which should probably require other people) and a couple of things that other people need them for.

A one-night generally has about fifteen to twenty parts, though some go a bit larger or smaller. The amount of work required to write a one-night is more closely related to the number of characters than the length of the game.

You need to accomplish three things today: form a GM team, have a basic concept for your game, including length and size, and have a rough work schedule for the next two weeks.

Things We Can Help You With

- Zampolit requirement.
- Administrative tasks, like your app.
- Technical support, including production.
- Coming up with a writing schedule.
- Helping you not forget things.
- Room reservations (already done).

We’ve reserved rooms in buildings 24 and 34 for most of Saturday and Sunday. Plan to run your game on one of those days. Collectively, we will serve as your zampolits (liaisons between your GM team and the High Council).

Forming a GM Team You’ll probably want a team with two to four people. Generally speaking,¹ you’ll want a team with one or more motivators, one or fewer control freaks, and one or fewer flakes. For a Guild Camp game with a tight schedule, avoid flakage entirely.

You should form a GM team with other people interested in writing the same kind of game as you. This means you usually want to have an idea of the game you want to write before you form a team. Once you form a team, the idea will probably change; this is a normal aspect of design.

It is convenient if the schedules of different GMs match up. If they don’t, make sure you have means of regular communication and collaboration.

¹From Jeremy Brown’s Ides talk of old

Getting Your Game Done There are three basic stages of game writing: design, writing, and production. These will overlap somewhat, though for a tight schedule, you should commit to design decisions as early as possible.

Design is more than coming up with basic ideas. You need to balance plots and mechanics, come up with the challenges facing your characters, and make sure everyone has enough to do. You need the details of your scenario and rules. You should come up with how gamespace will be laid out, including any signs and other stuff to scatter around. Communication is important: if a design is only in your head, other GMs can't implement anything that needs it, and writing out a design lets you vet it.

Writing is more than writing sheets. A plot is not written until every aspect of it is implemented: a research scientist needs a research mechanic and abilities and items for research in addition to motivation. An economic plot needs a complete economy, including things to be traded (in specific numbers) with supply and demand. Mechanics need all of the abilities, items, memory packets, signs, etc. to be implemented. Writing sheets is more than just producing prose: you need to cross-reference plots and facts and make sure all important details are covered.

Production is more than just printing and stuffing everything. You need to write your app and send it out, probably more than one week before game. You'll need to cast your game, which will take longer than you expect. Once game is printed, you have handout (did you remember to write rules?), set-up, and runtime, all of which are non-trivial. Also, after handout, you'll have player questions and other issues to deal with, which will further distract you from finishing work. Production is the time you discover all the things you've forgotten to write. If you haven't planned ahead, you'll be proofreading, debugging, and (re)writing, all at the last minute.

Designing Plot Your game needs a scenario to exist in, and plots to engage your players.

- Plot should make time in game enjoyable, exciting, or memorable (not just "busywork").
- Characters need motivations and goals.
- Plots need risk, conflict, and/or tension.
- PCs need ways to resolve tension and conflict (often the purview of mechanics).
- Goals, conflicts, and their resolution work better when they involve interaction with other PCs.
- From the PCs' perspectives, what are the benefits of cooperation: more help, more resources, and more success.
- What are the risks of cooperation: increased chance that someone will decide to stop, undermine, betray, or kill you.
- Think of the game as a complex economy of motivations, requirements, and resources — this is often the hard part of game design.

Designing Mechanics At a minimum, you need mechanics for things that characters want or need to do that the player can't do for real (violence, complex procedures, the supernatural, etc.).

- Simplicity and restraint are your friends.
- There's not much need for mechanical time-wasting, especially in a 2–4 hour game. Require people, instead.
- A mechanic needs to justify itself: why does a player care about it? What problems are they solving by using it?
- Mechanics can add interesting constraints, but they can't really control or dictate plot.
- Due to basic strategic thinking, players will find ways to work around mechanical limitations. They will tend to put effort into "sure things" rather than take risks, and they will make things more "sure" through preparation.

Some Ideas To help you jump-start the design and writing process, here are a few ideas you might use. Most of them are good for a short game (long games are harder to design because their plots need to be stable for much longer periods of time). Especially for a two-hour game, characters will need to be jump-started in their plots.

Sample Scenarios

- Starlight 4: In the future, travelers are stranded upon a very small spaceship. A serial killer is among them. There are technical problems with the ship. Paranoia ensues.
- Hotel Transylvania 2: horror, mystery, and skullduggery.
- Pirates!: Caribbean raiders pursued by the Royal Navy, the Bermuda Triangle, mysterious ghost ships, eccentric pirate captains, treasure maps and buried riches.
- Orient Express: International secret agents abound.
- A horror / sanity-loss game: Cthulhu cultists, lurking horrors, Things Man Was Not Meant To Know.
- Olympics spy game: athletes double as secret agents, being sketchy between competitions. Add drugs and doping.
- An eccentric, reclusive scientist invites his peers, businessmen, reporters and spies to his mansion for the unveiling of a revolutionary invention. When everybody arrives, things are not what they seem, or something goes horribly awry.
- Victorian Europe: Strict cultural norms, social politics.
- High-school prom!: Vicious social circles, cheerleaders, football stars, nerds, stern principals. Maybe add weirdshit.
- Clue: an old mutual friend is dead, alibis must be fabricated, and his will examined.
- Amnesia game: everybody slowly starts remembering...

Sample Game-Wide Plots

- There's an umbrella everybody wants that's hard to get to.
- There's an umbrella everybody wants that's easy to get to.
- Heavily armed people that don't trust each other are stuck together and something bad is going on.
- One person wants to kill everybody (without being caught) and isn't well armed.
- Generic resource allocation plot: there's a pie. Many people want pieces, and there aren't enough to go around.
- Lots of people want to kill somebody with strong protection. That person wants to win them over.
- Lots of people need to get together to run the government.
- Groups need to finish their research before a deadline.
- People are racing to find new sites in an archeological dig.
- There's a tournament many people want to win.

Sample Individual Plots

- Someone needs money for debt with a tight deadline.
- Someone needs to steal something.
- Taming of the shrew: person who wants some other person who hates them.
- N people in a secret race; they'll kill their competitors when they find them.
- Someone selling resources to both sides of a war.
- Prisoner's dilemma.
- Someone needs to perform a complicated sketchy ritual.

Sample Game Design Concepts

- When in doubt, go with the simpler design.
- Reuse and steal ideas from yourself and others.
- The PCs will always know far less than you expect.
- The PCs will have hard time herding each other.
- "The only people you can trust are the ones that need you."
- Plots and mechanics that require other people are generally better than those that can be done in seclusion.
- Not every plot needs a mechanic.
- Angst-driven plots are unpredictable, especially in how long they will take.
- People should have opposition or obstacles to their goals.
- If "good/bad" is obvious, the plots will degenerate.
- Production can take surprisingly long; vast reams of material do not always make something better.

