Make a Town Feel Alive in 20 Minutes of Prep

A quick town prep printable for giving your next settlement motion, pressure, and people in motion.

A living town does not need twenty pages of lore. It needs a problem, pressure, and people who react.

20-MINUTE TOWN PREP CHECKLIST

0-3 MIN

Current Problem

This town is dealing with: _____

People care because: _____

3-8 MIN

Three NPCs

Public Face: _____

Desperate Local: _____

Complicating Force: _____

8-11 MIN

Daily Rhythm

Every day: _____

But today: _____

11-15 MIN

Two Places

Social location: _____

Problem location: _____

15-18 MIN

Three Rumors

True: _____

Partly true: _____

False but believable: _____

18-20 MIN

Town Clock

1. Something happens: _____

2. Bad decision: _____

3. Impossible to ignore: _____

MAKE IT FEEL ALIVE AT THE TABLE

1. Make it visible

Put the problem where players can see, hear, or feel it: a silent bell, closed mill, caged witness, or bridge no one wants to cross.

2. Put it under pressure

Give it a timer, threat, cost, or temptation. Something should change if the party waits too long.

3. Let it change the aftermath

The choice should leave a mark: a saved ally, lost clue, angry official, changed rumor, or grateful witness.

QUICK PREP LINES

The town's current problem is: _____

The person most likely to ask for help is: _____

The thing everyone is avoiding is: _____

If the party ignores it, the town will: _____

Life comes from pressure, not lore.
Give the town a problem, people in motion, one broken routine, and a clock that advances.