

Game Design Document: Guild Merchant Sim (Working Title)

1. Executive Summary

- **Genre:** Merchant Management / Guild Simulation / Strategy.
- **Core Hook:** Players take the role of a Guild Master/Merchant who invests in heroes, equips them with custom gear, and manages their public reputation (Propaganda) to build an empire of legend.
- **Target Audience:** Fans of management sims (*Recettear, Gladiator Guild Manager*) and tactical RPGs with permadeath (*Darkest Dungeon, XCOM*).

2. Core Gameplay Loop

1. **Recruit:** Scout and sign heroes at the Tavern based on cost, potential, and "Hype."
 2. **Equip:** Assign gear from the Forge to heroes, balancing durability and combat effectiveness.
 3. **Mission:** Dispatch heroes on seasonal quests with specific "Stances" (Safe, Bold, Grand).
 4. **Propaganda:** Spin mission results to the public to gain Fame and influence.
 5. **Expand:** Reinvest Gold and Materials into Guild facilities, better gear, and higher-tier talent.
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3. The Hero System

3.1 Lifecycle & Aging

The game operates on a **Seasonal Calendar** (4 Turns = 1 Year). Heroes age and eventually retire, forcing the player to manage a constant cycle of fresh talent.

- **Rookie (Age 20–25):** +25% XP Gain. High HP but low base Accuracy. High "Return on Investment."
- **Prime (Age 26–35):** Peak physical stats. Highly reliable for difficult contracts.
- **Veteran (Age 36–45):** -20% Max HP. High Critical Hit chance. **Mentor Aura:** Provides +15% XP to any Rookie in their party.
- **Retirement (Age 46+):** The hero leaves the roster. If the "Bond" level is high, they may gift the Guild a **Legacy Item**.

3.2 Recruitment & Contracts

- **The Tavern:** Refreshes annually (every 4 turns). Players pay a small fee to **Vet** (reveal) hidden perks and loot requirements.
- **Signing Bonus:** Upfront Gold cost to hire.
- **Daily Maintenance:** Flat Gold salary paid to the hero every turn.
- **Loot Cut:** A percentage of all Gold found during missions that goes directly to the hero.

3.3 Hero Bonding

- A hidden **Bond** meter increases through successful missions and quality gear provision.
- **Loyalty:** High Bond prevents heroes from being poached by Rival Guilds and ensures they leave behind "Legacy Relics" upon retirement or death.

3.4 Mini-Game: The Bargaining Table

When hiring a hero, players can enter a "Bargain" phase to lower the **Signing Bonus** or **Loot Cut**.

- **The Tension Bar:** A visual meter representing the Hero's patience.
 - **The Trust Factor:** Your Guild's **Trust Meter** (from Section 5) provides "Negotiation Capital."
 - **High Trust (75%+):** The Hero starts with high patience. You can make "Low-Ball" offers with less risk of them walking away.
 - **Low Trust (<25%):** The Hero is skeptical. One bad offer ends the negotiation immediately.
 - **The Mechanic:** Players move a slider to make an offer.
 - **Safe Offer:** Small discount, high success.
 - **Risky Offer:** Large discount, high chance to offend the hero.
 - **The Walk-Away:** If you offend a hero during bargaining, they leave the Tavern and cannot be recruited for the rest of the Year.
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4. The Mission & Combat System

4.1 The Mission Board

A list of available quests updated every Season.

- **Danger Levels:** 1 to 5 Stars.
- **Intel:** Provides free hints on necessary gear (e.g., "Sharp weapons needed" or "Heavy Armor recommended").

4.2 Combat Execution

- **Hybrid Roster:** Early game focuses on individual hero deployments. Mid-to-late game allows for Team parties (2-3 heroes).
- **Simulation:** Combat is resolved via an automated "Narrative Log" comparing combined Hero/Gear stats against Monster Threat levels.

4.3 Strategic Stances (W.I.P)

Players issue specific orders to heroes before deployment:

1. **SAFE:** Hero flees if HP is low. Drastically reduces risk of death/gear loss but yields 50% less loot.
2. **BOLD:** Standard mission profile. High XP and Gold gains with standard risk.
3. **GRAND:** High Fame/Propaganda gain. Increases "Gear Durability" damage as the hero performs "stunts" for the public.

4.4 Gear & Loot

- **Durability:** All gear loses a percentage of durability per mission. Broken gear provides zero stat bonuses.
- **Rewards:** Heroes return with **Gold** (for salaries/hiring) and **Materials** (for crafting/repairs).

5. Propaganda & Fame (The "Spin" System)

5.1 Metrics: Fame vs. Trust

- **Fame (Quantity):** Measures how many people know the Guild. Unlocks milestones like Tax Immunity and Market Discounts.
- **Trust (Quality):** A 0-100% scale of the public's belief in your Guild's safety and honesty. Modifies Bargaining and recruitment costs.

5.2 The Reporting Phase (Mathematical Logic)

After every mission, players spend Gold to "Spin" the narrative.

Option	Gold Cost	Fame Change	Trust Change
Bury the Story	\$0	-10	+5
Simple Truth	\$10	+20	+2
Sponsored Hype	\$100	+100	-10

Total Spin	\$250	+300	-40
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5.3 Fame Milestones

- **1,000 Fame:** Market Influence (10% cheaper raw materials).
- **2,500 Fame:** Prestigious Name (Recruits accept 20% lower Signing Bonuses).
- **5,000 Fame:** Chartered Guild (Tax Immunity—keep 100% of Guild Gold profits).

5.4 The Trust Multiplier

- **Golden Reputation (80%+ Trust):** Fame gains are doubled; Bargaining success rate +25%.
- **Notorious (<20% Trust):** Fame gains are halved; Heroes demand 2x Signing Bonus due to "Hazard Pay."

6. Economy & The Forge

6.1 Resource Types

- **Gold (\$):** Used for Salaries, Recruitment bonuses, and Propaganda campaigns.
- **Materials (M):** Raw resources brought back from missions; used for crafting and repairs.

6.2 The Forge Loop (Maintenance)

- **Repairing:** Costs Gold + Materials. Cheaper than crafting new gear.
- **Scraping:** Destroying broken/obsolete gear to recover 40% of Materials.

6.3 Crafting Tiers & Modifiers

- **Tiers:** T1 (Training) -> T2 (Standard) -> T3 (Steel) -> T4 (Relic).
- **Modifiers:**
 - **Reinforce:** Increases **Durability** (Costs extra Materials).
 - **Gilding:** Increases **Fame Gain** when used (Costs extra Gold; lowers Durability).
 - **Sharpen:** Increases **Combat Power** (Costs extra Gold; lowers Durability).

6.4 Guild Infrastructure (Facility Upgrades)

Facility	Upgrade Effect
Forge	Unlocks higher Crafting Tiers (T1 -> T4).
Warehouse	Increases maximum Inventory storage.

Infirmary	Decreases hero recovery time after injuries.
Barracks	Increases maximum Hero Roster size.

Here is the finalized content for these sections, formatted specifically for your **Game Design Document (GDD)**. I have incorporated the research on "Narrative Lead" players and the refined inspiration list.

7. Market Analysis & Project Foundation

7.1 Target Audience

Our player base consists of two primary psychological profiles that overlap to create a dedicated community:

- **The System Thinkers (Tycoon/Management Fans):** Players who find satisfaction in optimization, economic loops, and high-stakes resource management. They enjoy balancing the "Moral Ledger" and the "Propaganda Engine."
- **The Narrative Crafters (Digital Dollhouse/Storytellers):** These players are driven by **Expression** and **Investment**. They value the ability to name heroes, customize their appearances, and track their personal histories. For them, a hero dying isn't just a loss of stats—it's the tragic end of a personal story.
- **Player Demographics:** Primarily PC gamers (Steam) aged 22–35 who prefer "thinking" games over "twitch" games and enjoy sharing "emergent stories" (e.g., "*Look at this disaster my guild caused*") on social platforms.

7.2 Market Gap

While the "Merchant Sim" genre is crowded, most titles focus on the logistics of inventory management (buying/selling). This project fills a specific niche: **Social Manipulation**. We are moving away from the "Clerk" fantasy and toward the **"Puppet Master"** fantasy—where the product being sold isn't just a sword, but the *reputation* of the person swinging it.

7.3 Primary Platforms

- **PC (Steam/Epic):** The primary development target.
- **Handheld (Steam Deck):** The UI and control scheme will be optimized for handheld play from the start, targeting "Steam Deck Verified" status to capture the growing "on-the-go" management market.

7.4 Inspiration & Comp Titles

This project sits at the intersection of several influential titles and media:

- **Games:**
 - **RimWorld:** For its "Emergent Narrative" and the way character traits and social bonds create unpredictable stories.
 - **Darkest Dungeon:** For the management of "human assets" under extreme pressure and the acceptance of "expendable" heroes.
 - **Crusader Kings III:** For the generational legacy systems and the feeling of managing a dynasty rather than a single character.
 - **Frostpunk:** For the heavy moral weight of management decisions where the "greater good" often requires cruelty.
 - **Football Manager:** For the "behind-the-scenes" perspective of managing "stars" with egos, contracts, and public reputations.
- **Media:**
 - **The Boys (TV Series):** A primary influence for the "Heroism as a Corporate Industry" theme and the dark reality behind public PR.

7.5 Unique Selling Points (USPs)

- **1. The Propaganda Engine (Social Strategy Layer):** Players aren't just selling steel; they are selling *mythology*. Through the Propaganda Engine, players can manipulate public perception, manufacture "fake news" about monster threats, and inflate a hero's reputation. This allows for tactical price gouging—selling a basic rusted sword as a "Legendary Blade of Destiny" to a hero the public already worships.
- **2. Generational Legacy (The Human Asset System):** To combat the "late-game stagnation" common in management sims, heroes are treated as finite assets. They age, accumulate permanent physical and mental scars, marry, and eventually retire. A retired hero can become a mentor for the next generation or a powerful political ally in town, forcing the player to constantly balance the "Old Guard" with fresh, unproven talent.
- **3. The Merchant's Dilemma (The Ethical Pivot):** The game forces a collision between financial greed and emotional attachment. Players must make high-stakes decisions where the most profitable outcome is often the most tragic. (e.g., *"Do I pay for the expensive healing potion to save my veteran hero, or do I let them die because a 'Tragic Heroic Sacrifice' will drive guild stock prices to an all-time high?"*)

7.6 Elevator Pitch

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