

Game Design Document: Guild Merchant Sim (Working Title) - V.2

1. Game Concept and Genre

1.1 Elevator Pitch

"Rise from a struggling merchant to the head of a world-renowned guild where legends are manufactured, not born. Manipulate public perception, gear up disposable heroes, and weigh your morality against your profit margins to build a legacy that defines the era."

1.2 Genre

- **Primary Genre:** Management Simulation (Tycoon)
- **Sub-Genres:** Social Strategy, Emergent Narrative Sim, Roguelite (Generational)

1.3 Target Audience

- **The System Thinkers:** Players who enjoy economic optimization, resource management, and high-stakes decision-making (e.g., *Tycoon* fans).
- **The Narrative Crafters:** "Digital Dollhouse" players who enjoy naming characters, customizing their guild, and seeing personal stories unfold through emergent gameplay (e.g., *RimWorld* or *The Sims* fans).
- **The Social Strategists:** Players interested in "The Puppet Master" fantasy—managing people and perceptions rather than just inventory.

1.4 High-Level Vision

- **Goal:** To create a management experience where the "human assets" (the heroes) feel alive and expendable at the same time, forcing the player to balance emotional attachment with corporate growth.
- **Tone:** A blend of **Satirical Corporate Cynicism** and **High-Stakes Dark Fantasy**. It feels like *The Boys* meets a medieval counting house—polished and professional on the surface, but grimy and ruthless behind the scenes.
- **Core Experience:** The player should feel the thrill of a successful "scam" or PR campaign, followed by the tension of watching a hero they've "hyped up" actually try to survive a dungeon with the cheap gear they were sold.

1.5 Inspiration

- **Games:**

- *RimWorld* (Emergent stories/traits)
- *Darkest Dungeon* (Stress/asset management)
- *Crusader Kings III* (Generational legacy)
- *Frostpunk* (Moral weight of leadership)
- *Football Manager* (Managing stars/reputations)
- **Media:**
 - *The Boys* (Heroism as a corporate product)
 - *A Knight's Tale* (Manufacturing public legends)

2. Core Gameplay Loop

2.1 Primary Actions

The player will repeatedly engage in the following activities to grow their guild:

- **Scout & Negotiate:** Finding talent at the Tavern and using "The Bargaining Table" to sign them at the best price.
- **Equip & Customize:** Managing the Forge to craft, repair, or "gild" gear tailored to specific mission needs.
- **Spin & Manipulate:** Using the Propaganda Engine to manufacture "hype" before missions and control the narrative afterward.
- **Reinvest:** Using profits and materials to upgrade Guild Facilities (Infirmary, Barracks, etc.).

2.2 Cycle Description

The gameplay follows a seasonal "Business Quarter" cycle (4 Turns = 1 Year). Each cycle consists of the following steps:

1. **Preparation Phase (The Investment):**
 - **Recruit:** The player visits the Tavern to hire new heroes or manage existing ones.
 - **Bargain:** Use the "Tension Bar" and "Trust Factor" to lower salary costs and signing bonuses.
 - **The Forge:** Craft or repair gear. Players might choose to "Gild" gear to increase Fame gain, even if it lowers durability.
2. **Strategic Deployment (The Setup):**
 - **The Mission Board:** Review available quests and Intel (e.g., "Sharp weapons needed").
 - **Stance Selection:** Set the hero's behavior (SAFE, BOLD, or GRAND).
 - **Pre-Mission Hype:** (Propaganda Phase) Spend gold to increase the hero's "Fame" before they leave, allowing for higher gear markups.
3. **Simulation Phase (The Execution):**
 - The mission resolves via an automated **Narrative Log**. The outcome is determined by the "Hero/Gear stats vs. Monster Threat."
 - Heroes return with Gold and Materials—or die, leaving behind potential "Legacy Relics."

4. Reporting Phase (The Spin):

- **The "Merchant's Dilemma":** If a mission goes poorly, the player chooses how to report it.
- Options range from "**Bury the Story**" (losing Fame but gaining Trust) to "**Total Spin**" (gaining massive Fame at the cost of public Trust).

2.3 Motivation

What keeps the player coming back for "one more turn"?

- **Progression:** Reaching "Fame Milestones" like **Tax Immunity** or **Market Influence**.
 - **Mastery:** Mastering "The Bargaining Table" and the "Propaganda Engine" to maximize profit margins.
 - **Investment (The Dollhouse):** Building deep "Bonds" with specific heroes and seeing their generational legacy unfold through their apprentices or mentors.
 - **Discovery:** Unlocking higher "Crafting Tiers" (from Training to Relic) and seeing what legendary gear can be manufactured.
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3. Mechanics and Systems

3.1 Player Mechanics (The "Puppet Master" Controls)

Unlike traditional RPGs, the player does not move a character. Instead, they interact with the world through high-stakes menus and management interfaces:

- **The Bargaining Slider:** A physical slider used during the recruitment phase at the Tavern. Players move this to adjust their offer, balancing the "Tension Bar" (the hero's patience) against the potential discount.
- **Tactical Stance Issuance:** Before a mission, the player selects one of three stances—**SAFE**, **BOLD**, or **GRAND**—which dictates the AI's risk-assessment during the automated simulation.
- **The Spin Toggle:** During the Reporting Phase, players select from specific narrative options to determine how the public perceives mission results.

3.2 Core Systems (The Game Engine)

- **The Propaganda Engine (Fame vs. Trust):** * **Fame (Quantity):** An additive metric that unlocks milestones like **Market Influence** (10% cheaper materials) and **Tax Immunity**.
 - **Trust (Quality):** A 0-100% scale that acts as a multiplier. High Trust (80%+) doubles Fame gains, while low Trust (<20%) halves them and forces the player to pay "Hazard Pay" to recruits.
- **Generational Hero Lifecycle:** * Heroes progress through four stages: **Rookie**, **Prime**, **Veteran**, and **Retirement**.

- The "**Mentor Aura**" of Veterans provides a +15% XP boost to Rookies, encouraging players to mix their roster.
- **The Forge & Maintenance Loop:**
 - A resource-management system using **Gold** and **Materials**.
 - Players must decide between **Repairing** (cheap) or **Gilding** (expensive; increases Fame gain but lowers durability).
- **Bonding & Legacy:** * A hidden meter that increases through successful missions.
 - High Loyalty prevents heroes from being poached by rival guilds and ensures they leave "**Legacy Relics**" (high-tier items) upon retirement or death.

3.3 Game Rules (Success & Failure)

- **Success State:** Achieving "**Chartered Guild**" status (5,000 Fame) and maintaining a profitable, self-sustaining loop of legendary heroes.
- **Failure State (Soft):** Running out of Gold to pay salaries or repair gear, leading to "Notorious" status where heroes refuse to sign.
- **Failure State (Hard):** Having your entire roster retire or die without enough Gold/Trust to recruit new talent.
- **The Combat Outcome:** Resolved via a "Narrative Log" that compares combined Hero/Gear stats against the Monster Threat level.