
Guild Camp XVII

“Boot not summer!”

Welcome to Guild Camp XVII! 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’re looking to reserve various rooms in buildings 24, 34, 36, and 38 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.
- Players will find ways to work around limitations. They will put effort into "sure things" rather than take risks, and they will make things more "sure" through preparation.

Random Advice

- 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 only people you can trust are the ones that need you."
- Plots and mechanics should require other people.
- Not every plot needs a mechanic.
- People should have opposition or obstacles to their goals.
- If "good/bad" is obvious, the plots will degenerate.