

# Manifold

## World Builder Standalone

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## 1 Manifold as a World-Operation Layer

### 1.1 Purpose and Scope

This document extracts and reframes the **world-building and world-operation model** of Manifold for use independently of the full Manifold RPG framework.

It is written for Game Masters who are satisfied with their existing systems for character creation, task resolution, combat, and advancement, but who want stronger tools for answering a persistent question:

*What is the world doing over time, and how do consequences persist beyond individual scenes?*

Manifold's world model can be adopted **without** changing dice systems, character sheets, or combat rules. It is not a replacement layer. It is an *underlying operational model* for how a fictional world behaves between and beneath moments of action.

## 1.2 The Core Insight

When Manifold is discussed in public forums, a consistent realization emerges:

The world-building aspect of Manifold stands on its own.

Stripped of player-facing assumptions and resolution philosophy, Manifold's world guidance functions as a **system-agnostic world-operation layer** — one that can sit cleanly beneath or alongside nearly any traditional RPG.

Most RPGs are excellent at resolving *what happens now*.

Few make explicit *what continues to happen later*.

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## 1.3 What This Layer Provides

At its core, the Manifold world-operation layer introduces four structural commitments.

### 1.3.1 1. Explicit World Entities

The world is composed of entities that matter:

- Locations
- Factions
- Institutions
- Threats
- Processes (wars, plagues, migrations, investigations)

Each entity is declared with **scope** — what it can affect and what it cannot. This prevents both overreach and hand-waving.

### 1.3.2 2. Persistent Pressure

Pressure represents accumulating strain, tension, or momentum in the world.

- Pressure builds whether or not the players succeed
- Pressure does not require immediate consequences
- Pressure narrows future options rather than punishing past choices

This allows the world to *lean* on the fiction without resolving everything immediately.

### 1.3.3 3. Instability as State, Not Event

Instability is what happens when pressure exceeds tolerance.

Crucially:

- Instability is traceable

- Instability persists
- Instability changes how future outcomes behave

It is not a scripted twist or surprise complication. It is a **new baseline** the world must now operate from.

#### 1.3.4 4. Visible, Shared World Memory

World state is recorded explicitly:

- What has changed
- What is strained
- What is no longer stable

This shared memory prevents drift, retconning, and accidental reset between sessions.

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### 1.4 What This Layer Does *Not* Replace

Adopting this model does **not** require abandoning:

- Action resolution systems
- Combat mechanics
- Character advancement
- Skill lists or attributes
- Encounter design

A traditional RPG can continue to function exactly as written while using this layer to answer different questions.

You still roll to hit. Players still track hit points, spell slots, stress, or resources.

The difference is that the *world itself* is no longer static or purely reactive.

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### 1.5 How It Integrates with Traditional Play

When used alongside an existing RPG system, the Manifold world-operation layer governs:

- How factions evolve between sessions
- How locations degrade, destabilize, or harden over time
- How unresolved consequences persist beyond a single scene
- How the world moves when players are absent

This separation of concerns is deliberate:

- **Your system** decides whether an action succeeds
- **The world layer** decides what that success or failure *means over time*

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## 1.6 Why This Feels Familiar — and Alien

Many experienced GMs already do parts of this informally.

They track grudges, worsening situations, background threats, and long-term fallout in notes or memory. Manifold's contribution is not invention, but **formalization**.

The difference is that world operation becomes:

- Explicit rather than implicit
- Shareable rather than private
- Consistent rather than intuitive-only

This is why Manifold can feel immediately recognizable while still unsettling. It promotes a background GM responsibility to a first-class system.

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## 1.7 What You Gain by Adopting It

Used on its own, this layer provides:

- Clear continuity across sessions
- Fewer improvisational contradictions
- Stronger causal chains in the fiction
- A world that develops momentum independently of spotlight time

Most importantly, it reduces the cognitive burden of *remembering everything* by turning memory into structure.

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## 1.8 Closing Perspective

Seen in isolation, Manifold's world-building guidance is not a rejection of traditional RPG design.

It is a **reusable extraction**: a way to make the long-term behavior of a game world legible, consistent, and durable — regardless of what mechanics sit on top of it.

You do not need to play Manifold to benefit from it.

You only need a world that deserves to be taken seriously.