

Manifold

World Building Guide

Reed Kimble

Contents

1 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs — Draft Outline	4
1.1 Part I: Framing the World	4
1.1.1 1. Purpose of Worldbuilding in Manifold	4
1.1.2 2. Choosing a Genre and Core Premise	4
1.1.3 3. Declaring the World’s Central Tensions	4
1.2 Part II: Selecting a Dice Grammar	4
1.2.1 4. What Dice Grammar Is (and Is Not)	4
1.2.2 5. Choosing a Dice Grammar for the Genre	5
1.2.3 6. Mapping Dice Results to Outcome Tiers	5
1.2.4 7. Stress Testing the Dice Grammar	5
1.3 Part III: Declaring Initial World Entities	5
1.3.1 8. What Counts as an Entity	5
1.3.2 9. Initial Entity Set (Minimum Viable World)	5
1.3.3 10. Using the Declarations Guide	5
1.4 Part IV: Establishing Initial State	5
1.4.1 11. Selecting Starting Tracks	5
1.4.2 12. Selecting Starting Tags and Conditions	6
1.4.3 13. Scoping and Visibility Decisions	6
1.5 Part V: First Contact with Play	6
1.5.1 14. Connecting Characters to World State	6
1.5.2 15. Preparing the First Situation	6
1.5.3 16. What <i>Not</i> to Prepare	6
1.6 Part VI: Iteration and Expansion	6
1.6.1 17. Watching What the World Teaches You	6
1.6.2 18. Adding New Tracks and Entities Safely	6
1.6.3 19. Retiring World State	6
1.7 Appendix: Worked Examples (Future)	7
2 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	7
2.1 Part I: Framing the World	7
2.1.1 1. Worldbuilding in Manifold Is Pressure Design	7
2.1.2 2. Genre as Constraint, Not Flavor	8
2.1.3 3. Establish the Core Premise	8
2.1.4 4. Identify What Moves Without the Players	8
2.1.5 5. Decide What the World Is Bad At	9

2.1.6	6. Keep the Initial Frame Narrow	9
2.1.7	7. Sanity Check: Is This a Manifold World?	9
2.1.8	What This Part Gives You	9
3	Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	10
3.1	Part II: Selecting a Dice Grammar	10
3.1.1	4. What Dice Grammar Is (and Is Not)	10
3.1.2	5. Dice Grammar Serves Outcome Tiers	10
3.1.3	6. Core Dice Grammar Axes	10
3.1.4	7. Common Grammar Families	11
3.1.5	8. Mapping Dice Results to Outcome Tiers	12
3.1.6	9. Pressure and Dice Must Interact Cleanly	12
3.1.7	9A. Variance and Opposing Rolls	12
3.1.8	9B. How Variance Rolls Are Used	13
3.1.9	9C. When to Use a Variance Roll	13
3.1.10	9D. Keeping Variance Honest	13
3.1.11	10. Growth, Regression, and Dice Expression	13
3.1.12	10. Stress-Testing Your Dice Grammar	15
3.1.13	11. A Minimal Starting Recommendation	15
3.1.14	What This Part Gives You	16
4	Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	16
4.1	Part III: Declaring Initial World Entities	16
4.1.1	12. What Counts as an Entity	16
4.1.2	13. Start with a Minimum Viable World	16
4.1.3	14. Use Declaration, Not Description	17
4.1.4	15. Applying the Declarations Guide at World Scale	17
4.1.5	16. Example: Declaring a Faction	17
4.1.6	17. Example: Declaring a Location	18
4.1.7	18. World Processes as Entities	18
4.1.8	19. Decide Initial Visibility	18
4.1.9	20. Do Not Interlink Entities Too Early	18
4.1.10	What This Part Gives You	19
5	Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	19
5.1	Part IV: Establishing Initial State	19
5.1.1	21. What “Initial State” Means	19
5.1.2	22. Start with Fewer Tracks Than You Think	19
5.1.3	23. Choosing World-Level Pressure Tracks	20
5.1.4	24. Entity-Specific Tracks	20
5.1.5	25. Using Tags and Conditions at the Start	20
5.1.6	26. Conditions vs Tracks	20
5.1.7	27. Deciding Scope Carefully	21
5.1.8	28. Visibility: Public, Shared, and Private State	21
5.1.9	29. Avoid Front-Loaded Crisis	21
5.1.10	30. Sanity Check: Is the State Playable?	21
5.1.11	What This Part Gives You	22

6 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	22
6.1 Part V: First Contact with Play	22
6.1.1 31. Connect Characters to Existing Pressure	22
6.1.2 32. Let the First Situation Be Small	22
6.1.3 33. Start in the Middle, Not at the Beginning	23
6.1.4 34. Use the State Sheet Actively	23
6.1.5 35. Allow Imperfect Calls	23
6.1.6 36. Do Not Optimize the First Session	23
6.1.7 37. Watch What Players Engage With	24
6.1.8 38. End with Changed State	24
6.1.9 39. Between Sessions: Adjust, Don't Rewrite	24
6.1.10 What This Part Gives You	24
7 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs	25
7.1 Part VI: Iteration and Expansion	25
7.1.1 40. Let Play Tell You What Matters	25
7.1.2 41. Adding New Entities Safely	25
7.1.3 42. Adding New Tracks	25
7.1.4 43. Merging or Retiring State	26
7.1.5 44. Collapse as Worldbuilding	26
7.1.6 45. Expansion Does Not Mean Escalation	26
7.1.7 46. Revisiting Dice Expression Over Time	26
7.1.8 47. Watching for State Bloat	27
7.1.9 48. Long-Term Campaign Shape	27
7.1.10 What This Part Gives You	27
8 Example Fantasy World Implementation: Greenhollow	27
8.1 I. Genre and World Frame	28
8.2 II. Dice Grammar (Full Polyhedral Set)	28
8.2.1 Core Grammar	28
8.2.2 Baseline Dice by Domain	28
8.2.3 Growth & Regression Hooks	28
8.3 III. Player Status Tracks (Universal)	29
8.3.1 Fatigue	29
8.3.2 Wounding	29
8.3.3 Distraction	29
8.4 IV. Player Development Tracks (Generic Fantasy)	29
8.4.1 Martial Development	29
8.4.2 Skirmisher Development	29
8.4.3 Mystic Development	29
8.4.4 Social Development	30
8.4.5 Artisan / Specialist Development	30
8.5 V. The World: The Kingdom of Lowreach	30
8.6 VI. Primary Location: The Town of Greenhollow	30
8.6.1 Initial State (Greenhollow)	30
8.7 VII. Political Pressure (Low Priority)	30
8.8 VIII. External Threat (High Priority)	31
8.8.1 Initial State	31

8.9	IX. Interpersonal Conflict (Mid Priority)	31
8.9.1	Local NPCs	31
8.9.2	Pressure	31
8.10	X. Mystic Entity: The Stonebound Idol	31
8.10.1	Connections	32
8.10.2	Initial State	32
8.11	XI. Starting World State Summary	32
8.12	XII. Why This World Works	32

1 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs — Draft Outline

This guide supports GMs in creating a **specific Manifold game world** after choosing a genre and high-level concept. It focuses on *declaration*, *pressure*, and *dice grammar*, not lore density or setting fiction.

The guide is intended as a **multipart series**, each part usable independently.

1.1 Part I: Framing the World

1.1.1 1. Purpose of Worldbuilding in Manifold

- Worldbuilding as *pressure design*, not lore creation
- The world as a system that remembers
- Why fewer, sharper declarations matter more than completeness

1.1.2 2. Choosing a Genre and Core Premise

- Genre as constraint, not flavor
- Identifying the genre's natural pressure vectors
- Defining what kinds of actions are common, rare, or dangerous

1.1.3 3. Declaring the World's Central Tensions

- What is strained *right now*
 - What happens if nothing is done
 - What forces act without player involvement
-

1.2 Part II: Selecting a Dice Grammar

1.2.1 4. What Dice Grammar Is (and Is Not)

- Dice grammar as interface, not resolution authority
- Relationship between grammar, outcome tiers, and uncertainty

1.2.2 5. Choosing a Dice Grammar for the Genre

- Granularity vs volatility
- Speed vs texture
- When fewer dice say more

1.2.3 6. Mapping Dice Results to Outcome Tiers

- Translating rolls into outcome categories
- Avoiding success/failure thinking
- Keeping grammar expressive but minimal

1.2.4 7. Stress-Testing the Dice Grammar

- Example rolls in low-pressure vs high-pressure states
 - Ensuring dice never grant permission
-

1.3 Part III: Declaring Initial World Entities

1.3.1 8. What Counts as an Entity

- Characters, factions, locations, institutions, phenomena
- When something deserves declaration

1.3.2 9. Initial Entity Set (Minimum Viable World)

- One or two major factions
- One primary location or region
- One background force or process

1.3.3 10. Using the Declarations Guide

- Applying Appendix F at world scale
 - Domains, limits, risk profiles for non-characters
-

1.4 Part IV: Establishing Initial State

1.4.1 11. Selecting Starting Tracks

- World-level pressure tracks
- Faction or location-specific tracks
- Choosing tracks that will *move without players*

1.4.2 12. Selecting Starting Tags and Conditions

- Environmental constraints
- Social and political realities
- Tags that explain why things are difficult

1.4.3 13. Scoping and Visibility Decisions

- What state is public, shared, or private
 - How much the world reveals at the start
-

1.5 Part V: First Contact with Play

1.5.1 14. Connecting Characters to World State

- Letting character declarations hook into world pressure
- Avoiding bespoke character exceptions

1.5.2 15. Preparing the First Situation

- One situation under mild strain
- Where pressure will accumulate if ignored

1.5.3 16. What *Not* to Prepare

- Avoiding plot, outcomes, and hidden solutions
 - Trusting pressure to generate motion
-

1.6 Part VI: Iteration and Expansion

1.6.1 17. Watching What the World Teaches You

- Which pressures matter in play
- Which entities need further definition

1.6.2 18. Adding New Tracks and Entities Safely

- When expansion is justified
- Avoiding state bloat

1.6.3 19. Retiring World State

- Collapse, replacement, and forgetting
- Letting the world settle

1.7 Appendix: Worked Examples (Future)

- Fantasy frontier world
 - Political intrigue city-state
 - Post-collapse survival region
-

This outline establishes structure only. Each section will be written in GM-manual style, with concrete examples and minimal theory.

2 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

2.1 Part I: Framing the World

This part explains how to establish a Manifold game world *before* you declare entities, tracks, or dice grammar.

Its purpose is not to help you invent lore.

Its purpose is to help you decide **what is under strain, why it matters, and what will move even if the players do nothing**.

Everything that follows depends on these choices.

2.1.1 1. Worldbuilding in Manifold Is Pressure Design

In Manifold, worldbuilding is not about completeness.

You are not attempting to describe a whole world.

You are deciding: - What parts of the world are already stressed - What forces continue acting without player input - What kinds of problems refuse to stay solved

A Manifold world is defined by **ongoing strain**.

If nothing in the world is under pressure, play will stall.

If too many things are under pressure, state becomes unreadable.

Your job is to choose a *small number* of pressures that matter.

2.1.2 2. Genre as Constraint, Not Flavor

Genre in Manifold is not cosmetic.

It is a **constraint on what kinds of actions are common, rare, or dangerous.**

When you select a genre, you are implicitly answering questions like: - What does competence look like? - What kinds of problems are hard to escape? - What forms of authority or power exist?

For example: - In a fantasy frontier, distance and scarcity often apply pressure - In a political thriller, visibility and attention apply pressure - In survival horror, stability itself is scarce

Do not mix genres casually.

Each genre has its own pressure logic.

2.1.3 3. Establish the Core Premise

After choosing a genre, define a **single-sentence premise.**

This is not a plot hook.

It is a statement about the world's condition.

Examples: - "A border kingdom is slowly sliding toward open war." - "The city's magical infrastructure is decaying faster than anyone admits." - "Every safe haven in the region is temporary."

A good premise: - Describes instability, not events - Remains true across many situations - Explains why pressure will keep returning

If the premise can be resolved in one scene, it is too small.

2.1.4 4. Identify What Moves Without the Players

A living world does not wait.

Identify **at least one force** that advances regardless of player action.

This might be: - Political escalation - Environmental collapse - Cultural decay - External threat

You are not deciding *how* it will resolve.

You are deciding that it **will continue to act.**

This ensures: - Time matters - Inaction has consequence - Pressure accumulates honestly

2.1.5 5. Decide What the World Is Bad At

Worlds, like characters, have limits.

Ask: - What does this world handle poorly? - Where does it break instead of bending?

Examples: - A powerful empire that cannot adapt quickly - A magical society that cannot scale safely - A decentralized culture that struggles to coordinate

These limits explain why problems persist.

They will later inform: - World-level tracks - Institutional instability - Long-term collapse

2.1.6 6. Keep the Initial Frame Narrow

You do not need: - A global map - A full history - Exhaustive factions

You need: - One stressed region - One active tension - One reason the situation cannot remain stable

Everything else can emerge through play.

Manifold rewards **starting small and letting pressure reveal complexity**.

2.1.7 7. Sanity Check: Is This a Manifold World?

Before moving on, ask:

- If the players do nothing, does the world change?
- Is pressure visible and understandable?
- Are there fewer than five major moving parts?

If the answer to any of these is no, simplify.

Clarity beats ambition.

2.1.8 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part I, you should have: - A genre with clear constraints - A premise rooted in instability - At least one force that advances on its own - A narrow, pressured starting frame

You are now ready to make **implementation decisions**.

Next: Part II explains how to select and implement a dice grammar that supports this world.

3 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

3.1 Part II: Selecting a Dice Grammar

This part explains how to choose and implement a **dice grammar** for your Manifold game.

Dice grammar is one of the few places where Manifold requires you to make a concrete, up-front implementation decision.

The goal is not mathematical balance.

The goal is to select a grammar that **expresses uncertainty honestly**, supports your genre, and stays out of the way of judgment.

3.1.1 4. What Dice Grammar Is (and Is Not)

A dice grammar is the **interface** between uncertainty and outcome.

It answers questions like: - How much variation do we expect when things are uncertain? - How swingy or stable do outcomes feel? - How often do extreme results appear?

Dice grammar is **not**: - A success/failure engine - A permission system - A balance mechanism

Dice never decide what is allowed.

They only help choose between outcomes that are already possible.

3.1.2 5. Dice Grammar Serves Outcome Tiers

In Manifold, outcomes are determined in two steps:

1. The GM defines the **Outcome Space** using state
2. Dice select among the remaining **Outcome Tiers**

This means your dice grammar must: - Produce results that can be cleanly mapped to tiers - Avoid collapsing everything into “pass/fail”

If your dice encourage binary thinking, they are working against the system.

3.1.3 6. Core Dice Grammar Axes

When choosing a dice grammar, consider three axes.

3.1.3.1 Volatility How widely do results vary?

- High volatility creates dramatic swings
- Low volatility produces steadier outcomes

Genres with chaos, magic, or panic often benefit from higher volatility.

Procedural, tactical, or investigative genres often benefit from lower volatility.

3.1.3.2 Granularity How many distinct result bands can the dice express?

- Low granularity: few, broad result categories
- High granularity: many subtle distinctions

Remember: - Granularity does not create meaning - Outcome tiers do

Too much granularity increases cognitive load without benefit.

3.1.3.3 Speed How quickly can the table read and interpret a roll?

- Fast grammars support tension and flow
- Slower grammars add texture at the cost of momentum

If players hesitate every time dice are rolled, the grammar is too heavy.

3.1.4 7. Common Grammar Families

You are not restricted to these, but most implementations fall into one of these families.

3.1.4.1 Single Die + Modest Range Examples: - d10 - d12

Strengths: - Fast - Easy to map to tiers - Good for volatile genres

Risks: - Extremes appear often

3.1.4.2 Multiple Dice Summed or Compared Examples: - 2d6 - 3d6

Strengths: - Predictable center - Fewer extreme results

Risks: - Can encourage optimization thinking

3.1.4.3 Dice Pools (Count or Compare) Examples: - Count successes - Highest die matters
Strengths: - Visually expressive - Scales easily
Risks: - Often reintroduces success/failure logic
Use with care.

3.1.5 8. Mapping Dice Results to Outcome Tiers

Before play, decide: - Which roll results map to which outcome tiers - Which tiers disappear under pressure or instability

This mapping should be: - Simple - Stable - Easy to explain

Do not change mappings dynamically.

Let state remove tiers instead.

3.1.6 9. Pressure and Dice Must Interact Cleanly

Pressure and instability should affect **which tiers are available**, not how dice work.

Avoid: - Adding modifiers for pressure - Increasing difficulty numbers - Re-rolling or stacking penalties

Instead: - Remove clean outcomes - Introduce loss of control tiers - Force tradeoffs

Dice remain unchanged.

State does the work.

3.1.7 9A. Variance and Opposing Rolls

In many Manifold implementations, the GM will also roll dice.

These are **not opposed checks** in the traditional sense.

They are **variance rolls**.

A variance roll represents: - Environmental interference - Opposition acting independently - Uncontrolled forces affecting the situation

The GM is not “rolling against” the player.

They are sampling **how the world expresses resistance or chaos** in this moment.

3.1.8 9B. How Variance Rolls Are Used

A variance roll may be applied to:

- Select between already-available outcome tiers
- Introduce secondary complications
- Determine who controls the situation after resolution

Variance rolls do **not**:

- Cancel player outcomes
- Add hidden difficulty
- Override feasibility

They only shape *how* the outcome manifests.

3.1.9 9C. When to Use a Variance Roll

Consider a variance roll when:

- The situation includes active opposition
- Multiple forces are acting simultaneously
- Environmental chaos matters as much as player action

Do **not** use variance rolls:

- For routine resistance
- To simulate fairness or balance
- To punish risky play

If state already answers the question, no roll is needed.

3.1.10 9D. Keeping Variance Honest

Variance rolls should:

- Use the same dice grammar as player rolls
- Be explained in terms of visible state
- Be applied consistently

If players cannot see *what the variance represents*, it should not be rolled.

Variance exists to reveal uncertainty, not to conceal judgment.

Pressure and instability should affect **which tiers are available**, not how dice work.

Avoid:

- Adding modifiers for pressure
- Increasing difficulty numbers
- Re-rolling or stacking penalties

Instead:

- Remove clean outcomes
- Introduce loss of control tiers
- Force tradeoffs

Dice remain unchanged.

State does the work.

3.1.11 10. Growth, Regression, and Dice Expression

Manifold supports **persistent change** over time.

Growth and regression do not change what dice *mean*.

They change **how dice are expressed**.

This allows characters and world entities to feel more capable, more brittle, or more constrained without introducing bonuses, difficulty numbers, or balance math.

3.1.11.1 What Growth and Regression Affect Growth and regression may modify:

- Which dice are rolled
- How many dice are rolled
- Which dice results are kept or ignored

They do **not**:

- Change outcome tier definitions
- Add success/failure thresholds
- Override feasibility or state

The structure stays constant.

Expression changes.

3.1.11.2 Dice Size: Breadth of Expression Changing **die size** is one way to represent growth or constraint.

Examples:

- A growing capability may roll a larger die
- A hardened or constrained capability may roll a smaller die

Die size expresses:

- Breadth of possible outcomes
- Access to extremes

Die size changes should be:

- Rare
- Persistent
- Justified by visible state

3.1.11.3 Dice Count: Reliability and Consistency Changing **dice count** expresses reliability rather than raw power.

Examples:

- Roll multiple dice and keep the best
- Roll multiple dice and keep the worst

More dice generally means:

- Greater consistency
- Reduced volatility

This is often the result of training, specialization, or hardening.

3.1.11.4 Selection Rules: Control and Loss of Control Some grammars use **selection rules**:

- Keep best
- Keep worst
- Discard extremes

These rules are especially effective for representing:

- Loss of control under instability
- Narrowing options due to pressure

For example:

- Instability may force the worst die to be kept
- Hardening may remove extreme outcomes entirely

Selection rules should always be explained in terms of state.

3.1.11.5 Linking Dice Changes to State Dice expression changes should occur only when justified by recorded state:

- Tags (trained, hardened, unstable)
- Track thresholds (fatigued, exhausted, exposed)
- Long-term growth or regression

If it is not written on a State Sheet, it should not affect dice.

3.1.11.6 Growth Is Directional As capabilities grow:

- Some expressions improve
- Others narrow or disappear

Growth deepens focus.

It does not create universal competence.

3.1.11.7 Regression Is Not Punishment Regression represents:

- Wear
- Trauma
- Overextension

It should:

- Be visible
- Be traceable
- Be recoverable with effort

Ignoring regression leaves lasting marks.

3.1.12 10. Stress-Testing Your Dice Grammar

Before finalizing a grammar, test it against three situations:

1. **Low pressure** — most outcomes available
2. **Moderate pressure** — clean outcomes missing
3. **High instability** — control is unreliable

Ask:

- Do the dice still feel fair?
- Do they produce surprising but believable results?
- Do they stay readable under strain?

If not, simplify.

3.1.13 11. A Minimal Starting Recommendation

If you are unsure, start simple.

A single die with 4–6 outcome bands is sufficient for most genres.

Complexity can be added later if truly needed.

Remember: - Dice are not the game - State and pressure are

3.1.14 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part II, you should have: - A chosen dice grammar - A fixed mapping to outcome tiers - Confidence that dice will not override judgment

You are now ready to declare **initial world entities**.

Next: Part III explains how to declare the minimum set of entities your world needs to function.

4 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

4.1 Part III: Declaring Initial World Entities

This part explains how to declare the **minimum set of entities** your world needs to function once genre, premise, and dice grammar are established.

You are not populating a setting.

You are declaring **systems that can accumulate pressure, change state, and persist over time**.

4.1.1 12. What Counts as an Entity

In Manifold, an **entity** is anything that: - Can hold state - Can accumulate pressure or instability - Can change in persistent ways

Common world entities include: - Factions or organizations - Locations or regions - Institutions (courts, guilds, churches) - Ongoing processes (wars, plagues, decay)

An entity is not defined by importance in the fiction.

It is defined by whether the world needs it to **remember strain**.

4.1.2 13. Start with a Minimum Viable World

At the beginning of play, you need very little.

A minimum viable world usually includes: - One primary location or region - One or two major factions - One background force that advances on its own

If you declare more than this, you will likely dilute pressure.

Let play reveal what else needs to exist.

4.1.3 14. Use Declaration, Not Description

Entities are declared the same way characters are: - By domain - By limits - By risk profile

You are not writing lore.

You are stating: - What this entity is good at - Where it breaks - How pressure shows up

This keeps entities playable.

4.1.4 15. Applying the Declarations Guide at World Scale

Use **Appendix F: The Declarations Guide** when declaring entities.

For each entity, establish:

- **Domain of influence**

What kinds of situations this entity reliably shapes

- **Explicit limits**

What it cannot handle well or adapt to

- **Risk profile**

Where pressure and instability appear first

- **Growth or decay direction**

How it is likely to change if strained

These declarations should be brief.

If you cannot state them simply, the entity is too broad.

4.1.5 16. Example: Declaring a Faction

Entity: The Border Crown

- **Domain:** Military authority and taxation within the borderlands

- **Limits:** Slow decision-making, fragile local loyalty

- **Risk profile:** Political fragmentation under prolonged pressure

- **Direction:** Centralization through force, or collapse into splinter powers

This declaration is enough to support months of play.

4.1.6 17. Example: Declaring a Location

Entity: The River City

- **Domain:** Trade, migration, information flow
- **Limits:** Food supply and flood control
- **Risk profile:** Civil unrest when scarcity and attention align
- **Direction:** Fortification and exclusion, or decentralization

No map is required.

The declaration defines behavior.

4.1.7 18. World Processes as Entities

Some entities are not actors.

They are **processes**.

Examples: - A spreading corruption - A slow environmental collapse - A technological arms race

These entities often: - Act without intent - Accumulate pressure continuously - Trigger instability indirectly

Declaring them explicitly prevents them from becoming vague narrative threats.

4.1.8 19. Decide Initial Visibility

For each entity, decide: - What is publicly known - What is shared but unclear - What is private to the GM

This is not about secrecy.

It is about **pacing revelation**.

Hidden state should still be recorded.

If it is not written, it does not exist.

4.1.9 20. Do Not Interlink Entities Too Early

Early declarations should be independent.

Avoid: - Complex dependency chains - Predefined alliances or betrayals - Locked outcome relationships

Pressure will create connections naturally.

Let state, not foresight, build the web.

4.1.10 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part III, you should have:

- A small set of declared world entities
- Each with clear domains, limits, and risk profiles
- No required plots or outcomes

Your world can now **hold state and accumulate strain**.

Next: Part IV explains how to select initial tracks and tags to bring these entities to life.

5 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

5.1 Part IV: Establishing Initial State

This part explains how to turn declared entities into a **living starting situation** by selecting initial tracks, tags, conditions, and visibility.

You are not simulating everything that exists.

You are deciding **what is already under strain when play begins**.

5.1.1 21. What “Initial State” Means

Initial state is the set of pressures, conditions, and constraints that are **already active** when the first session starts.

It answers the question:

What problems are already in motion?

Initial state is not:

- A backstory summary
- A prediction of what will happen
- A list of future events

It is the present tense of the world.

5.1.2 22. Start with Fewer Tracks Than You Think

Tracks are powerful.

They create direction, urgency, and consequence over time.

At the start of play:

- 1–2 world-level tracks are usually enough
- 1 additional track tied to a key entity may be appropriate

If you begin with too many tracks: - Pressure becomes diffuse - Player attention fragments - State loses clarity

It is easier to add tracks later than to remove them.

5.1.3 23. Choosing World-Level Pressure Tracks

World-level tracks represent forces that: - Advance without player action - Affect multiple entities - Change the tone of play

Good starting world tracks: - Move steadily - Are slow but consequential - Do not resolve cleanly

Examples: - Escalating border tensions - Failing infrastructure - Resource scarcity

Avoid tracks that: - Represent single scenes - Require immediate resolution - Exist only to create urgency

5.1.4 24. Entity-Specific Tracks

Some entities benefit from having their own tracks.

These tracks should: - Reflect the entity's declared limits - Accumulate pressure through interaction or neglect

Examples: - A faction's legitimacy - A city's food reserves - A location's structural stability

If a track does not change how players make decisions, remove it.

5.1.5 25. Using Tags and Conditions at the Start

Tags and conditions explain **why things are difficult right now**.

They are especially useful at the beginning of play because: - They are immediately legible - They do not demand escalation - They shape feasibility directly

Good starting tags: - Describe constraints, not solutions - Apply broadly - Invite multiple approaches

Examples: - Distrustful populace - Restricted access - Unstable magic

5.1.6 26. Conditions vs Tracks

Use a **condition** when: - The state is already settled - No further escalation is expected - You want a stable baseline

Use a **track** when: - Change is ongoing - Direction matters - Collapse would meaningfully alter play
If you are unsure, start with a condition.

Tracks can always be added later.

5.1.7 27. Deciding Scope Carefully

Every piece of state must have a clear **scope**.

Ask: - Who does this apply to? - Where does it matter? - Who is unaffected?

State without scope leads to confusion and overreach.

Be explicit.

5.1.8 28. Visibility: Public, Shared, and Private State

Decide, for each piece of initial state, whether it is: - **Public** — obvious to anyone in the world - **Shared** — known to the table but not to all characters - **Private** — known only to the GM

Visibility is about pacing, not secrecy.

Hidden state still exists and still advances.

If it is not written on a State Sheet, it does not exist.

5.1.9 29. Avoid Front-Loaded Crisis

Do not begin play at maximum instability.

Players need room to: - Learn the world - Make choices - See pressure accumulate

Starting with moderate strain creates momentum.

Starting with collapse creates confusion.

5.1.10 30. Sanity Check: Is the State Playable?

Before the first session, review your initial state:

- Are there fewer than five active tracks total?
- Does each piece of state change decisions?
- Would the world still change if players did nothing?

If any answer is no, simplify.

5.1.11 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part IV, you should have:

- A small, readable set of starting tracks
- Clear tags and conditions explaining current strain
- Explicit scope and visibility for each piece of state

Your world is now **ready to be played**.

Next: Part V explains how to connect characters to this state and prepare the first situation.

6 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

6.1 Part V: First Contact with Play

This part explains how to move from preparation into **actual play**.

Its goal is not to teach you how to run scenes.

Its goal is to ensure that your first session:

- Uses the state you prepared
- Applies pressure honestly
- Leaves room for learning and adjustment

You are not testing the system.

You are **letting it begin**.

6.1.1 31. Connect Characters to Existing Pressure

Before the first scene begins, look at the characters that have been declared.

Ask:

- Which pieces of world state affect them immediately?
- Which declared limits or risk profiles will matter first?

Do not create bespoke exceptions.

Characters enter the world **as it is**, not as it would be convenient for them.

This ensures:

- Immediate relevance
- Honest tension
- No special protection

6.1.2 32. Let the First Situation Be Small

Your first playable situation should be:

- Local
- Contained
- Already under mild strain

Avoid:

- World-shaking crises
- Multi-entity convergence
- Immediate instability

Examples: - A supply delivery delayed by local unrest - A meeting complicated by distrust and rumor - Travel through a region already under strain

Small situations reveal how pressure works.

6.1.3 33. Start in the Middle, Not at the Beginning

Do not begin with exposition.

Begin with: - A decision already required - A constraint already present - A cost already looming

This immediately grounds players in state.

They will learn faster by acting than by listening.

6.1.4 34. Use the State Sheet Actively

During the first session: - Write state where everyone can see it - Update it openly - Refer to it when making calls

Explain your reasoning briefly: > “This outcome isn’t clean because that pressure is already here.”

Transparency builds trust early.

6.1.5 35. Allow Imperfect Calls

Your first rulings will not be perfect.

That is expected.

When unsure: - Choose the outcome that preserves momentum - Make the state change clear - Move forward

You can adjust later.

State is replaceable.

6.1.6 36. Do Not Optimize the First Session

Do not try to showcase every system feature.

Do not: - Force instability - Force dice rolls - Force collapse

Let pressure accumulate naturally.

A quiet first session is not a failure.

6.1.7 37. Watch What Players Engage With

Pay attention to: - Which pressures they notice - Which constraints they push against - Which entities attract attention

This tells you: - What matters at your table - What state needs expansion - What can be retired

The world teaches you how to build it.

6.1.8 38. End with Changed State

Try to end the first session with: - At least one clear state change - A visible consequence - An unresolved pressure

This reinforces the core promise:

The world remembers.

6.1.9 39. Between Sessions: Adjust, Don't Rewrite

After the first session: - Simplify state if needed - Clarify scope - Remove anything that did not matter

Do not rewrite the world.

Let it evolve.

6.1.10 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part V, you should: - Be actively playing the game - Trust the system enough to let it breathe - Know what to prepare next by watching play

From here, worldbuilding becomes **iterative**, not speculative.

Next: Part VI will cover iteration, expansion, and long-term world growth.

7 Worldbuilding Guide for GMs

7.1 Part VI: Iteration and Expansion

This part explains how to **grow, simplify, and evolve** your world once play is underway.

In Manifold, worldbuilding does not happen all at once.

It happens through **response**.

You are not adding content to fill space.

You are adjusting state to reflect what the world has learned.

7.1.1 40. Let Play Tell You What Matters

After several sessions, patterns will emerge.

Pay attention to: - Which pressures players engage with - Which entities they return to - Which constraints drive difficult choices

These signals tell you: - What deserves expansion - What can remain abstract - What should be removed

Do not guess.

Observe.

7.1.2 41. Adding New Entities Safely

Add a new entity only when: - Something needs to remember strain - Pressure is currently being tracked informally - A situation keeps recurring

When you add an entity: - Declare its domain, limits, and risk profile - Keep it narrow - Connect it to existing pressure, not new plot

New entities should clarify play, not complicate it.

7.1.3 42. Adding New Tracks

Tracks should be added only when: - Directional change matters - Time or neglect is a factor - Collapse would meaningfully alter play

Before adding a track, ask: > *What decision does this help players make?*

If the answer is unclear, do not add the track.

7.1.4 43. Merging or Retiring State

State that no longer shapes decisions should be removed.

Options include: - Merging multiple tags into one - Collapsing tracks into conditions - Removing resolved or irrelevant state entirely

This is not loss.

It is clarity.

7.1.5 44. Collapse as Worldbuilding

Collapse is one of your strongest tools.

When a track collapses: - A new baseline is established - The world becomes more predictable in that area

Examples: - Temporary unrest becomes permanent oppression - Ongoing decay becomes ruin - Political tension becomes open war

Collapse replaces motion with structure.

Use it deliberately.

7.1.6 45. Expansion Does Not Mean Escalation

Worlds do not need to grow bigger to stay interesting.

Often, depth is created by: - Narrowing options - Increasing cost - Reducing flexibility

Let the world **settle**.

Settled state is what gives history weight.

7.1.7 46. Revisiting Dice Expression Over Time

As entities grow, harden, or regress, review how they express uncertainty.

You may: - Change die size - Change dice count - Apply or remove selection rules

Only do this when: - The change is persistent - It is recorded in state - It reflects real change in the fiction

Do not tinker frequently.

Dice expression should change slowly.

7.1.8 47. Watching for State Bloat

A warning sign: - Players stop referencing the State Sheets - Decisions feel murky - Pressure feels everywhere and nowhere

When this happens: - Replace the State Sheet - Carry forward only what matters - Archive the rest
The current sheet is the world.

7.1.9 48. Long-Term Campaign Shape

Over long play, you should see: - Fewer active tracks, not more - More conditions, fewer pressures - Clearer limits

This indicates a world that has learned.

7.1.10 What This Part Gives You

After completing Part VI, you should: - Feel confident adjusting the world mid-play - Know when to add, merge, or remove state - Trust collapse as a stabilizing force

At this point, worldbuilding is no longer preparation.

It is **ongoing play**.

This concludes the Worldbuilding Guide. Future parts may provide genre-specific examples and optional implementations.

8 Example Fantasy World Implementation: Greenhollow

This document presents a **complete, generic fantasy starting world** implemented using the Manifold framework.

It is intended as: - A reference implementation for GMs - A teaching example for worldbuilding, dice grammar, and state - A flexible foundation for a low-fantasy or classic fantasy campaign

Names, structures, and pressures are intentionally **generic and modular**.

8.1 I. Genre and World Frame

Genre: Low-fantasy frontier with light mysticism

Tone: Grounded, human-scale problems with emerging supernatural pressure

Premise: A small kingdom maintains nominal control over scattered towns, but local strain, petty politics, and nearby threats are eroding stability faster than authority can respond.

Nothing is immediately collapsing.

Everything is slowly fraying.

8.2 II. Dice Grammar (Full Polyhedral Set)

This implementation uses the full RPG dice set (d4–d20) as **expressive range**, not escalation.

8.2.1 Core Grammar

- **One primary die** is rolled for most actions
- **Die size** represents breadth of expression
- **Selection rules** represent control or instability

8.2.2 Baseline Dice by Domain

Context	Die
Crude, risky, improvised	d4
Strained, hurried	d6
Trained, routine	d8
Professional, calm	d10
Expert, prepared	d12
Exceptional focus or mastery	d20

Die size is determined by **capability + current state**, not intent alone.

8.2.3 Growth & Regression Hooks

- **Development tracks** may permanently increase or restrict die size
- **Status tracks** may force worse selection (keep lowest, discard highest)
- **Instability** may cap maximum die size

Dice meaning never changes. Only expression does.

8.3 III. Player Status Tracks (Universal)

All characters use the following **status tracks**.

8.3.1 Fatigue

Represents exertion, endurance loss, and wear. - Accumulates from travel, labor, combat, and stress
- High Fatigue restricts die size and forces conservative outcomes - Collapse results in **Exhausted** condition

8.3.2 Wounding

Represents physical harm and injury. - Accumulates from violence and accidents - Wounding removes clean outcome tiers first - Collapse results in **Impaired** or **Maimed** conditions

8.3.3 Distraction

Represents cognitive and emotional strain. - Accumulates from fear, social pressure, overload, or confusion - High Distraction alters selection rules (keep worse result) - Collapse results in **Unfocused** or **Shaken** conditions

These tracks apply pressure without declaring failure.

8.4 IV. Player Development Tracks (Generic Fantasy)

Each character selects **one primary** and **one secondary** development track.

These tracks extrapolate from common RPG archetypes without defining classes.

8.4.1 Martial Development

(Fighters, guards, soldiers, mercenaries) - Improves reliability under physical pressure - Converts volatility into consistency - Often trades flexibility for control

8.4.2 Skirmisher Development

(Rogues, scouts, rangers) - Improves action economy and positioning - Reduces Fatigue from movement - Vulnerable to sustained pressure

8.4.3 Mystic Development

(Wizards, priests, occultists) - Expands die size for supernatural actions - Increases environmental instability - Sensitive to Distraction

8.4.4 Social Development

(Bards, diplomats, leaders) - Improves outcome tiers in social conflict - Converts attention into leverage - Accumulates Distraction quickly

8.4.5 Artisan / Specialist Development

(Crafters, scholars, healers) - Improves precision and recovery - Slower under time pressure - Strong outside combat contexts

Multi-domain characters accumulate pressure from more vectors.

8.5 V. The World: The Kingdom of Lowreach

Entity: The Kingdom of Lowreach

- **Domain:** Taxation, law, military authority
- **Limits:** Slow response, poor local intelligence
- **Risk Profile:** Fragmentation under prolonged neglect
- **Direction:** Delegation to local powers or loss of control

Lowreach is stable enough to exist, but too thin to protect everyone.

8.6 VI. Primary Location: The Town of Greenhollow

Entity: Greenhollow

- **Domain:** Agriculture, river trade, local craft
- **Limits:** Poor defenses, internal distrust
- **Risk Profile:** Social fracture under external threat
- **Direction:** Militarization or abandonment

8.6.1 Initial State (Greenhollow)

- **Tag:** Wary Locals
 - **Tag:** Thin Militia
 - **Track:** Town Stability (moderate, declining)
-

8.7 VII. Political Pressure (Low Priority)

Entity: Castle Blackridge (Regional Authority)

- **Domain:** Military oversight, justice

- **Limits:** Arrogance, delayed response
- **Risk Profile:** Loss of legitimacy

Pressure: - Castle demands increased levy - Town resists quietly

This pressure advances slowly unless provoked.

8.8 VIII. External Threat (High Priority)

Entity: Redtooth Goblin Band

- **Domain:** Raiding, ambush, intimidation
- **Limits:** Disorganization, fear of open battle
- **Risk Profile:** Overconfidence leading to exposure

8.8.1 Initial State

- **Track:** Goblin Raiding Pressure (active)
- **Tag:** Broken Trade Route

This pressure escalates without player intervention.

8.9 IX. Interpersonal Conflict (Mid Priority)

8.9.1 Local NPCs

Mayor Edric Hale - Publicly loyal to the crown - Privately concerned with survival

Captain Mara Venn - Commands the militia - Distrusts both castle and townsfolk

Priest Alwen - Custodian of local shrine - Knows more than she admits

8.9.2 Pressure

- **Tag:** Divided Leadership
- **Track:** Trust Among Leaders

This conflict complicates coordination and response.

8.10 X. Mystic Entity: The Stonebound Idol

Entity: The Stonebound Idol

- **Domain:** Influence through dreams and omen
- **Limits:** Cannot act directly

- **Risk Profile:** Escalation when ignored or misused
- **Direction:** Awakening or containment

8.10.1 Connections

- Priest Alwen seeks to suppress it
- A local herbalist secretly listens to it

8.10.2 Initial State

- **Tag:** Subtle Whispers
- **Private Track:** Idol Influence

The idol is not evil.

It is patient.

8.11 XI. Starting World State Summary

Active Tracks: - Goblin Raiding Pressure - Town Stability - Trust Among Leaders - (Private) Idol Influence

Active Tags: - Wary Locals - Thin Militia - Broken Trade Route - Divided Leadership

Nothing is collapsing.

Everything is moving.

8.12 XII. Why This World Works

- Multiple pressures at different priorities
- Clear player entry points
- No required plot
- Dice grammar supports growth without escalation
- State is readable and expandable

This world is ready for play.