CREATE A TICKING CLOCK

*The story will drive **itself** forward with a ticking clock. Lost players, lost game prep, lost story lines, railroading, and lackluster grand finales can all disappear. With just a few key details these problems vanish, and games go as smoothly as we imagine during prep time.*

This might be the best time you can spend prepping your game. Come to this guide with an idea for the story you want to run. Fill in the blanks in each of the five steps, then keep this as a reference during your game. You'll be able to strike the balance of keeping things on track while still allowing the player characters to drive. Slow down or speed up, allow for diversions, and focus direction when you know it's needed.

Ultimately it comes down to clearly identifying what threat might motivate your players, building a foundation with what they care about, and letting the world they inhabit give them the motivation they need to move toward the story you've prepared. You can even use this format individual encounters to encourage timely action by players.

Find the Stakes

For a ticking clock to work, there needs to be a threat at the end. State the threat simply and clearly for yourself.

> Threat Element

External stakes refer to how the threat might directly affect the world around your characters. How would the world change or be affected if the threat were not stopped?

> External Stakes

Internal stakes refer to the things your characters care about. What would happen to these people, groups and places? How would they suffer personally?

> Internal Stakes

Foreshadow

How might you spell out early on what the threat is plainly in game? Characters cannot have any ambiguity about what the price of inaction might be. Whether it comes from a mystical vision, an NPC giving exposition, or a captured minion of your villain it needs to be stated plainly what they likely outcome will be if the threat isn't stopped.

> Foreshadow

Pressure

Increasingly serious signs the characters can see and/or interact with as they play that indicates the eventual outcome is drawing closer. For every action, there are effects visible in the world, what are they? These signposts act as motivation to be sprinkled in if players lose focus or tension needs to be heightened at any time.

Signpost 1

Signpost 2

Signpost 3

Signpost 4

Signpost 5

Danger Now

The threat is almost a reality. This is the clear indication in the world that action must be taken immediately and the ultimate motivator for characters. It's now or never. What does the "finger on the trigger" look like in this scenario?

Danger Now

The End

Success or death cannot be the only outcomes. The world (and game) continues in the event of success or failure. Players should be able to interact with these outcomes. Note the change in the world and try to use the original external and internal stakes.

The End: Option A - Positive effects in the world highlighting their success.

The End: Option B - Negative effects of the worst case outcome.