Worldbuilder's Field Kit

A practical workbook for stories, settings, and tabletop adventures.

Build a place. Give people a reason to act. Keep the consequences.

Your project

Working title / version / date

START WITH ONE FINISHED PIECE

1. Choose a small scope: one place, one immediate problem, a few people.
2. Complete the premise, rules, and the sheets your first piece needs.
3. Connect a person's goal to a real cost. Prepare choices, not only lore.
4. Write or play the piece. Notice what becomes confusing or convenient.
5. Record what changed, then choose the next small finish line.

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The Lantern Ferry example is an original standalone practice setting. It is unrelated to Astralith canon. Use the blank sheets for worlds of your own.

The world in one promise

Choose a clear experience and a small starting scope. A compelling world begins with a promise a reader can feel.

The experience

What should a reader or player feel? Name two qualities and one experience you want to avoid.

The premise in one sentence

In a place where ___, a person or group must ___, but ___ makes the cost unavoidable.

A place

One location that makes this world tangible.

A custom

An everyday habit that reveals a value.

A rule

Something people must work around.

The question beneath the setting

What disagreement can reasonable people have here? Give at least two defensible answers.

Start here

Name the first place, the people in focus, and the time span of the first finished piece.

Leave offstage

What can remain unknown for now? Keep distant history and geography small enough to manage.

Before you continue: Your premise suggests a choice, a cost, and a place to begin. It does not need to explain the whole world.

Rules, costs & limits

Give unusual powers, technologies, institutions, or customs practical boundaries. A cost matters when someone must actually pay it.

Rule 1: what is possible?

State a clear cause and effect.

Its cost

What is spent, risked, delayed, or owed?

Its limit

When does it fail or stop applying?

Rule 2: what is possible?

Choose a different system or custom.

Its cost

Who pays? Who avoids the price?

Its limit

How can another person test this?

Rule 3: what is possible?

Include an ordinary social rule.

Its cost

What happens when it is broken?

Its limit

Who can challenge its authority?

An ordinary day

How do these rules change work, food, travel, shelter, or care? Give one concrete example.

Who gains an advantage?

Who controls a scarce resource or knows an exception? What prevents unlimited use?

The tempting loophole

What easy solution might remove all tension? Close it with an established limit, or let it change the story honestly.

Before you continue: The rules create both opportunities and problems. Exceptions have causes and leave consequences.

A place worth staying

Build a place around work, needs, and relationships. Landmarks earn their space by changing what people can do.

Name & setting

Working name, terrain, weather, and the route by which people arrive.

Why people stay

What makes life here possible or desirable? What makes leaving difficult?

Livelihood

What is made, gathered, traded, or protected? Name an important dependency.

The strain

What shortage, dispute, or approaching change threatens ordinary routines?

Authority

Who makes decisions? Who actually gets things done? Where do those answers differ?

An everyday ritual

Choose one sound, taste, task, or custom that shows how people live.

A place of work

Name it. Who is here, and what can be learned?

A place of exchange

What changes hands besides money?

A place of friction

Who meets here who would rather stay apart?

The arrival complication

When someone enters the settlement, what small problem reveals its larger pressure?

Before you continue: The settlement still has a reason to exist when the main characters leave the page.

A faction with a price

A faction acts because its members want something. Give it a public promise, practical methods, and room for internal disagreement.

Identity & public promise

What is it called, whom does it serve, and what does it say it protects?

Immediate objective

What concrete result does it want in the next chapter or session?

What members believe

Name a value people might sincerely support. Show one benefit the faction provides.

The contradiction

Where do actions betray the promise? Who inside objects, and why?

Resources

People, access, supplies, knowledge, favors, legitimacy. Which resource is fragile?

Methods

What will it do to succeed? What line will at least some members refuse to cross?

Rival or necessary partner

Who blocks its goal? Why can neither side simply remove the other?

Leverage & weakness

What can change its behavior? Avoid making every problem solvable by force.

The offer that creates a dilemma

What does the faction offer the main character? What real obligation or compromise comes with accepting?

Before you continue: At least two members can disagree without one becoming a caricature. Membership is not a substitute for personality.

A person with a choice

Use a person, not a list of traits. Their wants, abilities, ties, and limits should make a difficult decision possible.

Name & present role

A working name, an ordinary responsibility, and one detail someone would notice.

Visible want

What specific outcome is this person pursuing right now?

Underlying need

What must they learn, accept, repair, or protect even if they do not see it yet?

Fear & false belief

What do they expect will happen? Where might that expectation be wrong?

Useful competence

What can they reliably do? What experience earned that ability?

Meaningful limitation

What can they not solve alone? Give the limit a practical effect.

Bond

Whom or what do they care about enough to change their plans?

Debt or promise

What commitment complicates the goal? Who remembers it?

The decision that reveals them

Put two valued things in conflict. What can they choose, what do they lose, and what will another person notice?

Before you continue: The character can cause events through choices. Their background informs them without determining every action.

Relationships under pressure

Track what people want from one another. A relationship can change even when neither person becomes a friend or an enemy.

Person A

Name and present goal.

Person B

Name and present goal.

Person C

Name and present goal.

From / to	Wants from them	Offers or owes	Withholds or misunderstands

The turning point

What discovery, sacrifice, refusal, or public act changes one of these relationships?

Visible proof of change

What will one person do differently afterward? Use an action, not only an emotion.

The unresolved thread

What remains between them? Give it a reason to return later.

Before you continue: The arrows run both ways. What A wants from B need not be what B wants from A.

A scene that moves

Give the scene an objective, resistance, and a change. Keep the setting active: space, work, weather, and witnesses can shape choices.

The immediate objective

Who is trying to do what before this scene ends? What happens if they do nothing?

Resistance

Who or what makes the objective difficult? Give the obstacle a cause.

Place & pressure

Where are they? What detail of the location or timing matters to the action?

Entry

What is already happening as the scene opens?

Turn

What new fact or action changes the available choices?

Exit

What action or discovery makes the scene end?

Choice A and its cost

What can be gained? What must be given up, risked, or deferred?

Choice B and its cost

Why might a reasonable person choose this instead? Leave room for another earned solution.

The state after the scene

What is now different in knowledge, position, resources, trust, or obligation?

Before you continue: Removing this scene would remove a meaningful change. A surprise creates options or consequences, not merely noise.

An adventure with room

Connect scenes through pressure and information. Prepare a situation people can affect rather than a single sequence they must obey.

The invitation

Why would these characters become involved? Connect the hook to a goal, bond, or obligation.

Stakes & time pressure

What changes if nobody acts? What is the actual deadline or worsening condition?

Useful information	First way to find it	Another route or source

A cooperative route

Who might help? What do they need in return? What complication remains?

A difficult alternative

What other approach is possible if help is refused or a plan fails?

The decisive situation

What choice or confrontation brings the immediate problem to a head? What would count as a changed outcome?

What carries onward

Choose one new relationship, loss, discovery, or obligation that can survive the ending.

Before you continue: Important information has more than one route. Failure changes the situation instead of making the story stop.

Consequences that endure

Let choices leave evidence. Scale consequences to the event, and distinguish what is certain from what is merely possible.

The action or decision

State what actually happened. Separate the event from a character's explanation of it.

Now: the immediate result

What changes in the scene? Who sees it, and what resource or opportunity changes hands?

Soon: the response

Who reacts next, with what knowledge and motive? What can the characters still influence?

Later: the possible echo

What lasting effect might follow? Record the condition that would make it happen.

Who benefits?

Include someone outside the main cast. How does the benefit become visible?

Who pays?

Name a concrete burden. How might the affected person respond?

The trace in the world

A changed price, damaged object, new ritual, rumor, or altered welcome. What can someone encounter later?

Before you continue: A consequence follows from causes you can explain. It need not punish every good choice or reward every bad one.

The continuity ledger

Keep established facts, working ideas, and open questions distinct. A small reliable ledger is more useful than a large contradictory archive.

ID	Fact or decision	Where established	Fixed / draft

Order / date	Event	What changes

Open promises & questions

What has been planted but not resolved? Record the character or reader who has reason to expect an answer.

Before you continue: When a fact changes, record the reason and affected scenes. Do not quietly overwrite a consequence you already used.

Stress-test the world

Look for weak joints before adding more lore. Test the rules against convenience, ordinary life, and conflicting points of view.

Test 1: the cheap escape

Could an established tool, rule, or ally solve the central problem immediately? Why has nobody used it?

Test 2: an ordinary day

Follow someone uninvolved in the plot through work, food, shelter, and rest. Which detail stops making sense?

Test 3: the other account

Describe the same event from the rival's point of view. Which claims are facts, interpretations, or mistakes?

Repair with the smallest useful change

Name the weak joint, change its cause, and list the scenes or facts that must be updated. Preserve meaningful costs.

Leave uncertain on purpose

What mystery strengthens the experience? What must still be clear for choices to feel fair?

Check after revision

What existing scene, relationship, or rule must still work? Write a concrete test.

Before you continue: Complexity earns its place by improving the work. You can remove an explanation that does not change anything useful.

Plan the next finished piece

Turn the workbook into a manageable piece of writing or play. Name a finish line you can recognize without finishing the whole setting.

The deliverable & its finish line

A scene, short story, location guide, or session outline. What must exist for this version to be usable?

Ready material

Which facts, characters, and places are already sufficient? Reference their worksheet or ledger ID.

Decisions still needed

Which unanswered questions actually block the next piece? Park the rest.

Small concrete task	Evidence it is done	When / who

Read or play it through

Where does someone become confused? Where is a choice weak? What will you observe?

Keep / change / cut

List one decision in each category after the read-through. Explain the change briefly.

The next starting point

Name the first useful action next time, with enough detail to begin without re-planning.

Before you continue: Your next task produces something a person can read, use, or play. A larger archive can wait.

The Lantern Ferry

Worked example 1 of 2. An original standalone exercise, unrelated to Astralith canon.

The premise

At Bracken Ferry, twelve shore lamps reveal a stone path across a dangerous river. The lamps burn the same reed oil that households need for winter. When a flood approaches, an apprentice must challenge the council's cargo priority before the reserve is spent.

Rules, cost, and limit

All twelve lamps must stay lit for the path to remain. Each uses one bottle of reed oil per hour. A crossing window therefore costs twelve bottles. The town has twenty-four bottles available tonight and has promised to keep twelve for an emergency. Boats exist, but the current makes launching unsafe tonight.

A working settlement

Bracken Ferry lives on reed harvesting, oil pressing, and crossing tolls. The Lamp House keeps the fuel ledger; the East Stair gathers travelers; the Highbank Store holds grain. At dusk, households return their empty bottles to be counted. The approaching flood has cut the usual oil delivery.

A faction with disagreement

The Highbank Council promises reliable trade and winter security. It wants its grain moved during the last safe crossing window. Its storekeeper believes protecting the reserve is responsible. Other members object that a medicine wagon is being delayed. Access to the fuel matters more than public speeches.

People with different stakes

Nessa, the lampwright's apprentice, wants her full license. She knows the fuel ledger but fears losing her mentor's trust. Oren, the storekeeper, wants the grain protected and fears disorder. Mara, the ferrier, promised to move the medicine; she will help, but refuses to launch an unsafe boat.

Why these pieces belong together

The unusual rule changes ordinary work, creates a scarce resource, and puts sincere goals into conflict. The central choice grows from the setting. Adding another continent would not strengthen this scene.

Choices leave a record

Worked example 2 of 2. One possible outcome; your characters may earn a different one.

The scene and the immediate pressure

At the Lamp House, Nessa learns that the available crossing window can move either the council's grain or Mara's medicine wagon, not both. Oren holds the release order. Rain is rising against the East Stair. Nessa can expose the order, bargain for a different cargo, or seek an earned alternative.

Choice A: protect the grain

Follow the grain order. The reserve promise is kept and winter food is safer, but the medicine is delayed. Nessa protects her license while straining her bond with Mara. She must make the delay visible rather than pretend the choice harms nobody.

Choice B: move the medicine

Persuade Oren to release the window for medicine. The reserve remains intact, but some grain is left exposed. Nessa risks her license and owes a plan for the grain. A successful bargain requires something Oren values; a speech alone need not settle it.

What actually happens in this version

For this version, Nessa persuades Oren by securing the millers' dry loft for part of the grain. Medicine crosses. Some sacks are still lost to damp. Oren shares responsibility for the decision, and Mara agrees to help repair the East Stair. Trust improves, but costs remain.

ID	Established fact	Later obligation
F01	Twelve bottles remain reserved.	Keep the next fuel ledger consistent.
F02	Some grain was lost to damp.	Account for the shortage later.
F03	Mara promised repair work.	Return to the East Stair.

The revision check

Keep the alternative honest: the dry loft exists before the bargain, space is limited, and carrying grain takes work. Record both the rescue and the loss so a later scene cannot quietly undo either.

Notes & continuations

Carry crowded answers here. Refer to a worksheet and field so you can follow the thread later.

Project / version / linked worksheet

A short reference is enough. Copy or print this page for your own work as needed.

Continuation 1

Worksheet and field:

Continuation 2

Worksheet and field:

Continuation 3

Worksheet and field:

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