

Build a world for your story

Take-home from Vibe Coding: Make Your Own Interactive Story with AI.

Why write anything down

An AI can't hold a world you never wrote. Left alone it invents, drifts and forgets what happened two turns ago. Notes fix the parts you care about.

The notes are also where your voice lives. You decide the rules, the people, the tone and what is off limits. Then a lot of what comes back is still yours, and you can tell when it isn't.

Start with five lines

Enough for a short story. About three minutes.

1. **Where** does it happen?
2. **Who** are you?
3. **What is wrong?**
4. **What is at stake?**
5. **What can you do about it?**

Our example, The Lighthouse. A harbour town whose lighthouse has gone dark. You, alone on the cliff path. The light is out, and a boat is still outside the headland. Whether that boat finds the harbour mouth tonight. Get in, light it, or walk away.

Then the sheet, if your story has people in it

A living world needs people who want things. One line each.

The place and its rules	The lamp is lit by hand. The radio has been dead since spring, so the only way to reach the boat is the light. The causeway floods for four hours either side of high water.
The people	A harbourmaster who wants the town quiet. A keeper's daughter with the key, who hasn't climbed the stairs in nine years. A voice on the boat's radio.
What each one wants	Quiet. To be asked, not told. To be told the truth.
What each would never say	That he was wrong. Her father's name. That she is frightened.
The pressure	Four hours of tide, and the boat's fuel.
The texture	Oil, salt, wet rope, gulls on the railing, a tin of matches nearly empty.
Off limits	Nobody dies on the page. No graphic detail. No real places.

One more line, the most useful one: what do you want the reader to feel? Ours: responsible for a small, ordinary choice, and never told which one was right.

Turn over for how to build yours.

Build it with the AI, not by it

Don't ask it to write your world. Its version will be smooth and generic. Ask it to interview you, then write the answers down in your own words.

I am building a small world for a story. Interview me about it, one question at a time, and wait for my answer before asking the next. Ask about the place, the rules, the people and what is at stake. Do not invent anything I have not told you. After ten questions, write my answers back to me as a one-page sheet I can edit.

Then cut it down to one page. A longer sheet won't get used.

Try it with other people: The Flip (10 minutes, 3 or more people)

1. **1.5 min.** Everyone writes one true, obvious thing about the world that nobody would argue with. Kings rule. Money works. The sea is cold.
2. **1 min.** The group picks one of those to turn upside down, and one to keep exactly as it is.
3. **3 min.** One at a time, each person adds one more thing that now has to change as a result. Nothing may contradict anything already said.
4. **1 min.** Pick the one consequence everything else leans on and write it at the top.

You now have a one-page world to hand your AI. The Flip is our ten-minute cut-down of *In This World* by Ben Robbins. The no-contradiction rule comes from his game *Microscope*. Both are worth a whole evening.

When it goes wrong

- **Long notes make it worse.** Short and precise beats complete and long.
- **It quotes your notes back.** Write facts, not instructions.
- **It ignores something you wrote.** Ask for the fact directly, or paste it in again.
- **The story drifts.** Keep a one-paragraph recap and paste it back in.
- **It invents something good.** Write it down straight away. That's how a world grows.

No AI at home?

Everything here works on paper. The sheet is what novelists and game designers have always kept. A branching story can be numbered paragraphs and arrows, which is how the form started.



This workshop online

Scan the code, or type:

ryankelln.com/project/tpl_2026/w11-vibe-coding-story/

Free to read: the *Dungeon World* reference document (its chapters on building a setting together); *Dawn of Worlds*. **Ask your library:** Jeff VanderMeer, *Wonderbook*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *Steering the Craft*.

TPL Innovator in Residence, Applied AI.