Game Master Workbook

by Ceridwen A
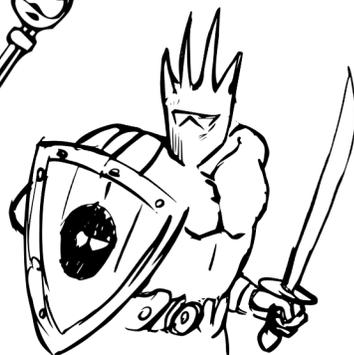
So, what is this?

Well, that's a pretty great question; unfortunately, there isn't an easy answer. The basics are pretty clear: this is a workbook for game masters. If you 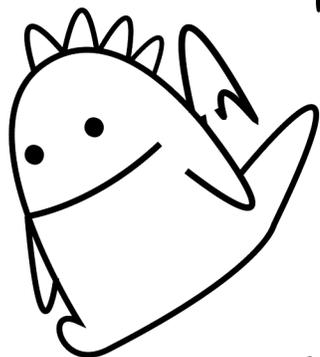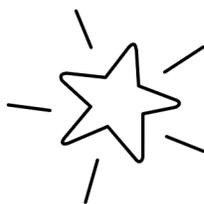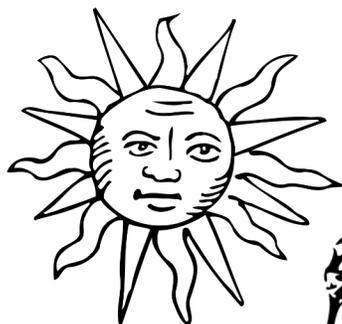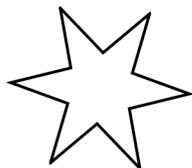are the person who owns this, then you are probably a game master, or want to be one! This isn't a textbook, or a guide on how to GM, but rather a collection of activities and experiments to help a GM get the juices flowing! Maybe this is something you sit down and finish in a day, or maybe you do one activity a day for a while. Or maybe you plow through half the book right away, then set it on a shelf and forget about it for a long time, then find it again and think, "Huh, I guess the intro paragraph was right." Whatever happens with this workbook, I hope it brings you some joy!

And... who are you?

I'm the narrator of this book - the voice in your head that is being put there by these words. Also, I'm kind of the author. I've been running games for almost two decades. I cut my teeth on playing AD&D with my dad and his friends when I was 13. Since then I've run everything from Unisystem to 5e, with a slew of other systems in between. My journey in gaming has taken me to lead workshops about world building at Gen Con, organize panels for other conventions, lead presentations at LARP cons, and, of course, write my own world and setting.

You probably have your own story about how you became a GM! With that, I invite you to turn the page, and get to the good stuff. Why read about me when you can write about you?
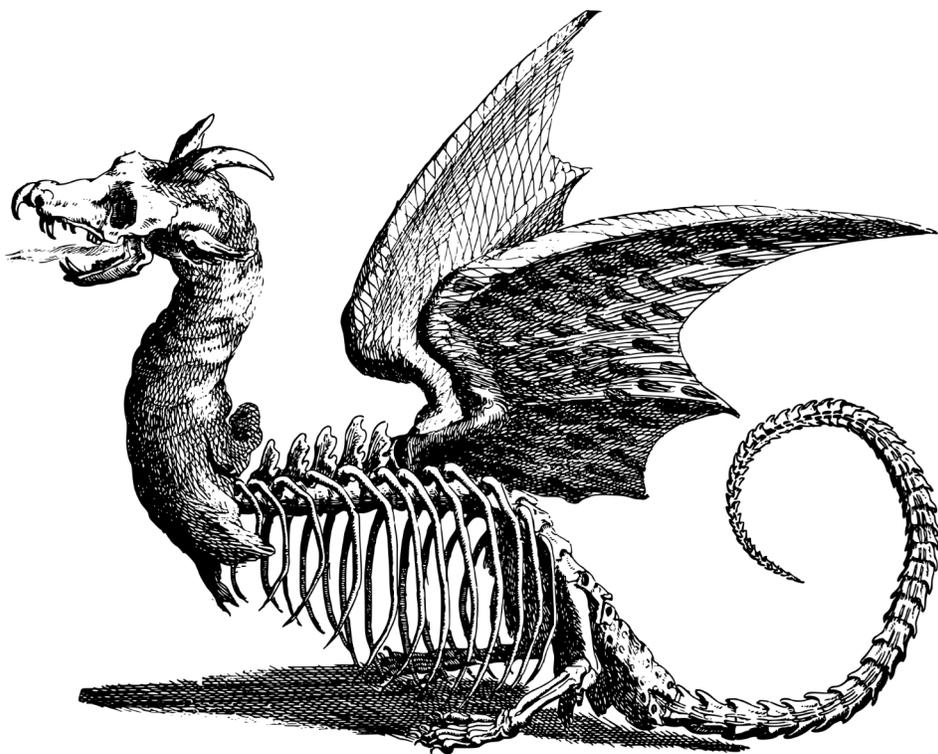
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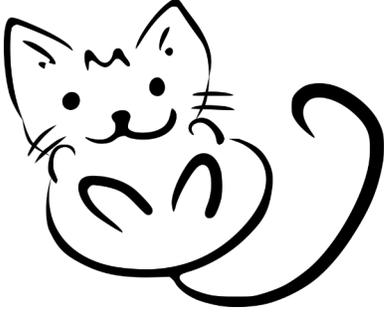
I know you're all excited and ready, but before you deep dive into this, I want to take a moment to give you some general guidelines - as I'm sure you've guessed, a lot of this book will be dedicated to building worlds, plots, and NPCs for your games!

- **Player/Character Contribution**
  - You need blank spaces in the world for your characters to fill in.
  - If characters help shape the world they will be more invested in it.
  - Unknowns make for more interesting storytelling/gameplay.

- **What If Questions**
  - What if questions are the kind of questions that create more questions.
  - Lists of questions are better than lists of absolutes, because questions can be answered by players - it saves you work and helps them feel like they're a part of the setting!
  - What If's can become plot hooks!!

- **Logical Conclusion**
  - Take concepts beyond present tense and reach logical conclusions.
  - Looking at where ideas could end up will let you set up the path they will take to develop, giving you more direction in game play.
  - If concepts can't be developed, they are poor starting points.

- **Extremes**
  - What is most interesting? For example, a town with a standard age distribution is boring, but a town where everyone is between 10 and 20 is interesting.
  - Extremes need explanation: why are things this way?
  - Questions are more interesting than answers.

- **Continuity/Justification**
  - All things require justification. If you add something "just because it's cool," then it won't necessarily make sense in your world.
  - Make things fit! The great thing about being the world builder is that you get to add and subtract as needed to make things make sense.
  - The more justification you add, the more depth there is to the world.
  - Continuity makes the world feel more real.
  - Also, when things are incongruous, the players/characters will notice and want to figure out why. #Plothooks

1 - What & Why?

What is a "game master" to you?

Circle some keywords from the word cloud below, then try to string together a vaguely cohesive answer.

Once you've done that, write about why you are a game master - not just how you became one, but why you keep doing it.

writer   challenges   creator   setting

group   story   experienced   storyteller

friend   development   collaborator   plots

designer   support   guide   leader   host

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<u>Something to think about:</u>

Are there any of those words you wish you were better at incorporating into your GMing? How do you measure up to your own definition of a GM?

2 - Food for Thought

"The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim."

The Picture of Dorian Gray
by Oscar Wilde

Though we don't always think of what we do as art, GMing is a form of artistic expression. Think about some art and artists that you enjoy - these could be singers, writers, actors, architects, etc.

Consider how what you do as a GM is an art form. Look at the definition you constructed in activity 1. Does your definition of a GM pair well with viewing your GMing as art? If no, then, why not?

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Something to think about:

What of yourself do you see in your GMing? What do you conceal? What of yourself would you like to put more of into your GMing?

3 - Isn't this supposed to be about gaming?

Yeah, yeah - keep your shirt on. Enough with this philosophical deep dive - let's talk about the fun stuff! Game Mastering is a lot about thinking on your feet! Start a timer for 15 minutes. Got the timer started? Good. Now pick up an object near you.

Your challenge is to build a world around that object. The object doesn't have to be what is physically is - it can be an abstraction, or representation. If it's an ordinary item, how can you make it interesting? The scale is irrelevant - it can be tiny or huge in your world. Same with modernity - this thing can be anachronistic. (In other activities we'll expand on this, so just focus on the prompts below, and you don't have to answer in order.)

What is is in the real world?
_____

What is it in your world?
_____
_____

How many of these exist?
_____

Why do people want it/them?
_____
_____

Why can't people get it/them?
_____
_____

Name a faction that wants to destroy it/them:
_____

Why do they want to destroy it/them?
_____
_____

Name a faction that wants to protect it/them:
_____

What to they gain from protecting it/them?
_____
_____

Something to think about:

Consider your thought process. How did you come up with these ideas? What did it feel like to make this stuff up on the fly?

4 - I think I'm getting it....

Great! Now, let's focus in our setting elements. What genre do you see your game world fitting into? There isn't one answer, and games with multiple genres can be more exciting and fun! (And you can go beyond this list!)

- **Adventure:** Characters journey to epic or distant places to accomplish something.
- **Comedy**: A series of funny, or comical events, intended to make the people laugh.
- **Crime:** A story about a crime that is being committed or was committed.
- **Fantasy:** A fantasy story is about magic or supernatural forces, rather than technology, though it often is made to include elements of other genres, such as science fiction elements if it happens to take place in a modern or future era.
- **Horror**: A story told with the purpose of inspiring fear and terror.
- **Mystery**: A mystery story follows an investigator(s) as they attempt to solve a puzzle.
- **Science Fiction:** This genre use science to explain the universe that it takes place in.
- **Apocalyptic** (post): The story is set in a world or civilization after such a disaster.
- **Hard Sci-Fi**: The science is detailed, researched, and could be plausible.
- **Soft Sci-F**i: Stories typically deal more with social/political issues in a sci-fi setting.
- **Western**: Exploring the contrast between civilization or society and the untamed wilderness.

Pick 1 or more genres and write some notes about why they fit with your weird object concept!

Something to think about:

Is this genre out of your normal gaming style? Is it right up your alley? What media can you consume to inspire you?

5 - How is this a world?

In activity 3 you started building a world around an object. You have some vague ideas, and I want to let you know that it's 100% okay to change things as you go, but please give this a chance! Let's see what crazy world you can build using this exercise!

Let's take those factions from activity 3 and flesh them out.

Name:	Name:
What is the structure of the group?	**What is the structure of the group?**
How are they funded?	**How are they funded?**
What is their insignia?	**What is their insignia?**

It doesn't have to be a good drawing.

Something to think about:

Creating conflicts in your world helps give the players motivations to do things. Can you think of interesting conflicts between these groups?

6 - Do I have to draw again?

Yes. SUFFER! Mwahahah! Just kidding. No - you don't have to draw. This is a writing activity. Within each faction, there will be bad elements; no group of people is perfect. It's time to think about the good, the bad, and the ugly of these factions. What does that mean? Well, that's up to you!

Name: **Name:**

Good   Good

Bad   Bad

Ugly   Ugly

Something to think about:

How do you imagine players would see the factions? How would you have them discover the different sides of the factions in gameplay?

7 - This is so lame/cool.

At this point you may be feeling super excited, or super unenthusiastic, or worse, largely ambivalent about the world you're building. After all, you did make this stuff up based on a random thing that was near you!
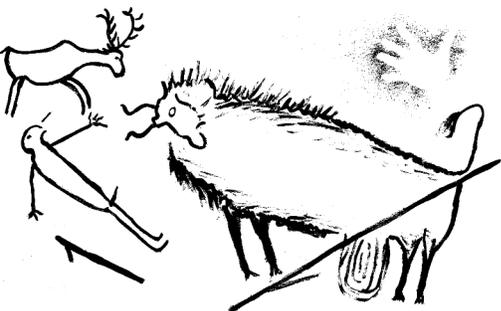
Whenever you're working on something, it's important to take a step back from time to time and be a little critical. Critique isn't bad! While we don't want to discourage ourselves, we do want to look for opportunities to improve. So, let's take a look at what you wrote in activity 3, 4, & 5, then answer the prompts below.

What's the coolest thing about what you've made so far?
_____

What is the lamest thing about what you've made so far?
_____

What are some influences you see in what you're building?
_____
_____

How can you re-imagine the tropes/cliches you see in your work?
_____
_____

What are some awesome things you want to build more about?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Something to think about:

We all draw from our favorite games/books/movies to create. What makes your work special and different from your source(s) of inspiration?

8 - Okay... now what?

EXACTLY! You've got these cool, opposing forces now, fighting for control over some thingy you've wizarded up. Now think about the world around them. What sorts of structures and supports would have to exist to allow those factions to survive and thrive? Someone has to make sure the trash gets picked up and the farms can deliver their goods to market, right?

What are the broad strokes in your world? Democracy? Theocracy? Oligarchy? Monarchy? Anarchy?

_____

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_____

Who rebels? What factions resist government control? How does that impact the day to day lives of characters?

_____

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_____

Who are the leaders? What are their goals?

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_____

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How is technology/magic/religion used by the government?

_____

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_____

How are player characters used by government? At what point does the government take an interest in them?

_____

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Something to think about:

What real world topics can you see working with your story? How can those things inspire you without taking over your story?

9 - This is coming together!

Damn skippy it is! Look at you - building a complex world full of dynamic, interesting stuff and people!

Now it's time to tackle the foundational components of your world. See, by starting from this nugget of your artifact, you've already done a lot of the heavy lifting in how you will approach your setting. Now it's time to write it down, because otherwise you will forget it.

<u>Technology</u>	<u>Magic</u>	<u>Religion</u>
How long has this technology been in use?	What are the consequences of magic?	Are the gods real?
Why has it not advanced more?	Who has access to magic?	Are they omnipotent? Are they omniscient?
How does technology affect the average npc?	What does the average npc think about magic?	How does religion impact the day to day life of a person?

<u>Something to think about:</u>

What real world topics can you see working with your story? How can those things inspire you without taking over your story?

10 - DRAWING?!

YES! It's time to put everything together and map out the shape of your world. What does your world look like? Are there natural borders? Coast line? What sorts of resources are readily accessible and where are they? Where will conflicts arise over land/borders/ports? What sort of weather will you find in these places? Remember - most wars are not fought over ideological and moral grounds. Usually the ideological and moral arguments are used to justify political or economic goals!

Something to think about:

How did your factions, governments, and object inspire your map?
How did it feel to wait this long to start drawing your world out?

Is there a good cheese place on your map? I'm hungry.

WE DID IT!!!...

Yeah, we did :) Good job, friendo!

I hope you enjoyed this silly little workbook, and that maybe you found it useful. You may never play with the world that we've made, or bring the NPCs to life, but you know what? That's okay too! Being a game master is sometimes about trial and error. So maybe this world didn't work out, but maybe you found something in the process of making it that you CAN use!
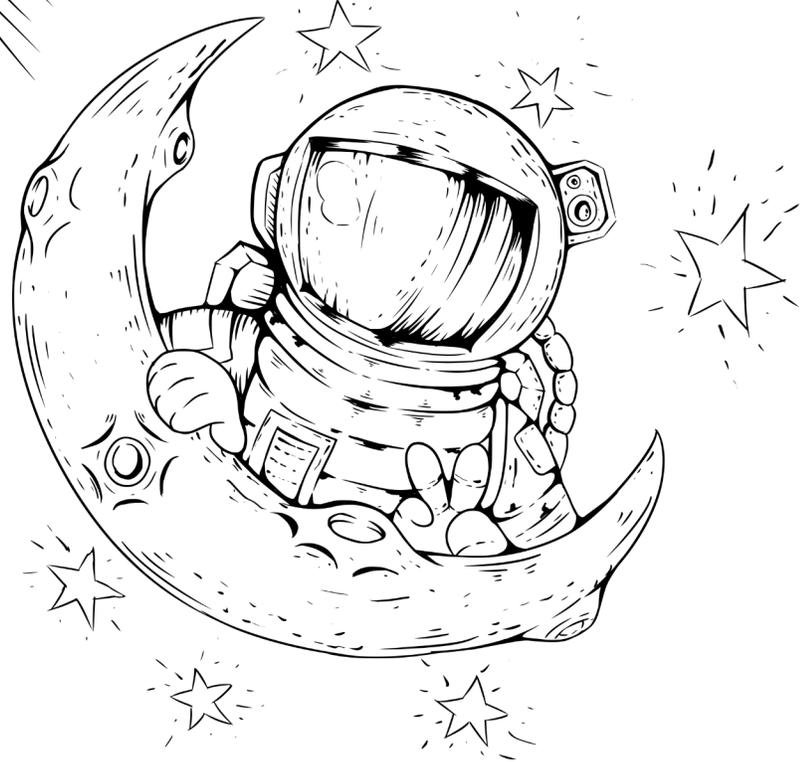
I know I've said there aren't right answers, and that's mostly true, but I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts about game mastering. I think of GMing as World Running. It's not just about building plots and trying to get my players to play them out (I mean, there's some of that, but it's not the focus). My view is that when I am running a game, I'm setting up a huge park, with all kinds of playground equipment for folks to explore. But those slides and monkey bars are just the foundations for the stories the players will tell. It's my job as the GM to give players things to respond to, to care about, and to desire. When I am building worlds, I am building a landscape.

Once the players are out in the playground, building their stories and setting themselves up for victory and heartbreak, I have the pleasure of adding obstacles and challenges, forcing players to make decisions. Just like in real life, decisions shape who a person is. When a GM uses elements of the world to give players a chance to see how their character responds, we are really collaborating. And no matter how well we think we know our characters and players, there will always be surprises.

Anyway, thanks again for enjoying this workbook. I have a few more ideas for similar workbooks, so maybe we'll meet again some day. Until then, good luck with all your endeavors, and I hope you treat yourself with the kindness you wish others to treat you with.

Thank you for playing! ☼

The Unnamed Game Company is a passion project run by us, Gilbert and Ceridwen. We love games, gaming, and gamers, and really appreciate that you took the time to see what we made :)

The idea of creating, laying out, promoting, and publishing 31 games was all Gilbert. In two months we worked together to bring 31 games to life just so we could give them away. Why? Well, for one, Gilbert likes doing stuff. For two, we like to explore and try things out! This challenge was really intense, and we're so glad that we met our goal - and even more glad that you decided to check it out!

If you enjoyed this game, please let us know on twitter @UnnamedGameCo

You can also check out our published work on our website www.unnamedgameco.com

And if you'd like to support our work, head on over to our Ko-Fi page ko-fi.com/theunnamedgameco/

Thank you again for your interest and we hope you'll enjoy more Unnamed Games!

Thanksssssss for playing!

THE UNNAMED
G A M E   C O.