
MAR DE ORO
GM TOOLS
Clocks, pressure, consequence, and session structure

How to Use This Booklet

A compact preparation and live-play reference

This booklet is a visual reference. Use it to structure sessions quickly, keep pressure visible, and make consequences easy to track during play. You do not need every tool at once. Start with the core loop, then add the other tools only when they support the current session.

1. Pick only the tools you need

Most sessions work well with a session objective, two or three active factions, one to three clocks, and an end-of-session update. Use more only when they add clarity.

2. Let the fiction lead

These tools do not replace GM judgment. They help you record what is under pressure, what changes when the players act, and what happens when time passes.

3. Keep consequences concrete

Instead of saying things got worse, name who acted, what changed, and what the players now have to respond to.

Recommended prep loop

Define the session objective. Choose active factions and current moves. Identify one or more clocks. Build a clue web if truth must be discovered. Prepare one hard choice. Prepare likely consequences. Use the scene spine and pace guide. End with a short review.

Golden rule

Show the warning. Name the pressure. Let the players choose. Then advance the consequence only when the world has actually moved.

Contents

Full-page tool infographics

GM Tool 1: Clocks 4
GM Tool 2: Session Objective 5
GM Tool 3: Factions & Moves 6
GM Tool 4: Clue Web 7
GM Tool 5: Hard Choices 8
GM Tool 6: Scene Structure 9
GM Tool 7: Consequence Planning 10
GM Tool 8: End-of-Session Update 11
GM Tool 9: Pace Guide 12
GM Tool 10: Leverage 13
Back Cover 14

Recommended reading order

Read Clocks, Session Objective, Factions & Moves, and End-of-Session Update first. Those four tools form the core loop of campaign play. Add Clue Web, Hard Choices, Consequence Planning, and Pace Guide as needed.

GM TOOL 1: CLOCKS

What they are and how to use them.

1. What a Clock Is



A clock is a segmented tracker that represents a threat, plan, instability, progress, or deteriorating condition in the fiction. It advances over time as triggers occur.

2. Why it Works

Makes pressure visible.
Everyone can see what's coming.

Turns delay into consequence.
Waiting has a cost in the fiction.

Makes failure productive without stopping play.
Every result moves the story forward.

3. How to Use It

1. **Describe the fiction.**
   Establish the threat, plan, or condition in the world.
2. **Resolve the action.**
   Call for rolls or judgement and see what happens.
3. **Advance the clock if a trigger occurred.**
   Mark one segment (if the fiction supports it).
4. **Show the new pressure.**
   Describe the change and what it means now.

4. Anatomy of a Clock



Name
What the clock represents.

Segments
The total number of ticks before it completes.

Progress
Filled segments show how close it is to completion.

Advance When
The triggers that cause the clock to move forward.

When Full
The consequence that happens when the clock completes.

Visibility
Keep it visible so everyone can see the pressure build.

5. Example

Albion Identifies the Asset



Advance when:

- Albion interrogates someone who knows the asset.
- Albion gains access to sensitive records or communications.
- Albion pieces together a clue that reveals the asset's identity.

When Full:
Albion identifies the asset. They act—capture, track, or destroy the asset.

6. Good Practice

Advance it only when the fiction supports it.
Let the story justify the move.

Show Warning Signs.
Foreshadow what the clock tells you is coming.

Define a Concrete Consequence.
Be specific about what happens when it fills.

7. Avoid

Advancing every failed roll.
Failure isn't the only way pressure builds.

vague Outcomes.
"Bad things happen" is not a consequence.

Using the Clock to Force a Scene.
Clocks create choices, not railroads.

Show the Warning. Name the pressure. Let the players choose.

GM TOOL 2: SESSION OBJECTIVE

What it is and how to use it.

1. What it Is

A session objective gives the table one clear direction for the session.

It answers: What matters most right now?

2. Why it Works

Keeps the session focused.
Everyone knows what success looks like.

Clarifies the stakes.
Defines what is on the line and why it matters.

Helps the GM prep consequences.
Clear outcomes make prep faster and play stronger.

3. How to Use it

1. **Choose the objective.** State the one thing the session is about.
2. **Define Success.** What does winning look like?
3. **Define Delay/Failure.** What happens if they fall short?
4. **Define what happens if Ignored.** What changes if they walk away?

4. Anatomy of a Session Objective

Objective	The one clear task the session is about.
Success	What happens when the objective is achieved.
Delay	What happens if they succeed, but not in time or at a cost.
Failure	What happens if they attempt and fail.
Ignored	What happens if they choose not to pursue it.

5. Example

Secure The Original Ledger

Objective	Obtain the original ledger before the auction ends.
Success	The party gets the ledger. Gain an advantage and new leads.
Delay	The ledger changes hands. They can still pursue it, but it costs more and time is short.
Failure	Rivals secure the ledger. They gain leverage and act first.
Ignored	The ledger's secrets are lost or exploited by someone else.

6. Good Practice

Keep it Concrete.
Use clear, specific verbs and tangible outcomes.

Make Success Change the Situation.
Tie success to meaningful results, not just "progress".

Let Failure Continue the Campaign.
Consequences should create new problems, not dead ends.

7. Avoid

Vague Goals.
"Find info," "deal with the threat" are not objectives.

Multiple Competing Primary Objectives.
Too many directions, no real focus.

No Consequence for Delay.
If time doesn't matter, choices don't either.

• Give the Session Direction. Let the Stakes create Momentum. •

GM TOOL 3: FACTIONS & MOVES

What they are and how to use them.

1. What it Is



Factions are active powers with goals, assets, and current moves.

2. Why it Works

Keeps the world moving.
Events happen even when the players look elsewhere.

Prevents static NPC groups.
Factions act, adapt, and pursue their own agendas.

Creates off-screen pressure.
Choices matter beyond what the players can see.

3. How to Use it

1. **Choose Active Factions.**
   Pick 2–3 factions that are in motion right now.
2. **Define What Each Wants.**
   State their objective in one clear line.
3. **Choose a Current Move.**
   Pick what they are doing about it right now.
4. **Show the Result in Play.**
   Reveal the outcome through events, signs, or complications.

4. Anatomy of a Faction Card



- **Faction** — Who they are.
- **Objective** — What they ultimately want.
- **Public Face** — How they present to the world.
- **Current Move** — What they are doing right now.
- **Status** — Where their power stands.
- **If Ignored** — What happens if they are left unchecked.

5. Examples

Albion

Objective: Maintain control and expand influence.

Current Move: Tighten border patrols and demand new taxes.

Status: Strong

If Ignored: Civil unrest and heavier crackdowns.

Duchy of Heller

Objective: Regain lost lands and prestige.

Current Move: Forge alliances and raise a levy.

Status: Growing

If Ignored: Military pressure on the borders.

Stroomdijk Syndicate

Objective: Control trade and undercut rivals.

Current Move: Smuggle weapons through the fog.

Status: Hidden

If Ignored: Black markets spread and corruption grows.

The Clann

Objective: Preserve the old ways and their lands.

Current Move: Gather support among the clans.

Status: Restless

If Ignored: Raids, feuds, and roadblocks increase.

6. Good Practice

Use only 2–3 active factions per session.
Keep the focus tight and the world manageable.

Make Moves Concrete.
Use actions with clear stakes and visible results.

Let Ignored Factions Act Off-Screen.
They don't wait for permission.

7. Avoid

Making every faction active at once.
Too much noise drowns the story.

Vague faction goals.
"Get power" or "Be strong" are not enough.

Factions that only react when the GM remembers them.
Factions need agency, not reminders.

8. Faction Turn



At the end of the session, ask:

- Who was ignored most?
- What do they want?
- What can they do now?
- What sign appears next session?

• Factions keep the world alive when the players look elsewhere. •

GM TOOL 4: CLUE WEB

What it is and how to use it.

1. What It Is



A clue web gives multiple routes to an important truth.

2. Why it Works

Prevents dead ends.
The investigation keeps moving.

Preserves Investigation Momentum.
Players stay engaged and in control.

Makes Failure productive.
New leads emerge from setbacks.

3. How to Use it

1. **Define the truth.** Name the key fact the web will reveal.
2. **Place at least 3 clue routes.** Ensure there are multiple paths to the truth.
3. **Vary clue types.** Use different sources and perspectives.
4. **Decide how failure changes access or reliability.** Don't remove the path.

4. Anatomy of a Clue Web

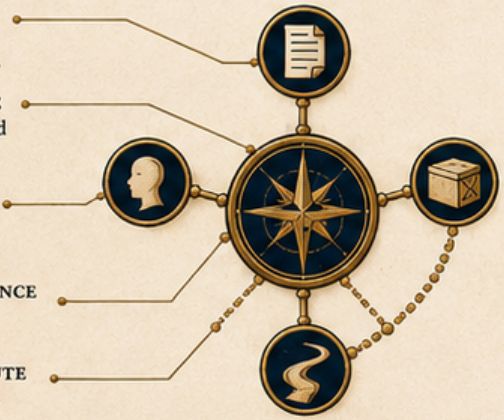
Truth
The core fact the investigation seeks.

Document Clue
Written or recorded information.

Witness Clue
A person with knowledge.

Physical Evidence
Tangible items or conditions.

Alternate Route
A different path to the same truth.



5. Example

Truth:
"Stroomdijk exemptions move captives"



6. Good Practice

Use at least three routes.
More paths mean more choices and fewer dead ends.

Vary clue types.
Documents, people, places, and things reveal the same truth.

Let failure change control or cost rather than deleting the route.
The path remains—conditions shift. Access or reliability may change.

7. Avoid

One-Clue Bottlenecks.
If one clue fails, the story stops.

Making Every Clue Require the Same Method.
Variety invites creativity.

Hiding the only proof behind one Roll.
Don't tie truth to a single swing.

If one route is lost, the truth should still have a path forward.

GM TOOL 5: HARD CHOICES

What they are and how to use them.

1. What it Is

A hard choice pits two desirable outcomes against each other.

2. Why it Works

Creates agency, tension, and meaningful consequence.

3. How to Use it

1. **Choose Two Goods**
   Pick two goods that cannot both be secured easily.
2. **Define Who Benefits**
   Identify who benefits from each outcome.
3. **Define What Changes**
   Define what changes if either outcome is lost.
4. **Let Players Decide**
   Present the choice clearly and let the players decide.

4. Anatomy of a Hard Choice



- **Outcome A**
  One desirable result.
- **Outcome B**
  Another desirable result.
- **Who Benefits**
  Who gains from each outcome.
- **Permanent Change**
  What changes if either is lost.

5. Example

Protect the Witness
versus
Follow the Courier

Protect The Witness
The witness survives and can testify, exposing a powerful foe.

OR

Follow The Courier
The courier delivers critical intelligence that prevents disaster.

Either path brings a real good—losing one changes the world.

6. Good Practice

- **Both sides should matter.**
  Each option should offer a real, desirable good.
- **Neither option should be fake.**
  Don't present a choice where one is clearly the right answer.
- **Consequences should reshape the situation.**
  Let the outcome create new opportunities and challenges.

7. Avoid

- **Obvious Correct Answers.**
  Don't make one option clearly better.
- **False Dilemmas.**
  Don't force a choice when both outcomes can be had.
- **Punishing Players for Choosing at all.**
  The choice should be meaningful, not a trap.

• Offer two real goods. Let the players decide what matters most. •

GM TOOL 6: SCENE SPINE

What it is and how to use it.

1. What It Is

A flexible five-function structure for building a session.

2. Why it Works

Gives shape without railroading and helps pacing.

3. How to Use it

Choose an opening disruption, first meaningful decision, investigation or movement, escalation or reversal, climax and consequence.

4. The Five Functions

1. **Opening Disruption**
   Introduce the pressure. Something changes the status quo.
2. **First Decision**
   Present a meaningful choice with real stakes.
3. **Investigation or Movement**
   Gather clues, meet NPCs, travel, or take action to open the path.
4. **Escalation or Reversal**
   Raise the stakes, complicate matters, or shift the situation.
5. **Climax and Consequence**
   Resolve the core conflict. Show the outcome and what it means.

5. Example



Harbor Investigation Session

1. **Opening Disruption:** A body washes up near the docks.
2. **First Decision:** Who do you question first and where do you start?
3. **Investigation or Movement:** Question sailors, search the docks, visit the warehouse.
4. **Escalation or Reversal:** The suspect flees, or a false lead collapses—new threat emerges.
5. **Climax and Consequence:** You confront the culprit. The harbor reacts to your actions.

6. Good Practice

Scenes can merge or shift order. Flexibility keeps the story alive.

Each scene should lead to a choice or consequence.

Keep one clear throughline: what the characters are up against.

7. Avoid

Scripting Player Actions.
Describe situations, not solutions. Let players drive.

Adding Filler Scenes.
If it doesn't create pressure, choice, or consequence—cut it.

Making the Climax unrelated to the Opening Pressure.
The end should flow from the start.

Use structure to prepare pressure, not to force decisions.

GM TOOL 7: CONSEQUENCE PLANNING

What it is and how to use it.

1. What It Is



Consequence planning is preparing likely outcomes for failure, delay, violence, and ignoring a scene.

It ensures every path forward creates new developments.

2. Why it Works

It helps the GM respond quickly when players' choices lead off course.

It keeps failure from becoming a dead end by turning it into new situations, not "game over."

3. How to Use It

1. **Identify the scene.** Pick a major scene with a clear goal or outcome.
2. **Define Four Outcomes.** For each scene, define failure, delay, violence, and ignored.
3. **Make them Meaningful.** Each consequence should change the situation in a concrete way.
4. **Use and Evolve.** Let consequences play out and adjust future planning as needed.

4. Consequence Grid

Failure	Delay	Violence	Ignored

5. Example

Warehouse Rescue

- **Failure:** Captives are moved but one witness remains.
- **Delay:** Convoy leaves before the party arrives.
- **Violence:** Public case weakens and guards call reinforcements.
- **Ignored:** The Shadowed Tide attempts the rescue alone.

6. Good Practice

- **Change something important.** Consequences should shift control, cost, timing, or exposure.
- **Be specific.** Name who acts, what they do, and what changes.
- **Keep it Moving.** Use consequences to open new paths, not close all of them.
- **Stay Proportional.** Match the consequence to the stakes of the scene.

7. Avoid

- **Blank Failure States.** "They fail." isn't useful—define what happens next.
- **Total Dead Ends.** Avoid consequences that end the story or remove player agency.
- **Punishing Every Outcome Equally.** Not all outcomes should carry the same cost—be fair, not rigid.

Let consequences change the situation, not stop the campaign.

GM TOOL 8: END-OF-SESSION UPDATE

What it is and how to use it.

1. What it Is



A short GM review at the end of each session that updates the living campaign record and sets the stage for the next session.

2. Why it Works

Tracks consequences.
The world reacts, not resets.

Prepares the next session.
Clear threads. Strong starts.

Keeps faction pressure consistent.
Momentum never stalls.

3. How to Use it

1. **Ask what changed.** What materially shifted in the fiction?
2. **Which clocks advanced?** Mark the clock segments that moved.
3. **Who gained or lost trust?** Update NPCs and faction relationships.
4. **What evidence was found or lost?** Add or remove evidence.
5. **What consequence has begun?** Name the consequence that started.
6. **What hook opens next session?** Set up the next-session opener.

4. End-of-Session Checklist

- [ ] What changed?
- [ ] Which clocks advanced?
- [ ] Which NPC or faction state changed?
- [ ] What evidence was found or lost?
- [ ] What consequence has begun?
- [ ] Next session: 3 possible hooks.

5. Example

From Session End to Next-Session Hooks

Session ends.	Clocks advance.	Trust Changes.	Evidence found.	Consequence begins.	Next-session Hooks.
The crew escapes with the ledger.	Inspector's Net advances 2. Debt Collector advances 1.	The Clann trust increases. City Guard trust decreases.	A ledger page reveals a hidden buyer.	A warrant is issued for the Captain's arrest.	Present 3 hooks to open with pressure.

Sample Hooks

- A coded courier seeks only the Captain.
- Smoke rises from the abandoned warehouse.
- The Clann send word: Come if you seek truth.

Good Practice

Keep it brief.
5–10 minutes. Focus on facts that drive the world.

Update Immediately after play.
Details fade. Momentum suffers.

Use it to start the next session under pressure.
Open with stakes, not exposition.

7. Avoid

Waiting until later and forgetting details.
Small facts drive big consequences.

Resetting pressure Between sessions.
The world remembers.

Opening the next session with no Consequence.
Start in media res. Keep it moving.

End with consequences. Begin again with pressure.

GM TOOL 9: PACE GUIDE

What it is and how to use it.

1. What It Is



A pace guide is a rough time structure for a session.

It helps you shape the flow and build to a satisfying climax—without scripting scenes or outcomes.

It's a *compass*, not a *cage*.

2. Why It Works

Keeps momentum.
A clear rhythm prevents stalls and keeps players engaged.

Helps the GM notice drift.
You can course-correct before the session loses focus.

Preserves time for the Climax.
Your big moments land when you save space for them.

3. How to Use It

1. **Estimate Session Length.**
   Agree on a target (3–4 hours, or whatever fits your table).
2. **Divide Time by Phase.**
   Use the pace guide to set targets for each stage.
3. **Watch for Drag.**
   If energy dips or the clock tightens, notice it early.
4. **Compress or Escalate.**
   Cut, summarize, skip ahead, or raise the stakes to regain pace.

4. Sample 3–4 Hour Session

1	2	3	4	5	6
Opening Disruption	**First Decision**	**Investigation / Movement**	**Escalation / Reversal**	**Climax & Consequence**	**Wrap-up & Fallout**
Hook the table. Present the problem and its stakes.	Give players a real choice and set direction.	Explore, gather clues, travel, and deal with obstacles.	Complications mount. Plans shift. Stakes rise.	The main conflict resolves. Choices have weight.	Loose ends, rewards, reactions, and next hooks.
15–20 min	20–30 min	35–45 min	30–45 min	45–60 min	10–15 min

Total: 3–4 Hours

5. Good Practice

Protect the Ending.
Guard time for the climax and its aftermath.

Cut repetition.
Summarize what you've already covered.

Let important scenes breathe.
Give key moments room to land.

6. Avoid

Spending half the session before the first real choice.
Players need agency early.

Rushing the Climax.
Give it time to build and mean something.

Treating the guide as rigid law.
Adapt to your table and what the story needs.

Pace the pressure so the session peaks at the right moment.

GM TOOL 10: LEVERAGE

What it is and how to use it.

1. What it Is



Leverage is what gives a faction, witness, officer, or rival a reason to bargain, yield, threaten, or act.

2. Why it Works

Makes negotiation meaningful.
People change their minds for a reason.

Turns clues into power.
Information becomes influence.

Gives social scenes real stakes.
Choices matter, and so do consequences.

3. How to Use it

1. **Identify** what someone wants.
2. **Learn** what they fear.
3. **Decide** what the players can offer or threaten.
4. **Show** what changes when leverage is used.

4. Anatomy of Leverage

- **Desire** — What they want or hope to gain.
- **Fear** — What they dread or must avoid.
- **Cost** — What it costs them to act or change.
- **Proof** — What confirms the truth or gives you credibility.

5. Example

Governor Deluca

- **Wants:** Order and legitimacy.
- **Fears:** Scandal and exposure.
- **Cost:** Public instability.
- **Proof:** Ledgers, witnesses, and harbor records.

6. Good Practice

Leverage should shift behavior, not mind-control.
It creates pressure, not puppets.

Different factions respond to different pressure.
Know who cares about what.

Spend leverage in the fiction, not only in notes.
Let the world react.

7. Avoid

Treating every NPC like they only want money.
People want safety, respect, love, power, freedom, and more.

Making leverage identical for everyone.
Variety makes the world feel real.

Letting major revelations have no social consequence.
Information should move the world.

Quick Reminders

- ASK: *What do they want most right now?*
- ASK: *What are they most afraid of?*
- ASK: *What would they accept to avoid that fear?*
- SHOW: *What will change if they choose to act?*

Information matters most when it changes what people will do.


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