



# Purdue Fantasy Club GMing

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Eric Liu, Story Coordinator, 2021



# GM Approval Process

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These are the steps to becoming a full-fledged GM in PFC:

1. Express interest to Story Coordinator, they will send you appropriate materials (such as this presentation), and you will be set up with a coGM(s) and the GM-in-Training discord role.
2. GM games with your coGM(s). The Story Coordinator will keep track of the number of games run, and take any questions, comments, concerns, etc. from you and/or your coGM(s).
3. Take the GM Quiz (It's very easy, at the end of the presentation, mostly for information gathering to set you up with permissions later on).
4. After about 10 games, a final meeting will be held with your coGM(s) and the Story Coordinator. Full permissions and the GM role are given out, or a hold for you to run more games may be placed until there are no significant concerns.

# This Presentation

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- First, some rules that you should keep in mind. These slides list the most important rules, which should (generally) never be broken.
- GMing tips and tricks
- Magic Items
- Story Coordination and Campaigns
- Final Notes and Quiz

# Rules I: In-Club Games

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In-Club Games garner In-Club rewards.

- This includes exp, gold, magic items, regular items, RP access to learning skills/languages/spells/etc.
- Out-of-Club games and their respective rewards cannot transfer to In-Club rewards.
- All In-Club games must adhere to In-Club posting guidelines:
  - All club members can see and access the game info, the listing must be public and within club
  - Reasonable effort should be made to include all local members, and if possible, provide accommodation to non-local members
  - At least half the spots are open for new players to join.
- Town Actions, either overseen by a GM in person or in the discord channel, should not be the place to award players, but can be used to allow some prep/continuation of in-game actions, if need be.

# Rules II: Monetary Rewards

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**Gold Standard.** Club now uses the gold piece as the standard unit of pay. Do note that pricing in the *AQ Manual* (as of 2021) uses silver as the standard. The exchange rate is 10 silver to 1 gold, and the prices in the manual can be divided by 10 to get the gold cost.

Standard pay for a hiring is limited to 200 gold per character for a game. This is a soft maximum, as significantly dangerous or momentous quests can garner more gold. A “regular” game should pay 100 gold, and a less dangerous game should pay 50 gold. Don’t be afraid to not give out gold if it doesn’t make sense for the characters to receive it.

# Rules III: Writeups

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**Adventure Writeups.** *Always* submit an adventure writeup to the website after you run an in-club game, especially if a significant event happens that may affect the games that other GMs run on the plane or affect characters outside of the current game, either present or future. These writeups should include: The Real Date, the Game Date (especially for Jaern adventures, can be found on the website), the locations, character, and event(s) and their effects. If a significant event happens on Jaern, you should additionally send a ping to @Story Coordinator in the discord to view your writeup, and add that to the Historical Events tab.

# Rules IV: GM Exp

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To receive any GM exp, you **must** submit an adventure writeup for the game. For each game, you receive a total of 3500 exp. 3000 of this can be put on a character that has **not been played that week** (using the same reset at 7:00 PM Saturday at regular club meeting start time) or **not already received GM exp that week**. The remaining 500 exp can be placed on any of your characters. You should not be stockpiling exp over the course of several weeks to dump all on one character and should be putting the exp on a character each week, since this may lead to characters doubling up on exp when they shouldn't have. This GM exp also applies if you are coGMing.

***If you don't submit the adventure writeup, you do not receive GM exp!*** It is difficult to enforce this, so it is held on honor system. If it is suspected that GM exp fraud is occurring, the ~~HS~~ Rules Coordinator and/or President may have to be notified to resolve the issue, checking through the adventure writeups and your exp budget. CoGM writeups should include a note on who was the coGM and GM of the game.

GM exp does not double for low-rate characters. Only exp earned by playing those characters on games will double.

# Rules V: Read the Manual

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You should be familiar with the system, and have played as a player and be familiar with the player section of the manual before starting to GM. You don't need to be familiar with every background and every race, but having experience with at least 2 characters is important. Skimming through the other sections is also incredibly helpful.

You should also familiarize yourself with GM sections of the manual, especially sections 29-33, which include creating and running NPCs and creatures, creating and running adventures, and how to judge various situations that may come up. *This is not a complete catch-all guide!* Most of becoming a good GM comes from experience rather than reading the manual, but reading the material will set up a road for success.

# Tips, Tricks, and Guides

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Here are 9 GM pointers:

- Know the rules. If you don't know how something works, like a spell, look it up. Make sure to keep yourself updated on official rulings.
- Don't always trust what you are told at face value. Vague wording can lead to misinterpretation which may lead to unexpected or unfair situations. If you have a rules question, check the official rulings, ask the rules coordinator, not the players. If you have questions about a magic item, look it up in the database. If you still have questions, ask the rules coordinator. If an item isn't in the database, you should not allow it to be used if it has impact on the game.
- You are in charge. You have the right to look at the character sheet of any player and ask information of the player about their character. Don't let a player deny you information, such as magic item codes or skill/stat ranks. You can allow them to pass the information to you in secret if they don't want other players to know about it.

# Tips, Tricks, and Guides

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- Limit rewards. Mission rewards should be based on the mission difficulty. Players shouldn't expect to get a magic item (or other high valued loot) after every single game you run.
- Keep it simple. If you do give out rewards, try to keep them simple. Other GMs will have to understand the item in question and making things complicated makes it more difficult for other GMs.
- Think about consequences. Remember that everyone has to live with the decisions you make as a GM. If you give out an item that alters the game, other GMs have to live with it. If you introduce a creature that is overpowered and the party is able to capture it and somehow use it to their advantage, everyone has to live with it.

# Tips, Tricks, and Guides

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- Penalize players when necessary. If players do stupid things, they should be faced with the consequences from it (could range from taking damage to the risk of death, or even include RP effects). Also, when players are being disruptive out-of-character, you can warn them and even take any XP if they refuse to stop.
- Bad things happen. Don't let players out of bad things that happen; it is part of the game. If characters die due to bad luck or a random spell effect, it happens. This is especially true if the player created the situation that ultimately killed their character. Always allow a divine intervention (unless you have a reason not to), but characters should fear the possibility of death at least a little bit.
- Seek Guidance. There are a lot of settings, NPCs, and other things within the campaign that have been used over the years. Many of them have someone that would be considered their "owner" that are responsible for running actions involving them. It is advisable to seek the owner out and let them know if you plan to do significant things with it.

# Tips, Tricks, and Guides

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The next portion of the presentation are composed of two guides to GMing.

The first, “So you want to GM?”, gives many general tips on GMing in club.

The second, “5-5-5-3 Method of Game Making”, offers a specific procedure for creating a 3-session adventure for newer GMs and can be incredibly helpful if you don’t know where to start.

So You want to GM?

# It's easy, no seriously

GMing itself is easy

Bare minimum effort

Stick solid to book interpretation

Basic cookie cutter idea

Use a module online

Stick to an action-consequence style narrative

# But it's difficult to do well

GMing well is difficult

1. Takes time

- To learn your style, build skill, and learn about players

2. Takes energy

- Responding to party shenanigans is draining while flexing and creating on the spot rulings

The manual can't account for all situations. You need to learn how to make on the fly choices that don't break the game

# However, You have tools to help you

Things you have at your disposal

You are the GM, you have final say in most things.

What you say happens, happens

You control how the world responds.

You can say if it is possible for the character to do things or not.

You can control the rules at your table\*

\*Within reason (More on that later)

# However, it's even more difficult in club

## Out of Club GMing

- Campaigns are with consistent players and characters
- Complete Freedom in Magic Items and story choices
  - No limits on items if you want
- Complete control over world background/ character backstory.
  - Can easily work with all characters and have intertwining backstories
- House Rulings and small table agreements
  - Only need the people at your table to be fine with
- Only 1 Chef : I.e you are the only GM

## In club GMing

- Each Week it's different characters or players
- You are limited on strength of magic items to function within system bounds as determined by approvals committee
- Character backstories are hard to work with and many don't necessarily work on them
- Rulings are made club wide and rules need to be somewhat standardized
- Many Chefs, Jaern is a common world shared by many GM's, one impact could set off a chain of events and many times it could lead into arguments about how the world responds.

# Tips to help you in the system

## 1. Find your style

- a. Do you like prepping/need it?
- b. Do you stick hard to rules as written or do you bend them?
- c. Do you like long winded epics or short one offs?
- d. Do you railroad players or let them have complete open world?

## 2. Learn players/characters and their habits in the club

- a. Are they Power Gamers, do they love combat? Do they love RP?
- b. Do they tend to overpower the direction of party in the game? Are they silent?

## 3. Create, Build and Destroy

- a. Brainstorm Worlds, Items, Concepts, Stories and work with feedback on other GM's.

## 4. Build awareness and be flexible

- a. Each game is different, so look how players are reacting and adapt to make them more interested or involved.

# TIPS Part II

## 1. Root for the players

- a. It's easy to make it a me vs. them struggle, but you'll win every time as you are the GM
- b. Make it hard, but help the players out. (Not to say that player death should be completely avoided)

## 2. Be Flexible

- a. Don't ever really force your players to do things, if a player goes somewhere that you haven't prepared for be ready to adjust to allow them to do that
- b. Fantasy Club is a game where games will have a massive power level difference in party. Allow enemies to either adjust mod or have enemies with different power level.

## 3. Be Honest and fair

- a. Most players like a GM that will be up front and honest with them. If a player makes a mistake and gets frustrated. I.e they fight a monster that you tried to make clear they were supposed to fight, work with them to understand what you tried to convey and reach a solution

# TIPS Part III

1. Don't be afraid to pause the game + Don't be afraid to speak directly with your players
  - a. Sometime players get heated or upset and its best to take a break so you can talk to them
    - i. Grab older GM's or other people for advice if you need to.
  - b. Sometimes players overrun or railroad party into doing things they really didn't want to do, stop and talk to those players
    - i. People are reasonable and will work with them.
  - c. Sometimes players tune out from the game or lose focus, stop and talk to them.
  - d. Sometimes the players do something completely unexpected and you need time to think about what will happen
2. **REMEMBER: YOU ARE HERE FOR FUN AND TO PLAY A GAME.**
  - a. If you or your players aren't all having a decent time or end up arguing or bickering then there is a problem. (The benefit of the club structure is that you have officers you can lean on for help. : ).

# TIPS Part IV

1. Don't be afraid to look goofy or to make mistakes
  - a. Players will recognize you are human and will often work around them
2. PvP = Bad IDEA normally
  - a. Players are invested emotionally in characters. PvP pits that investment against other people as opposed to a fictional enemy the GM makes up that has 0 investment in reality.
  - b. Combat is already long and sluggish with 6 minds, 11 minds are nearly double that time'
3. Remember RP.
  - a. It'll fill in the gap and prevent the game from being a combat slogfest
  - b. Creates interesting and fun interactions between people
4. Rule of COOL
  - a. Let the player win, i.e if a player does something that really doesn't seem to make 100% sense in reality but lets them do something awesome. Or use a spell in a manner which it wasn't completely intended for but would do something awesome or clever, let them do it or give them a fair check to complete it.

# TIPS Part V

1. Party is stupider than you think, but at the same time, don't underestimate them.
  - a. Puzzles are hit or miss, always try to include an alternative path than completing the puzzle. Some players have 0 patience for them, others love them.
  - b. Puzzles can be either easier than you think or way harder than you think. Balance not enough clues with enough clues. If party won't pay attention to lore, then give them the lore information that they need right in front of them. Otherwise, stress important information
  - c. Don't be afraid to change the answer if you can correctly follow the party's logic to their hypothesized solution, if it makes sense and there's no reason why it couldn't be the case, let it work.

# TIPS Part VI

1. Get quiet or uninterested players involved.
  - a. If a person is being silent, they may be shy, or uninterested in what's happening. Have an overly eccentric NPC interact with them. Maybe have a strange item appear magically in their hand. Directly interact with the player to see if they are shy or uninterested. If they are not having a fun time, then don't be afraid to pause the game and talk to the players and see what is making the game not fun for them.

# How to Brainstorm Worlds/ Missions/Campaigns

## 1. How do you create the story?

- a. NPC created first and then world to match backstory?
- b. World itself first created, then NPCs and story created to match it?
- c. Story is created, and world and NPCs are fleshed out to match it?
  - i. All the above are valid approaches to creating a world

## 2. Over Focusing detail

- a. Be aware of planning things to a complete T, it limits creative freedom and on the fly judgement calls, though it can make the setting much stronger and realistic.

## 3. Under Focusing Detail

- a. Not enough detail in the world and it comes off as bland or empty. Is the world itself the important bit? Or is it the characters.

# Part 2

1. Understanding Scale in campaign and how that necessitates world building.
  - a. Threats need to match the scale of the adventure itself. I.e Universe threatening guy can't be a pushover that attacks a single city. Destroyer of worlds can't be there to just destroy a single town.
  - b. If the scale is small, i.e you are to destroy a goblin village, the built world can be small
  - c. If the scale is planar-level or multiverse level threats then multiple worlds may need to be involved and the world needs to seem big.
2. Understanding party on the campaign
  - a. Are the players interested in a large epic quest? Are they interested in a space opera adventure? Do they want to have a big story or small story? These are important to know before planning games for them, or communicating the type of game to potential players.
  - b. Are the players wanting to play go fish? Bomb the drump towers? Are they wanting to stop and seriously interact with NPCs and uncover a dark political plot to overthrow the king? Do they want to quest and slay a series of large monsters? The types of games or campaigns is important that it matches up with what players want and their characters.

# Part 3

1. Get the players involved a tiny bit in world creation and backstory.
  - a. Sometimes it's quite beneficial in getting the players involved in general world creation. TTRPGs are a collaborative storytellings. With players involved in world creation, their characters can have a heavily fleshed out backstory. It also will get the players themselves automatically invested in the world on a personal level. However, don't let them create the main plot. Afterall, it's fun not knowing what you are going up against.



# 5-5-5-3 Method of Game Making

By Zachary Berglund



# What is the 5-5-5-3 Method

This is a method to use for the creation of a very short campaign. In particular it's good to be used to plan a small game/story that will be played out in 3 games or 12-18 hours.

This is a great method for newer or experienced GMs to give a try.

**NOTE:** This is a very improvizational method meaning not everything needs to be planned. Not every aspect of the world needs to be planned. If there's a large town, plan what is in the town but not who is where and the tiny details. You have the list to help with that.



What is the main jist of this method?

You brainstorm from scratch 5 ideas for the following categories

**Traps**

**Scenes/Settings**

**NPC names**

**Professions/Jobs**

**Monsters**



# Okay, I did that, now what?

Once you have that list come up with 3-5 Themes. This can be movie cliches or themes from books

Ex:

Inside becomes the outside (A thing exposes people for who they are on the inside, monsters, beats, etc.)

Love conquers all (A love story of some kind that party is involved in)

Man vs Nature (The consequences of civilization messing with nature, or nature fighting back)



# Okay, why do that?

Now you have almost everything you'll need for a game. You have different settings for party to adventure through, you have enemies you can make, names for actors, jobs for the actorsw, traps for party to navigate through, and then a theme to help guide the story. You can then start to come up with a story for each of the themes using the different stuff from the lists.

Once you do that, come up with 3 twists in that story. Do not worry about them being original, cliques are cliques because they have value.

Feel free to combine the ideas: Ex. party has to travel through the bridge, but the bridge itself is a monster

This can count as a twist



# Are we almost done?

Last step:

Create an ideal summary for the story, where would party go and what would they encounter there, why would they go there.

You can't predict where party will go, but plan the major aspects and improv everything else. If you are worried about railroading let party go off on their own, don't force them back but do let them know the story you have for them to work with is X way. You can also come up with a subplot that might sneakily link them back to the main story, especially if the villain is causing a large problem.



# Congrats

If you have done all this, you can sit down and plan out the stats for the creatures, a small snippet about each NPC and their job, as well as the circumstances under which you think party will meet them

Furthermore, you aren't limited to brainstorming those different things. You can make lists of 5 things that aren't the 5 categories at the beginning.

You can make 5 puzzles, 5 names for artifacts, etc. You can do whatever and use that to help refine your idea and story.



# Bonus Slide

A collection of ideas for one-offs that are easy to run.

1. Stop a war occurring between two medieval societies where magic is known. The world has magical creatures and Demi-humans, often where they form anthropomorphic beats.
2. A man-made planet needs to be destroyed as AI's have influenced it's core and the planet itself is constructing a massive weapon. Green influenced, very jungley
3. Human are living in mobile fortresses due to monsters that roam the surface, people needed to save one, but are crossed with issues from terrorists on the inside. They use a substance known as permond. This is used to power the fortress, but it can also be used for personal power and mutation.
4. Post Apocalyptic, Magical Apocalypse has rendered magic unusable on the plane. Surviving tribes war over the remaining resources, think of Fallout. People needed to find Shangri La. They will then bring back life to the land.
5. Frosted world, The Ice King has been ruling for generations and has been living isolated in a permafrost. The citizens have been suffering under his cruelty. A group of legendary heroes have been sent in but have not been seen. Some have had a change of heart but the magic on them is hard to let go as it will refresh itself every round as an item on him will prevent this. Some have been captured. Please bring back our heroes in one piece.
6. Adventure in Space, a great being known as Azmorpheus is on a rampage to devour worlds. Adventurers needed to stop him. A colossal being the size of a planet. An Earth needs heroes to stop this. They can talk to others to see about what is necessary to kill him. They may need to travel to other worlds to get different technologies and rescue a top scientist that has memorized the formulas and blueprints to a weapon to stop it. They are fighting a green, four legged half human half scorpion race to rescue him.
7. Eternal Storms ravage this water world. Most do not know of dry land. But there's an ancient creature that threatens to destroy the water and raise land. Cities are floating and often ruins of cities on top of mountains can be found.
8. An omnisphere/ dyson sphere covers this planet. Inside the world is man made and carved into four sections. These are wilderness and players must fight using these zones for cover. Occasionally events happen as well as natural disasters. Super powerful magic items are kept at the center. Super Powerful large creatures roam, similar to Ark, Survival Evolved.
9. Rescue someone from the labyrinth, think of greek minotaur labyrinth.

# Magic Items I

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This Magic Item system of PFC is contained on the club website. It uses a three-letter system, followed by three numbers (most generally. Some other things can be done with the system, but stick with the ABC### format if possible). The three letters should be your Initials, or something as close to that as possible.

Before you can give out magic items, you must read through the rest of the powerpoint, and complete a short quiz.

When creating magic items, you should write up the item's description and mechanics, and submit them for approvals to overview the balance of the item. If the item has any issues with it, they will reach out to you, and if it cannot be worked out, they retain the power to veto any item outright.

# Magic Items II

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The guidelines are all located on the official rulings part of the website:

[https://centralia.aquest.com/doku.php?id=rulings#magic\\_item\\_guidelines](https://centralia.aquest.com/doku.php?id=rulings#magic_item_guidelines)

Make sure to read through all these guidelines. The most important rules are given on the following slides.

# Magic Items III

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Word Limit - 500 Words

- You may have a longer description that correlates to lore and physical descriptions, but all **mechanics** for the item should be 500 or less words. Keep this as specific and clear as possible, avoiding any strange or excessively complicated mechanics.

Attach an adventure writeup if possible

- This will help approvals gauge the balance of your item. If it seems your item is slightly too powerful, a detailed adventure writeup that reveals that the game was particularly difficult would help expedite the process of approving an item, and gauging if it is an appropriate reward.

# Magic Items IV

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## No Legendary Creature Abilities

- GMs can give out *mutate* castings to adventurers as rewards. However, no Legendary Creature Abilities can be given out. These would also include most regular creature abilities higher than rank 4 (except for a seldom few such as flying, land movement, some natural armors).
- Any mutate rewards are very valuable, since it would normally cost exp. That should be kept in mind when considering giving them out.

# Story Coordination & Campaigns

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Every Fall semester, a “newbie campaign” is created and run for any new members of club, structured to last the entirety of the first semester.

This effort is headed by the Story Coordinator, but is not solely done by the Story Coordinator. Members (especially GMs) will be needed to help with writing, planning, editing, helping new members create characters, as well as GMing games and playing NPCs, and planning the LARP finale session.

A submission process and vote for the theme and hook of this campaign occurs in the spring, and work on the project happens usually over the summer leading into the following fall, when it takes place.

# Story Coordination & Campaigns

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Besides from the Newbie Campaign, GMs are encouraged to approach the Story Coordinator with ideas and hooks for campaigns that are open to the entirety of club. These can be continuations of the newbie campaign, or a completely different plot hook. If it is a campaign idea that will require multiple GMs, the Story Coordinator can help organize efforts for you. In any case, a loose writeup of the campaign structure and how it will affect the world of Jaern should be sent to the Story Coordinator. Many times, these campaigns are used to work in mechanical updates to the system, such as introducing rewrites, reworks, new races, spell groups, etc.

# Final Notes

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PFC is centered around a massive, long-standing, continuous campaign that traces its origins back to the 1980's, started here on Purdue campus. The world of Jaern is still, after 40 years, vastly unexplored and open, and the possibilities are limitless. Some history of the campaign is included on the website in historical events, and that can be read to provide ideas or see what notable campaigns have happened in the past. The future is up to you, as GMs come in and eventually leave, the torch of bringing new stories to club continuously passes forward, and now rests in your hands. Don't be afraid to mess up, and above all, have fun.

# Quiz

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It's only a few questions, and super easy. Once you pass it, and after greenlit by your co-GM(s), you are approved for GMing on your own, submitting and giving out magic items, and will be officially assigned the GM role in discord.

<https://forms.gle/6Y1Qv9L2LceEobjUA>