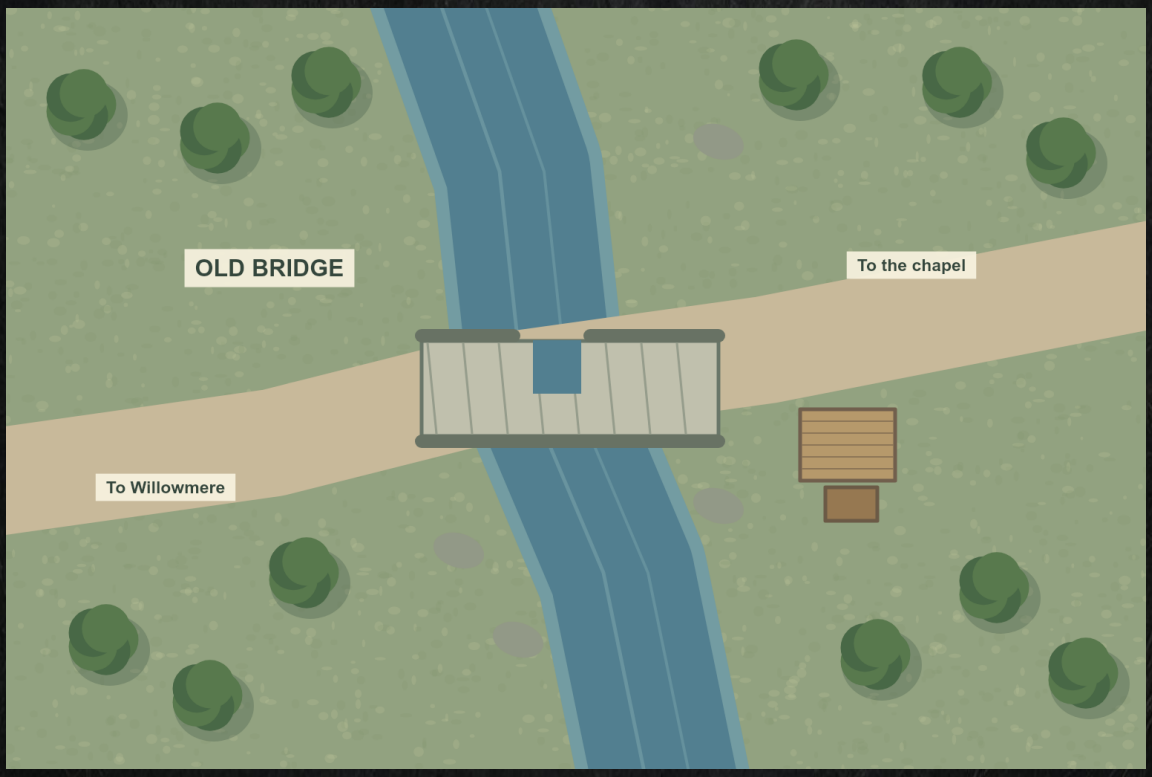
AETHERA VTT / BEGINNER FIELD GUIDE

Your first Aethera campaign

The Lantern at Willowmere

From an empty world to a playable first adventure.
Maps, characters, player access, private notes, and a rehearsal you can follow.



One village. Three locations. Several ways to help.

Includes an original adventure, a player handout, and a path into sessions two and three.

September 2026 edition. Real application screenshots, guided character setup, and practical GM and player checkpoints.

Find your next step

Work through the numbered chapters in order the first time. Stop at each checkpoint and try the action yourself. The adventure and handout are included at the back.

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Before you start

A practical guide for your first virtual tabletop. Build a small adventure, bring your players into the same scene, and run a first session with room to grow.

Your finished table: three prepared locations, a token for each player, a shared adventure brief, private GM notes, players added to the world, and a rehearsed first session. The included adventure can become a three-session campaign.

Who this is for: a first-time VTT host. You do not need to know the interface. For your first practice evening, you can use the small original rules in **GM-RUNSHEET.md** and the practice characters below. For a campaign using an established game, have that game's rules and suitable characters ready. This guide does not replace its character-creation or combat rules.

Set aside: roughly 60-90 minutes for initial setup, plus a short rehearsal with a player. This is a planning allowance, not a timed benchmark. Work through one checkpoint at a time; taking longer is fine.

Before you start: use a desktop or laptop browser, a mouse or trackpad, your Aethera account, and the three PNG files in the `maps` folder beside this guide. Arrange a way to talk together. Your group can use its usual call while learning the tabletop.

The walkthrough uses Aethera's D&D SRD / 2024 rules selection. If your group already plays another supported system, select that system instead; character sheets and rule-specific controls will differ. Agree on one rules version before building characters. The original adventure below is system-neutral and can be completed without combat.

Screenshots show real application rehearsals with fictional accounts and campaigns. The September 6 update checks the corrected joining, character, resource, journal, and scene workflows with separate GM and player accounts. See the verification record for the exact scope.

Follow one checkpoint at a time: upload the supplied maps, make a practice character or use guided D&D character setup, invite a player, and rehearse together before game night. You can keep the starter bestiary for later or leave optional starter content off.

Files to keep together: `START-HERE.md`, the `assets` and `maps` folders, `GM-RUNSHEET.md`, `PLAYER-HANDOUT.md`, and `starter-content`. The guide and GM run sheet contain spoilers. Send players only the player handout and their world link.

1. Understand the table in two minutes

A **virtual tabletop**, or **VTT**, is the shared play surface. You describe what is happening, players say what their characters do, and you use the map, tokens, notes, and dice to help everyone picture it.

- **GM (game master):** the host who prepares locations, portrays the world's characters, and makes rulings using the agreed game rules.
- **Player:** a participant who controls their own character. Give ordinary participants the Player role.
- **World / campaign:** the saved home for your group, scenes, characters, and notes. Aethera's launcher calls it a world; other screens may call it a campaign.
- **Scene:** one prepared location or view inside that world. A village, a bridge, and a chapel can be separate scenes.
- **Map:** the picture used as a scene's background. A picture of a wall is just artwork until you add a VTT wall that blocks sight or movement.
- **Actor:** a character or creature's stored information, including its sheet. A **token** is the piece representing that actor on a scene. Creating an actor and placing its token are separate steps.
- **Grid:** the overlay used to line up tokens and measure distance. Pixel size describes the image; feet or other units describe the game world.
- **Journal:** written information such as a player handout or your private session plan.
- **Fog:** the system that hides unexplored areas. Learn the basic scene and token workflow before adding it.
- **Session:** one meeting to play. A campaign is the story that continues across meetings.

Checkpoint: explain the difference between a world, a scene, an actor, and a token in your own words. Those four ideas make the rest of the interface much easier to follow.

2. Plan one good evening of play

Before opening lots of panels, write a short promise for your campaign: **"We are helpful adventurers protecting a small river village, and our choices will change who trusts us."** A clear promise helps you choose what belongs in the first session.

For Willowmere, prepare these five things:

1. **A visible problem:** the village beacon is dark, and travelers need it to navigate the river after sunset.
2. **A reason to care:** each character knows someone in the village, needs to cross the river, or has promised to help a traveler. Let players choose their connection.
3. **Three places:** Willowmere Dock, Old Bridge, and Bellkeeper's Chapel. Put one map in each scene.
4. **Three people:** Nessa the ferrymaster wants the beacon restored; Orrin the messenger needs help crossing the bridge; Tamsin the apprentice is using the missing lens to signal stranded travelers from the chapel.
5. **A meaningful decision:** return the lens immediately, finish the rescue first, or organize a way to do both. Prepare consequences for each, rather than requiring one correct solution.

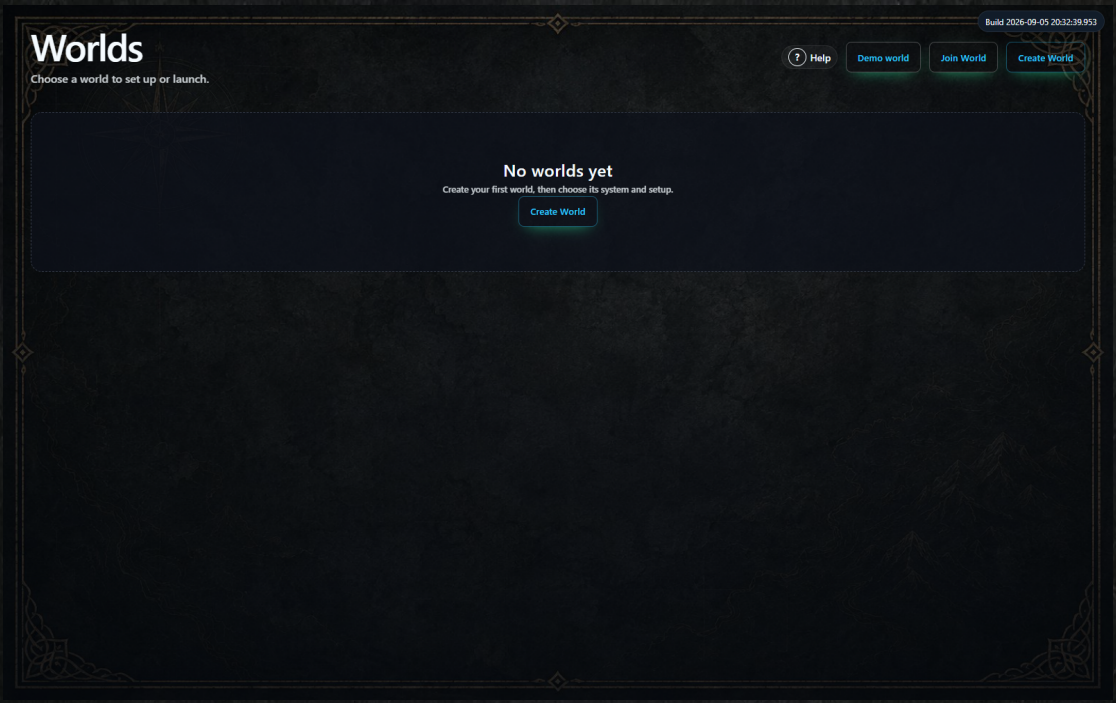
Have a brief conversation with the group about tone, topics to avoid, session length, breaks, and how anyone can ask to pause. For this example, suggest hopeful adventure with environmental danger and no graphic injury. Ask each player to bring a character willing to cooperate. Decide how you will handle a missing player and where you will arrange the next session.

Do not make essential information depend on a single successful dice roll. If players inspect the beacon, they find that the lens has been removed. A roll can reveal extra detail or affect time, noise, or a complication; it should not erase the only route into the adventure.

Checkpoint: you can describe the starting problem in two sentences, name the three locations, and explain why each character might help. You have enough material to begin preparing the table.

3. Create the world

1. Open **aethera.tv/app/vtt** in your browser. If you see the account screen, use **Create free account** or **Sign in**, then return to the launcher. Complete any account steps the site presents.
2. On **Worlds**, choose **Create World**.
3. Enter **The Lantern at Willowmere** in **World name**, then choose **Create world**. The setup wizard opens.

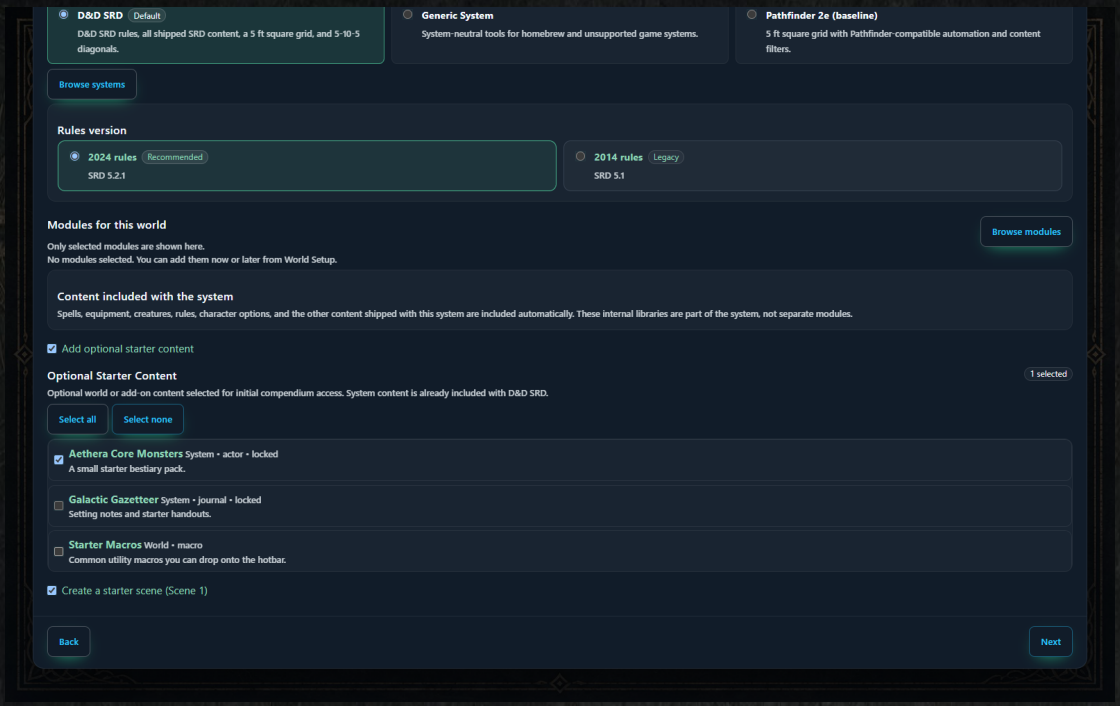


Worlds launcher with Create World in the upper-right corner.

The five wizard steps are **System & Modules**, **World**, **Players**, **Invitations**, and **Review**. Follow them in order.

System & Modules

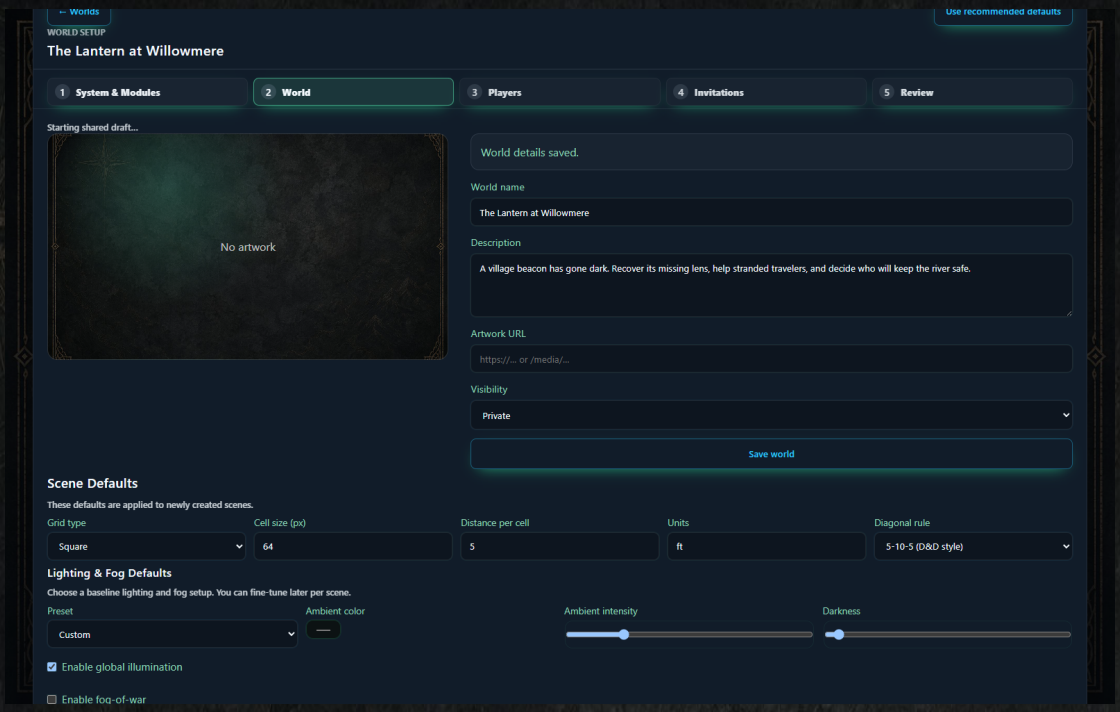
1. For this walkthrough, keep **D&D SRD** and **2024 rules**. Keep the module list empty while learning.
2. For this fantasy walkthrough, keep **Add optional starter content** checked, keep **Aethera Core Monsters** selected, and uncheck **Galactic Gazetteer** and **Starter Macros**. The bestiary is optional; you can turn off starter content for a smaller practice world. Content included with your chosen game system is also available automatically.
3. Keep **Create a starter scene (Scene 1)** checked. Scroll within the wizard if this option is below the visible area.
4. Choose **Next**.



The system step distinguishes the game system, rules version, and optional modules.

World

1. Enter a short description: **A village beacon has gone dark. Recover its missing lens, help stranded travelers, and decide who will keep the river safe.**
2. Keep **Visibility: Private**, then choose **Save world** for these world details. Leave artwork empty for now.
3. Set **Grid type: Square**, **Cell size (px): 64**, **Distance per cell: 5**, and **Units: ft**. Keep the selected system's diagonal rule for this exercise.
4. Under **Lighting & Fog Defaults**, start with **Bright day (global illumination)**. Keep **Enable global illumination** checked and uncheck **Enable fog-of-war**. The preset name changes to **Custom** when you edit a setting; that is expected.
5. Choose **Next**. The scene defaults are saved through the wizard.



The World step shows a private world, a 64px grid, global illumination, and fog disabled.

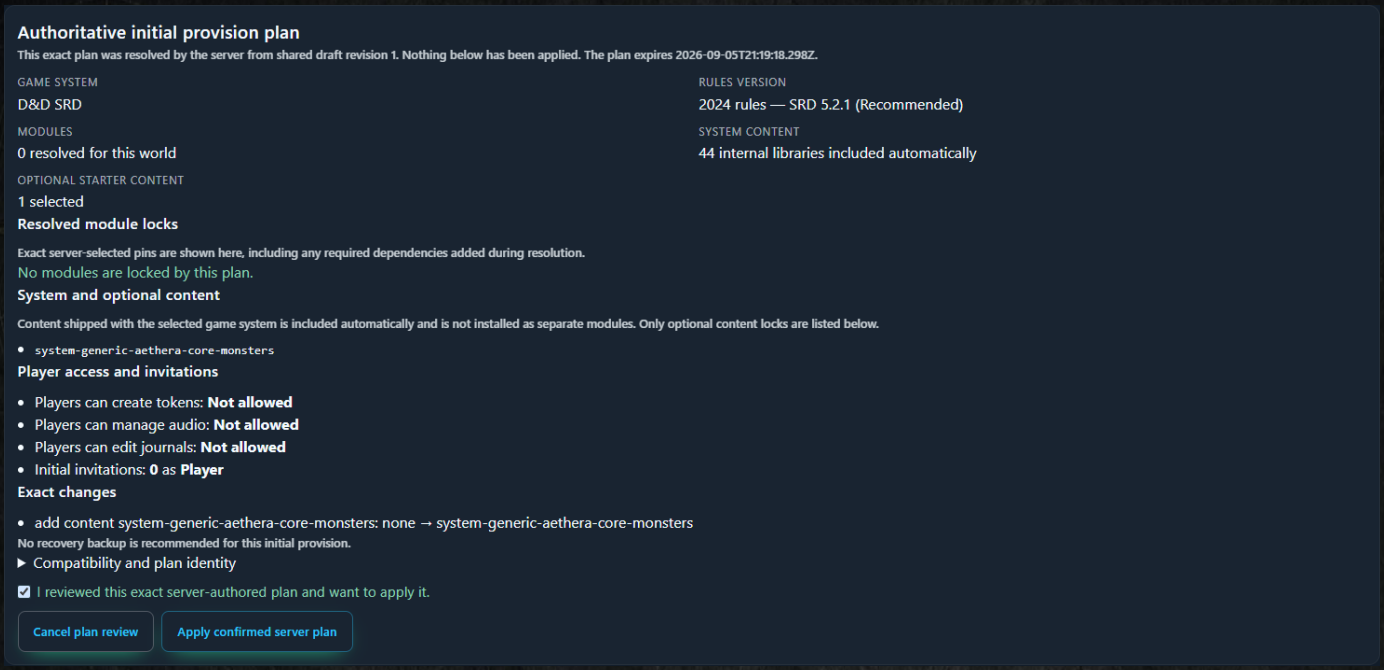
Why 64 and 5 are different: our supplied map is 1,536 by 1,024 image pixels. At 64 pixels per square, it covers 24 by 16 squares. At 5 feet per square, that is 120 by 80 feet. Changing the distance label does not resize the map picture.

Players and Invitations

1. In **Players**, keep the three extra permissions unchecked for the first rehearsal: creating tokens, managing audio, and editing journals. You will assign a player's own character separately.
2. Choose **Next**. In **Invitations**, keep **Invite role: Player**.
3. Leave invitations until chapter 8, which explains joining and character ownership together. Keep the email field empty for now.
4. Choose **Next**.

Review and launch

1. In **Review**, check the system, rules version, grid, starter scene, and player permissions. **Scene lighting preset: Custom** is expected because you turned off fog.
2. Choose **Review authoritative plan**. In plain language, this asks Aethera to prepare the setup changes for your review.
3. Read the plan, check **I reviewed this exact server-authored plan and want to apply it**, then choose **Apply confirmed server plan**.
4. Wait for the tabletop to open. Avoid clicking Apply repeatedly while it is working.
5. If **Prepare your first session** opens, use **Run tour** for a brief orientation or **Finish later** to follow this guide. Checklist ticks are reminders; do the practical checks in this guide yourself.



The final setup plan requires a checked review box before Apply confirmed server plan becomes available.

Checkpoint: the tabletop header says **The Lantern at Willowmere**, the starter **Scene 1** is visible, and the save indicator settles to **Saved**. If you leave during setup, return to **Worlds** and resume the unfinished world's setup instead of creating a second world.

4. Find your way around

The map area is the **canvas**. The left **Tool palette** chooses how the pointer behaves. The right **Panels** area contains directories such as **Scenes**, **Actors**, and **Journal**. Some panels are inside **Library panels**; the visible tabs can change between **Prepare** and **Run** workspaces.

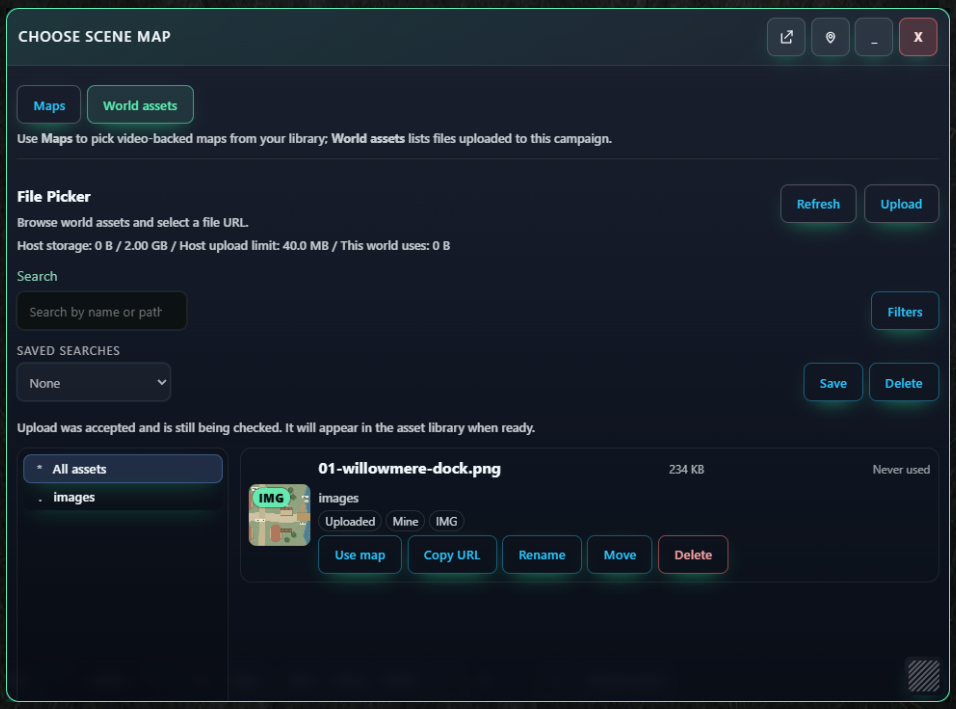
- Use **Prepare** while building your session. It brings preparation panels into view.
- Use the **Scenes** panel to create and manage locations.
- Use **Actors** for characters; **Journal** for written notes and handouts.
- If the map seems lost, use **Fit** in the zoom controls to bring the scene back into view.
- Click a tool and read its tooltip before dragging on the canvas. Selecting something and drawing something use different tools.
- Wait for the header to say **Saved** before a reload or before leaving the world.

5. Build the first scene with the supplied map

Upload and choose the background

1. In **Scenes**, choose **Create Scene**.
2. Set **Name** to **01 - Willowmere Dock**. The number keeps your locations in a useful reading order. You can leave **Folder** as Uncategorized.
3. Choose **Browse maps**, then the **World assets** tab. Use this tab for the PNGs supplied with this guide.
4. Choose **Upload** and select `01-willowmere-dock.png` from the supplied `maps` folder.
5. Read the **Upload assets** confirmation, then choose **Upload** there too. Selecting a file is not the final confirmation.
6. Wait for processing. If the picker says the upload was accepted and is still being checked, wait and choose **Refresh**. Do not repeatedly upload the same file.
7. When the file's thumbnail appears, choose **Use map** on that file. The scene-creation window now shows the map preview.

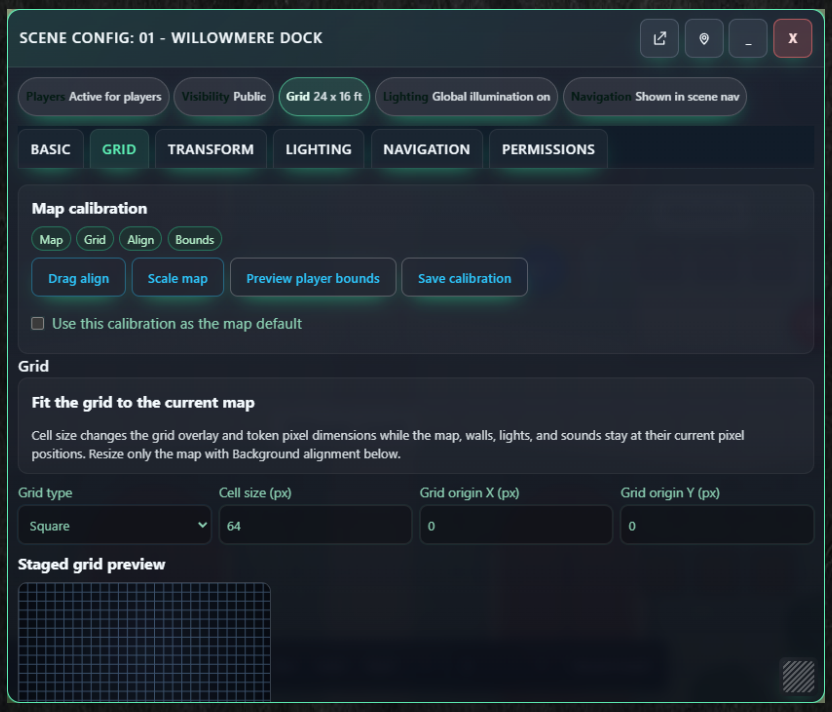
The map picker's **Upload map image (PNG / JPEG / WebP)** shortcut also opens this World assets upload flow. Use the same confirmation and processing steps.



World assets contains the uploaded PNG and its Use map button.

Set the grid deliberately

1. Open **Adjust size or grid (optional)**.
2. Keep **Map scale (%): 100**, **Scene width (px): 1536**, **Scene height (px): 1024**, and **Keep map proportions** checked.
3. Set **Grid: Square** and **Cell size (px): 64**. Check these values even if you set world defaults earlier; a selected map or scene can suggest a different cell size.
4. Leave both grid origins and both map offsets at **0**. The preview should report **24 x 16 cells**. Close the optional section to see the whole scene form again.
5. Keep **Lighting: Daylight**, **Visibility: Public**, and **Show in scene navigation** checked for the opening dock scene. Here, Public means available to participants in your world; it does not make your private world a public internet listing.
6. Keep **Player start: GM preview**, then choose **Create scene**. This lets you finish preparing the map before moving players to it.



After creation, Configure > Grid provides a second check of the 64px square grid and zero grid origins.

About "Grid not verified": detecting a picture's dimensions is different from detecting a printed grid. The supplied maps are designed for 64px cells; use those known dimensions and inspect the result yourself. If using another map with a printed grid, calibrate that map separately instead of copying our values.

Make the rehearsal easy to see

1. In the **Scenes** list, open **Scene actions for 01 - Willowmere Dock** using the row's action button, then choose **Configure**.
2. In scene configuration, open **Lighting**. Keep **Global illumination** checked and **Darkness** at **0**.

3. Uncheck **Enable fog of war** and **Enable token vision** for this first exercise. Newly created scenes have their own lighting settings, so check them here even after changing the world defaults.
4. Open **Grid** and verify **Units: Feet** and **Distance per cell: 5**. The source shape check should say the map and scene shapes match.
5. Close the configuration window with its **Close window** button and wait for **Saved**.

The Lighting tab contains separate fog-of-war and token-vision switches.

The whole map is intentionally visible for the beginner rehearsal. Keep surprises in private notes and in the other scenes. Do not draw secret labels or put unrevealed enemies on this opening map.

Show the location to the group

Use the dock scene's action menu and choose **Activate** when you want it to become the group's active location. Read the **Activate scene** confirmation, then choose **Activate** once. **View / GM preview** changes what you inspect; **Activate** moves the group to that location.

Use **Fit** to bring the map into view. Look for the dock scene's **Live** label in the scene navigation.

The tabletop with the opening scene prepared.

Checkpoint: the correct map is visible, its shapes are not stretched, there are 24 squares across and 16 down, and the opening scene is Live. Later, your player-side rehearsal will check that another participant can actually see it.

6. Prepare the bridge and chapel

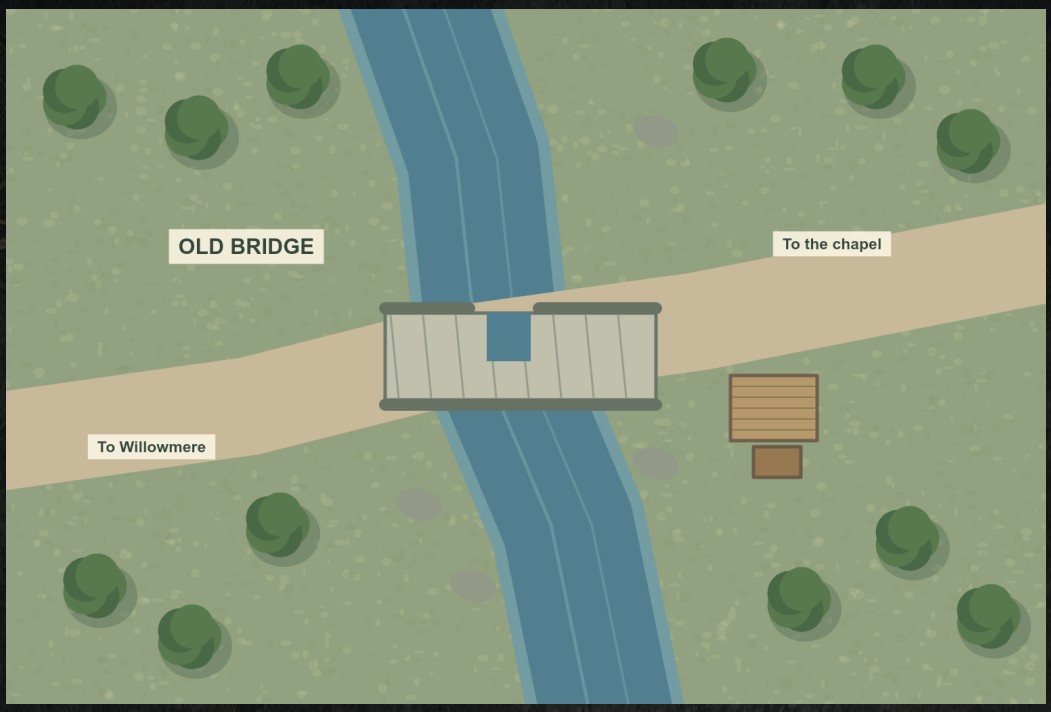
Repeat the scene-creation workflow for these two locations:

- **02 - Old Bridge** uses `02-old-bridge.png`.
- **03 - Bellkeeper's Chapel** uses `03-bellkeeper-chapel.png`.

For each, upload through **World assets**, confirm the upload, choose **Use map**, and set 1536 x 1024 pixels with a 64px square cell. Both maps use 24 x 16 cells at 5 feet per cell. Keep them in **GM preview** while preparing.

Use **Visibility: GM only** and leave **Show in scene navigation** unchecked for locations you want to keep unrevealed. When the group reaches one, open its scene action menu and choose **Visibility: Public**. If navigation is hidden, choose **Show in navigation**, then activate the scene. The menu describes the action it will take; **Hide from navigation** means it is already shown. Chapter 10 checks this from the player's side.

Apply the same simple Lighting settings to each teaching scene: global illumination on, darkness 0, fog off, and token vision off. Once this basic campaign works, you can rehearse a separate scene with lighting and fog enabled.



The original Old Bridge map includes a damaged crossing and a roadside cart.

The chapel's drawn stone walls do not block tokens or sight by themselves. For this first session, describe those boundaries and ask players to move through the doors. You can teach automated walls and vision in a later practice scene.

Keep the original **Scene 1** as a scratch space if useful. Rename it to **Practice** and keep it GM-only before adding private test material. Your three adventure scenes should remain easy to identify in the directory.

Checkpoint: you can find all three maps, switch your own preview between them, and explain which scene is currently Live. Your maps contain no GM-only text.

7. Make a character and place a token

An actor is the stored character; a token is its piece on a particular scene. Choose one route: use **Ari - Practice** for the original Willowmere practice rules, or skip to **Use guided setup for a D&D character** below for a D&D campaign. Portrait artwork is optional; the interface displays an initial when an image is absent.

A simple practice character

1. Return your GM view to **01 - Willowmere Dock**. Open **Actors**, then **Create actor or folder > New PC**. PC means player character.
2. Enlarge the sheet if needed by dragging its lower-right resize handle. Keyboard users can focus that handle and use Right/Down Arrow to increase its size. Scroll inside the sheet to reach fields below the visible area.

3. On **Attributes**, enter **Ari - Practice** in **Character name**. Set the maximum HP field, to the right of the slash, to **10**, then the current **HP** to **10**, **AC** to **12**, and **Speed** to **30**. Use **Friendly** for **Disposition**. Leave the six ability scores at **10** for this interface exercise.
4. In **Token**, keep **Width (grid): 1** and **Height (grid): 1**, and set **Nameplate: Always**. Leave special vision and light settings alone while the teaching scenes have fog and token vision disabled.
5. Close the sheet. Open it again through **Actions for Ari - Practice > Open sheet** and check the saved name and values. Close it before placing the token.
6. Drag **Ari - Practice** from the Actors directory onto an open square of the dock map. The interface should report **Placed token for Ari - Practice**.

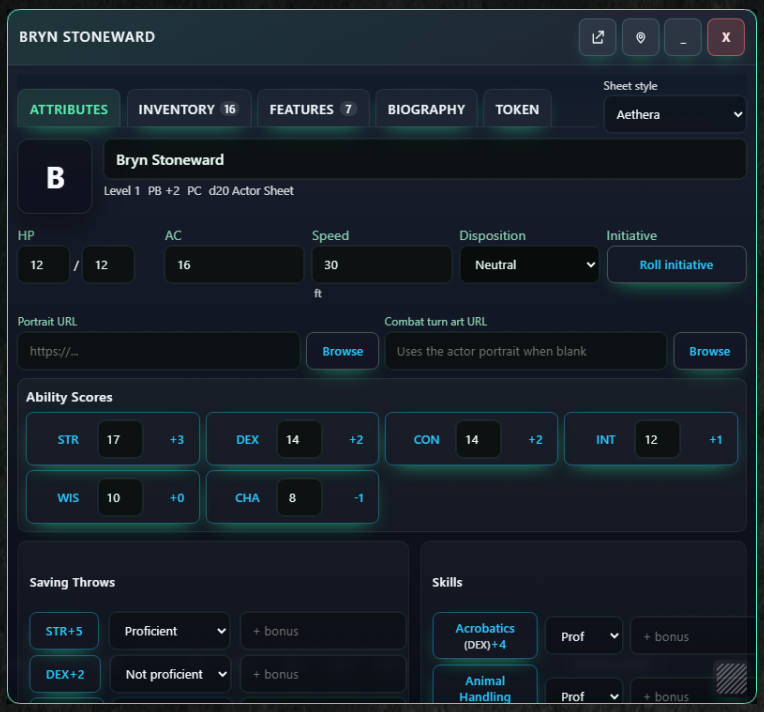
These practice numbers support learning the controls. The original practice adventure does not use damage or armor. For D&D or another full game, use an approved character and check its abilities, saves, skills, equipment, features, spells, resources, and rules version against the agreed rules before play. Do not infer that owning a weapon means it is equipped or that every rule is automated.

Check linked HP: right-click Ari's token, choose **Show resources**, change **HP current** from 10 to 9, and choose **Save**. Open the actor sheet and check that it also reads 9/10. Restore HP to 10 in the sheet and check the token again. Repeat this with the player's account after assigning ownership in chapter 8. The supplied practice story does not use HP loss, but this check teaches where to record it in a full game.

Use guided setup for a D&D character

For a D&D SRD / 2024 campaign, create a separate **New PC** and choose **Create character**. The following level-one example is the route used in the updated rehearsal; use your group's approved choices for your own hero.

1. Name the character **Bryn Stoneward**. Assign the starting scores: **Strength 15, Dexterity 14, Constitution 13, Intelligence 12, Wisdom 10, Charisma 8**.
2. Choose **Choose character options**. Use the filter to find and select **Dwarf**, **Soldier**, and **Fighter**.
3. Read each choice's explanation. **Apply suggestion** supplies an eligible starting choice; review it before choosing **Next**. You can choose another eligible option to suit your character.
4. At the background's ability increases, use **STR 2**, **DEX 0**, and **CON 1** for this example. These are increases to the starting scores, not the final scores. Continue through skills, equipment, and other choices presented by the builder.
5. At **Ready to apply**, review the complete character, then choose **Apply changes** once. Wait for the sheet to return and saving to finish.
6. Close and reopen the sheet. For this example, check **Strength 17**, **HP 12/12**, Strength and Constitution saving-throw proficiency, and **Athletics +5**. Review the selected features and equipment too. Different choices can change these results.
7. Drag the completed actor onto the scene, then assign that actor to its player using chapter 8. Use Bryn's name wherever that chapter uses Ari.



Bryn's reopened sheet shows Strength 17 and HP 12/12, with readable ability scores and saving throws.

The builder handles the supported choices shown in its review. Check the resulting character with your GM and the agreed rules, especially before adding homebrew, changing equipment, or using a different rules version.

Add someone the GM portrays

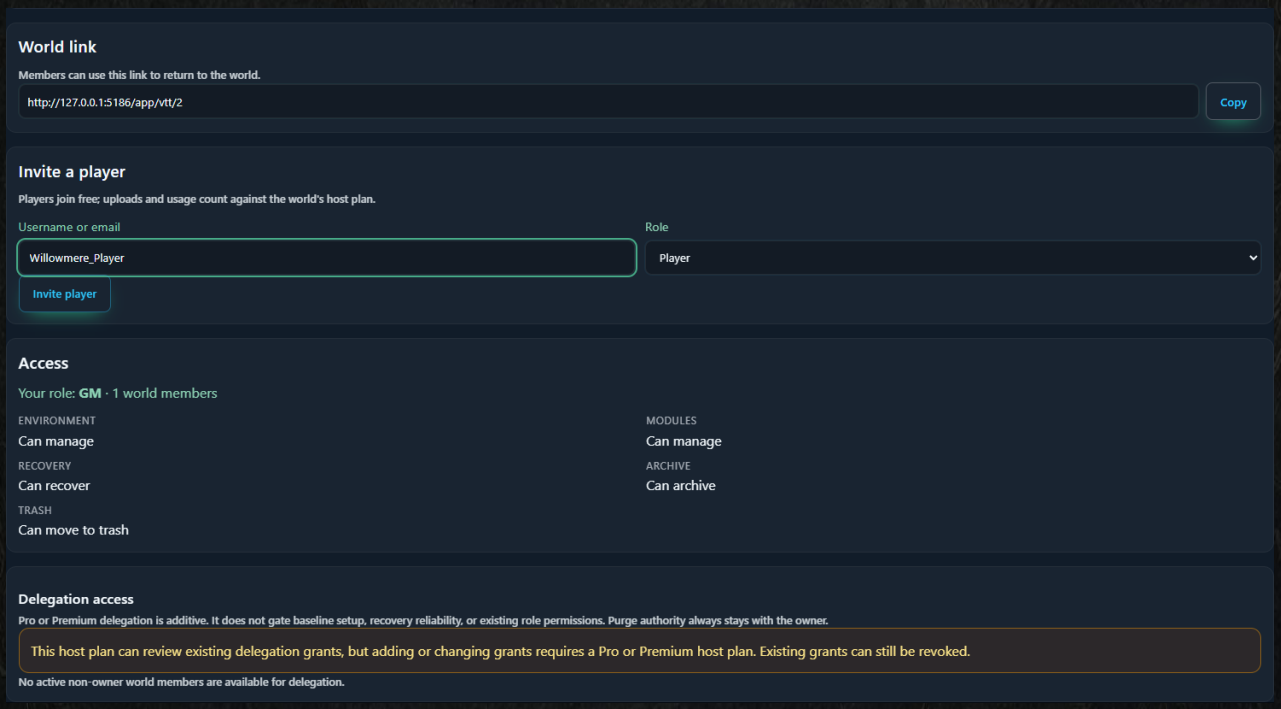
To represent Nessa, use **Create actor or folder > New NPC**, name her **Nessa**, and set **Disposition: Friendly**. NPC means a character the GM portrays. In **Token**, use **Nameplate: Always** and uncheck **Show bars on token** for this noncombat character. Close the sheet and drag Nessa onto the map near the dock. Keep her under GM control. Orrin and Tamsin can be described aloud, or created the same way on their own scenes.

Checkpoint: your chosen hero appears in Actors and on the dock map. You can explain why deleting a map token and deleting the stored actor are different actions. A player still needs character ownership before they can control that hero.

8. Add players and give each their own character

Add an existing account by username

1. Have the player create or sign in to their own Aethera account and tell you its exact username. Each person uses their own account.
2. Return to **Worlds** at **aethera.tv/app/vtt**. Select your world's name to open its setup, then the **Players** tab.
3. Under **Invite a player**, enter the existing username in **Username or email**. Keep **Role: Player**, then choose **Invite player**.
4. Look for **Player added to the world**. An exact existing username can add that account directly.
5. Copy the **World link** above the form and share it privately with that player. This is the returning member's world address. Their own world number will differ from the screenshot.
6. The player opens that world link while signed in. If a first-time destination screen appears, complete it and continue to the requested page. Once inside, they can choose **Finish later** on the introductory checklist and use **Fit**.



World setup's Players tab can add an existing account by username.

Use an invitation link

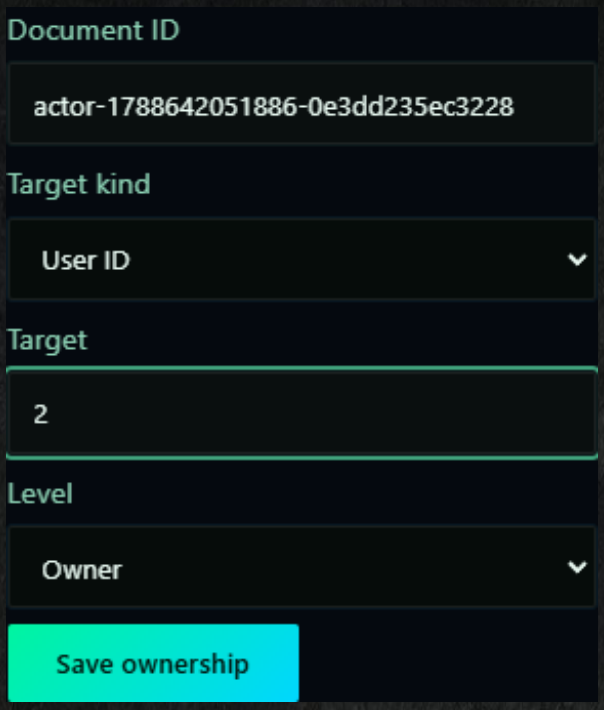
You can also open **Settings > People & permissions > Invitation Links**, keep **Role: Player**, choose an expiry, and use **Create invite link**. Share the resulting link privately. The recipient opens it, signs in or completes account creation if needed, and accepts the invitation to join the world. Both an already signed-in player and a player returning from sign-in can use it. Keep the ordinary World link for later sessions.

The setup Review screen's **Saved pending invitations** count reflects saved invitations. A count is a useful check that one was created; having the player actually enter the correct world is your joining checkpoint. Revoke links you no longer need, and avoid showing them in screenshots or recordings.

Assign the character to one player

World membership and character ownership are separate. The Player role gives normal participation; **Owner** on a particular actor gives control of that character. It does not make the player the world owner.

1. As GM, launch the world. Open **Settings > People & permissions > Invitation Links**. In **Accepted players**, find the player's username and the small numeric ID displayed beside it. Write down that player's number. Use their number, not the example number **2** from our screenshots.
2. Open **Actors > Actions for Ari - Practice > Configure permissions**. The Settings panel opens and focuses **Document ID** in **Ownership & Visibility**. The actor's ID is already filled in.
3. In that same form, choose **Target kind: User ID**, enter the player's numeric ID in **Target**, keep **Level: Owner**, and choose **Save ownership**.
4. Use this **Save ownership** form for the existing actor. The separate **Local creation presets** section applies to future creations and is not the assignment you need here. Do not change world-wide role permissions for this step.
5. In the player's browser, open **Actors**, find **Ari - Practice**, and open its sheet. Wait for the ownership change to save and reach the player before testing control.
6. Let the player choose **Select tool**, then drag Ari's token one square. Check the resulting position from the GM side. Repeat with a separate actor and the correct user ID for every player.



Assign Owner to a specific User ID on the already-selected actor, then Save ownership.

Checkpoint: the player enters under their own account, sees the dock, can open their own sheet, and can drag their own token. Ask them to try selecting Nessa: do not proceed if they can move a GM-controlled character unexpectedly. Check individual ownership first; promoting a player to GM is not a character-control fix.

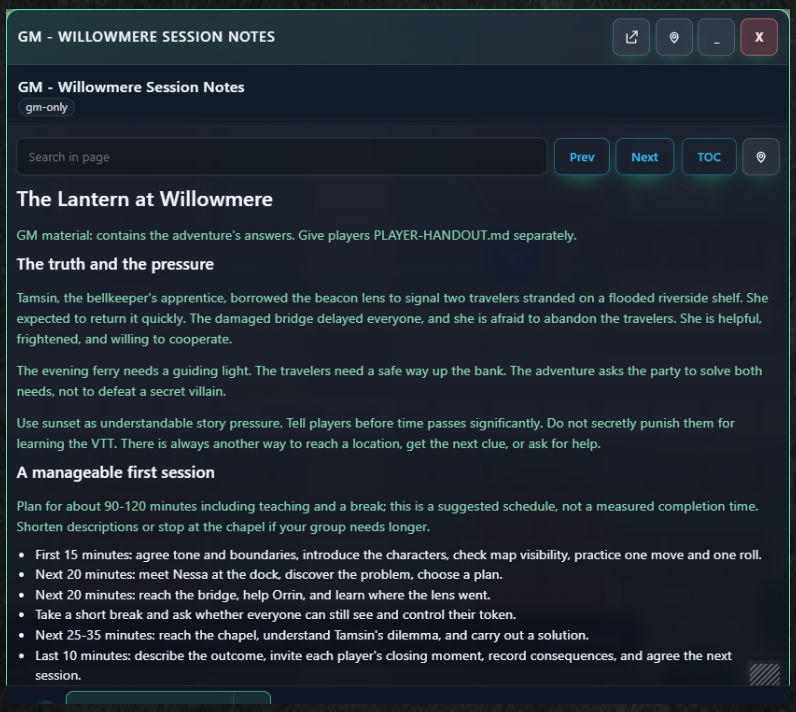
9. Load the notes and share the handout

Keep **GM-RUNSHEET.md** open in your usual text editor while you prepare. It contains read-aloud descriptions, NPC motives, multiple ways forward, consequences, a suggested session schedule, and follow-up adventures. Make your own copy before adapting it. Plain text notes remain usable even if a VTT panel is awkward or the connection drops.

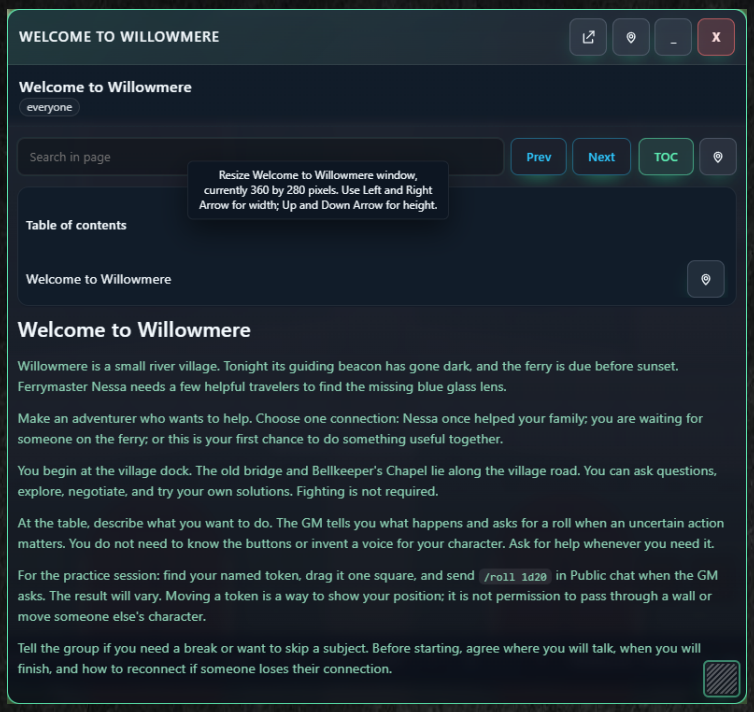
The two files in **starter-content** also import these notes into Aethera's Journal directory. You do not need to edit JSON to use them.

1. Open **Journal**. If you already have entries, right-click one and choose **Import JSON into folder**. If you have none, use **Create journal entry or folder > New journal entry** to create a temporary empty entry, then right-click it.
2. Select **willowmere-gm-notes.json** from the supplied `starter-content` folder. Wait for the imported entry **GM - Willowmere Session Notes** to appear with a **GM only** badge.
3. Repeat the import with **willowmere-player-handout.json**. It creates **Welcome to Willowmere**. Import each file once; importing again creates another entry.

4. Right-click the GM notes and choose **Open**. Enlarge the window using its resize handle. The **TOC** button shows or hides its table of contents. Check that the content begins with the adventure and that the visibility label is **gm-only**.
5. Open the player handout the same way. This contains only the public premise and joining/practice advice. Keep the adventure's answer in the GM notes.
6. In the player's browser, open **Journal** and search for **Welcome to Willowmere**. It should be readable. Search for **GM - Willowmere**; the private entry should not appear. Perform this check again after changing permissions or importing your own material.



The imported GM journal identifies its private visibility and contains the session plan.



The separate player handout can be read by the player account.

To update your session plan inside the VTT, open the journal and choose **Edit journal**. Edit the title or body in the **Journal editor**, wait for saving, then close and reopen it to check your changes. Keep your text copy too if you want notes available outside the tabletop.

Privacy habit: a title such as "GM Notes" does not make an entry private. A GM's **New journal entry** starts **GM only**; **New handout** starts shared with **everyone**. Check the actual visibility before entering secrets, and verify the player's view after sharing or importing. Avoid **Show to players** on private material.

Checkpoint: you can read your session plan, the player can read the public brief, and the player cannot find the private GM entry. Send only **PLAYER-HANDOUT.md** if sharing the brief outside Aethera.

10. Rehearse the table before game night

Do this with one patient player or a separate test account. Two tabs signed into your GM account are both GM views and cannot check player permissions.

A five-minute player practice

1. Confirm that both people name the same **Live** scene and see the correct map. Use **Fit**, then **Zoom out** if panels cover an important edge of the map.
2. The player opens their actor's sheet, closes it, chooses **Select tool**, and drags their token one square. A map square is 5 feet in this campaign. Check that the GM sees the final position too.
3. Open **Chat Log** in the Run workspace. Set the message composer's **Visibility** to **Public**, type **/roll 1d20**, and choose **Send chat message**. Check the roll card in both browsers. Your number will be random; the screenshot's 15 is only one result.
4. Send a short normal message such as **Ready to play**. Explain **IC** as speaking in character and **OOC** as speaking as the player. Use OOC for technical questions. Leave the speaking language at **None** for a shared technical check.
5. Ask the player to read **Welcome to Willowmere** and confirm the private notes are absent. Agree how to ask for help or a break during play.

A player-side dice roll creates a public result card beside the map.

These checks establish that your group can use the table together. The **Saved** indicator tells you about persistence; checking the other person's view also confirms their connection and permissions.

Practice moving to the next location

1. As GM, choose **View** on **02 - Old Bridge** to inspect it. The player should still be at the dock; a GM preview is useful for preparation.
2. Open the bridge's action menu, choose **Visibility: Public**, and choose **Show in navigation** if its navigation is hidden.
3. Choose **Activate** and confirm the single prompt. Check that the GM header marks the bridge **Live**.
4. Check the player window: it should follow to the bridge automatically. Return to the dock and activate the bridge again to practice revisiting a location. If a player loses their connection, pause important changes; when they reconnect, their view should catch up to the current Live scene. Use the ordinary **World link** if you need to reopen the table.
5. Place each hero on the new map by dragging its existing actor from **Actors** onto the arrival area. In the rehearsal the new scene started without the dock token; changing scenes did not put that piece on the bridge automatically. Reuse the stored actor, then check control from the player's side.
6. Repeat your own preview check for the chapel. Keep it private until needed. Return the group to the dock when practice ends so game night starts in the right place.

The GM's bridge scene is Live after activation and contains the practice hero.

If the two browsers still disagree after reconnecting, pause play and check the connection, scene visibility, and character ownership before continuing. Preserve any unsaved text before reopening the world. Do not create duplicate worlds or characters to recover a connection.

Your ready-to-host checklist

- Every player can enter with their own account and can see the correct opening map.
- Each player controls their own character; GM characters remain under GM control.
- Everyone can find chat, make a public roll, and read the handout.
- Private notes and unrevealed scenes are absent from the player view.
- Players follow a scene transition and a return visit, and you know how to recover after a lost connection.
- Your group has chosen the original practice rules or a full ruleset with approved characters.
- You know where everyone will talk, how to reconnect, when to break, and when to finish.
- You have read the GM run sheet and can explain the lens, the rescue, and the possible outcomes.

11. Run a good first session

Use **GM-RUNSHEET.md** as your adventure, not as a speech to read in full. Its suggested order is dock, bridge, chapel, then a short epilogue. Let the players' decisions change that order when it makes sense.

Begin with the player brief and one question for each character: **Why are you willing to help Willowmere tonight?** Teach one move and one roll, then read Nessa's opening request from the run sheet. You can describe her normally; a special voice is optional.

Follow a simple conversation loop: describe what the characters can perceive, ask what they want to do, clarify their approach, resolve any meaningful uncertainty, and describe what changes. Ask a quieter player what their character is doing before one person makes every decision.

At the bridge, give players visible options and welcome their own. At the chapel, explain Tamsin's dilemma promptly; discovering the next scene should not require guessing a password or succeeding on one die roll. Before asking for a risky roll, explain what a setback could mean.

This adventure can finish without combat. If your chosen game includes a fight, prepare that encounter using its rules and your actual party's abilities, and rehearse combat controls separately. The supplied adventure makes no claim of D&D combat balance and needs no enemy stat blocks to reach a satisfying ending.

Finish with the consequences of the party's plan. Give each player a closing moment, ask what they enjoyed or found confusing, and write down promises, changed relationships, and the next destination. Schedule the next session before everyone leaves.

Checkpoint: the evening ends with a changed situation, the players understand what their decisions accomplished, and you know what they want to do next.

12. Grow a campaign you can maintain

Reuse Willowmere as a home base. The run sheet includes **The Broken Warning Posts** for session 2 and **Lights Beyond the Marsh** for session 3. These are preparation prompts, not fully scripted follow-up adventures: build their details around what your players choose.

Before each session, prepare a short recap, one current problem, three clues or leads, two ways forward, and a consequence that could return later. Add one new location when you know the group wants to go there. Reuse Nessa, Orrin, and Tamsin so relationships can develop.

Keep a campaign record using the template at the end of the GM run sheet. Record what actually happened, not only your original plan. Note the party's location, resources, promised rewards, unresolved jobs, and chosen next destination.

Keep your original PNGs, text notes, and approved character records in a campaign folder outside the VTT too. An exported scene or actor is one document; it is not proof of a complete world backup. Before relying on a backup or moving a campaign, verify the application's current backup and restore process in a disposable world. Backup restoration was outside this tutorial rehearsal.

Add one feature at a time after the first session: a portrait, measurement tools, a practice combat, then walls, lighting, and fog on a separate practice scene. Check every new feature with a player account before putting it into a live adventure. More automation is useful when it removes work you already understand.

13. When something does not look right

What you see	What to check next
A blank or very dark map	Confirm the scene and map; use Fit. For this rehearsal, check global illumination on, darkness 0, fog off, and token vision off in that scene's Lighting tab.
A stretched or misaligned map	Check 1536 x 1024 scene pixels, 100% map scale, Square grid, 64px cell, and zero offsets/origins for these supplied maps only.
Upload accepted but no map thumbnail	Wait for processing, then Refresh in World assets. Check for a rejection message. Do not keep uploading duplicates.
Cannot find the image upload	In Browse maps, choose Upload map image (PNG / JPEG / WebP), or open World assets > Upload.
An invitation is expired, revoked, or meant for another account	Ask the GM to check the intended account and create a fresh Player invitation if needed. Existing members can use the ordinary World link.
Player sees a map but cannot control Ari	Check Player membership, the correct actor's individual User ID > Owner grant, and the placed token. Reopen the world after saving, then retry with Select tool.
Player can control the wrong character	Inspect that actor's grants and the placed token's control settings. Remove unintended grants; keep the person's world role at Player.
Player still sees the old location	Confirm the new scene is Public and Live, wait for saving, and reopen the ordinary World link in the player browser. Recheck both sides before continuing.
A new location has no hero tokens	Drag the existing hero actors onto that scene's arrival area. Do not create duplicate actor sheets merely to visit a new map.
A character choice cannot be applied	Read the choice's validation message and complete any missing selection. If someone else edited the actor, preserve your choices and reopen the current sheet before reviewing again. Report an error that persists.
A journal opens for reading	As its GM or authorized editor, choose Edit journal. Players normally read shared handouts without editing them.
A GM note appears in the player directory	Stop adding secrets. Check actual visibility and ownership; the title alone offers no protection. Recheck using the player account after saving.
No chat result is visible	Check the composer's visibility, the Chat Log filter, and the other browser. A private or filtered result may not be shared.
Offline, reconnecting, or disagreement between browsers	Pause critical changes. Preserve unsaved text, restore the connection, and reopen the world when saving permits. Check connection and permissions together if disagreement persists.

When reporting a problem, note the world and scene names, what you clicked, what you expected, and what happened. Include a screenshot that avoids private notes and invitation links. That is more useful than "the VTT broke."

14. Make the next campaign your own

Keep the useful structure and change the setting: a dark beacon becomes a missing caravan, a sealed gate, or a damaged station transmitter. Give the party someone to care about, three places worth visiting, people with understandable motives, and more than one workable ending.

You are ready to prepare your own small campaign when you can create a world, put a correctly sized map into a scene, place and assign a character, keep notes private, bring a player to the table, recover a stale view, and turn the group's choices into next session's preparation.

For recording later, use **VIDEO-SCRIPT.md**. It turns these same steps into short screen-only lessons with narration and caption copy. You do not need to record your face or your own voice.

Appendix A. The GM adventure

GM material: contains the adventure's answers. Give players PLAYER-HANDOUT.md separately.

The truth and the pressure

Tamsin, the bellkeeper's apprentice, borrowed the beacon lens to signal two travelers stranded on a flooded riverside shelf. She expected to return it quickly. The damaged bridge delayed everyone, and she is afraid to abandon the travelers. She is helpful, frightened, and willing to cooperate.

The evening ferry needs a guiding light. The travelers need a safe way up the bank. The adventure asks the party to solve both needs, not to defeat a secret villain.

Use sunset as understandable story pressure. Tell players before time passes significantly. Do not secretly punish them for learning the VTT. There is always another way to reach a location, get the next clue, or ask for help.

A manageable first session

Plan for about 90-120 minutes including teaching and a break; this is a suggested schedule, not a measured completion time. Shorten descriptions or stop at the chapel if your group needs longer.

- First 15 minutes: agree tone and boundaries, introduce the characters, check map visibility, practice one move and one roll.
- Next 20 minutes: meet Nessa at the dock, discover the problem, choose a plan.
- Next 20 minutes: reach the bridge, help Orrin, and learn where the lens went.
- Take a short break and ask whether everyone can still see and control their token.
- Next 25-35 minutes: reach the chapel, understand Tamsin's dilemma, and carry out a solution.
- Last 10 minutes: describe the outcome, invite each player's closing moment, record consequences, and agree the next session.

Scene 1: Willowmere Dock

Read aloud: "A quiet bell rings over the water. At the dock, a woman in a patched blue coat shields an empty lantern from the wind. Out on the river, the evening ferry is only a distant shape. 'The beacon's lens is missing,' she says. 'Will you help me bring its light back?'"

Nessa is practical and warm. She wants people safe and can lend rope, a hand lantern, and a small cart. She offers supper and a place to sleep as thanks. No one must accept an obviously dangerous job just to participate; ask what makes each hero willing to help.

Give these facts freely when the party examines the beacon or talks to Nessa: its blue lens was removed without breaking the housing; Tamsin was seen carrying a wrapped blue object toward the old bridge; the beacon can work again if the lens is returned or a bright temporary signal is arranged.

Ask: "What would you like to check or take before you leave?" Let two different players contribute. A careful search can reveal a useful coil of rope or a rough sketch of the chapel, but never withhold the bridge's location behind a die roll.

Leave for the bridge when the players choose to follow the lead. If they instead organize a dockside signal, let that plan help the ferry and have Orrin arrive asking for help at the chapel.

Scene 2: Old Bridge

Read aloud: "The river presses against the old stone bridge. Several boards are missing from its middle. Beyond the gap, a messenger braces a little cart with one boot. A blue flash answers from the chapel on the hill."

Orrin is an exhausted messenger. He saw Tamsin cross with the lens and heard her call for more rope. He knows two travelers are stranded near the chapel. He wants his cart safe, but will leave it if people need help.

Offer three visible possibilities: secure a rope and cross carefully; use sound boards from the cart to make a temporary walkway; or take a longer path around the shallow upstream ford. Invite other sensible solutions. The longer path costs story time, not access to the rest of the adventure.

For an uncertain attempt, describe the risk before calling for a roll. A setback might mean wet supplies, a dropped bag that can be recovered, or needing another character's help. Avoid surprise lethal falls during the introductory exercise. If a player proposes a careful, well-equipped plan with no meaningful uncertainty, simply let it work.

Whatever the outcome, Orrin supplies the chapel lead. Success can also earn his help and a cart of useful boards. At a slow table, let the first workable plan succeed and move on.

Scene 3: Bellkeeper's Chapel

Read aloud: "Blue light sweeps through the chapel window. Inside, an apprentice turns a glass lens above a lantern. From the riverbank below comes an answering wave. 'They're still down there,' she says. 'I couldn't leave them in the dark.'"

Tamsin explains the truth as soon as someone asks. The two travelers are cold but unhurt. They are on a ledge below the chapel's riverside path; they are not hidden enemies. Describe the ledge verbally rather than requiring a second map.

Let the party solve the competing needs. They might keep the signal running while a rope team rescues the travelers, use Orrin's boards to build a safer path, or send someone back to arrange a temporary beacon while the others help Tamsin. A good alternative should work even if it is absent from these notes.

Give everyone a job: secure a line, talk someone through the climb, carry a lantern, calm a frightened traveler, watch the river, or return to Nessa. Rotate attention among players. Ask for a roll only when its outcome will change the situation.

If time runs short, narrate the last safe steps after the party makes a workable plan. The meaningful choice is how they help; the finale does not require a combat encounter.

Resolve the evening

- Both rescue and beacon succeed: the ferry docks safely; Tamsin apologizes, and Nessa asks the party to help improve the warning system.
- Rescue succeeds while the ferry waits: the ferry anchors safely until morning; villagers organize food and shelter, and repairs become tomorrow's job.
- The lens returns before the rescue: Nessa sends a second rescue team with the party's information. The travelers survive, and Tamsin asks why she was left alone. Let the group respond.

- The party invents a different solution: follow its sensible consequences. Give credit for cooperation, not for matching this outline.

Ask each player: "What is one small thing your character does before turning in?" Record one changed relationship and one unanswered question. Ask the players which lead sounds fun next.

Optional rules for a first practice evening

These are original, deliberately small practice rules. They are not D&D character-building rules and do not make Ari a legal D&D character. If your group already chose a ruleset, use that ruleset and approved characters instead.

Each hero has a name, one useful talent, one connection to Willowmere, and the same basic chance on a roll. Use the 10 HP, 12 AC, 30-foot speed, and ability-score-10 entries only as interface practice values; this story exercise does not use HP loss, armor, classes, spells, or combat.

For a risky action, agree the possible benefit and setback before rolling `/roll 1d20`. A result of 10 or more gets the intended result. A result of 9 or less changes the situation: success with a manageable cost, a need for help, or a different available route. Keep crucial information available. Each helper describes a concrete contribution; a strong preparation can remove the need for a roll. Let a hero's talent justify something plausible they know or can do, without adding a numerical bonus.

Move tokens to show agreed positions. One square is 5 feet. During conversation and exploration, take turns speaking naturally; there is no timed movement budget in this exercise. Stop or simplify an action that makes someone uncomfortable.

Turn the first adventure into a campaign

Session 2, The Broken Warning Posts: river villages disagree over who should maintain the signals. Reuse the dock for negotiations and the bridge for repair work. Add one new location only after the party chooses its destination. Let Nessa, Orrin, and Tamsin react to what happened last time.

Session 3, Lights Beyond the Marsh: one restored warning post starts signaling an impossible route. A lost surveyor asks for help, and the party must decide who can be trusted with the old river charts. Bring back a consequence from session 1, rather than declaring all its choices irrelevant.

Prepare situations and people, not a required sequence of player actions. Before each session, write a recap, a current problem, three clues or leads, two ways forward, and one consequence that could matter later. End each session by asking where the party wants to go next. That answer tells you what to prepare.

Session record template

Copy this page for each session. Leave enough room for what actually happened and the next destination your players chose.

Date and attendees:

What the party wanted:

What actually happened:

NPC relationships changed:

Promises, rewards, and unfinished jobs:

Current location and character resources:

Player-selected next destination:

One thing to simplify in the VTT next time:

Appendix B. Player handout

The material below is safe for players. Share the separate PLAYER-HANDOUT.md file instead of this full GM guide.

Willowmere is a small river village. Tonight its guiding beacon has gone dark, and the ferry is due before sunset. Ferrymaster Nessa needs a few helpful travelers to find the missing blue glass lens.

Make an adventurer who wants to help. Choose one connection: Nessa once helped your family; you are waiting for someone on the ferry; or this is your first chance to do something useful together.

You begin at the village dock. The old bridge and Bellkeeper's Chapel lie along the village road. You can ask questions, explore, negotiate, and try your own solutions. Fighting is not required.

At the table, describe what you want to do. The GM tells you what happens and asks for a roll when an uncertain action matters. You do not need to know the buttons or invent a voice for your character. Ask for help whenever you need it.

For the practice session: find your named token, drag it one square, and send `/roll 1d20` in Public chat when the GM asks. The result will vary. Moving a token is a way to show your position; it is not permission to pass through a wall or move someone else's character.

Tell the group if you need a break or want to skip a subject. Before starting, agree where you will talk, when you will finish, and how to reconnect if someone loses their connection.