



GAMEMASTERING 101

This document is for Game Masters, coordinators, and store owners. You should be familiar with the Core Rulebook and Guide to Pathfinder Society Organized Play.

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The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game rules can be found online as part of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Reference Document at paizo.com/pathfinderRPG/prd

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ROLEPLAYING: BRINGING SCENARIOS TO LIFE

THIS IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME

First and foremost, Pathfinder is about roleplaying and not dice rolls. It's about playing a character and interacting with other players and the world. As a GM, really get into the game and engage your players to get the most out of the experience. Don't be afraid to push yourself and make mistakes; your players will appreciate your efforts to make the world come alive. Most of all, have fun.

THE GM AS AN ACTOR

Remember that you are a performer, and your players are your audience. They will follow your lead, and if you are enthusiastic, they will also be enthusiastic. Here are some tips:

Stand up: This allows freedom of movement, allows you to pay attention to your players, and encourages them to pay attention to you. This works well during combat, too.

Gesture and use body language. Point at players to put them on the spot, making it clear that NPCs are talking to them. Body posture will say a lot about the NPC you are playing, personifying them as much as voice.

Make eye contact. Look at *your players*, not at your papers!

Liven up dialogue: You don't necessarily have to talk in accents, but at least give a description of the accent. Even without accents, you can still slur, hiss, make sound effects, or tailor your vocabulary to bring the character to life. Employ stereotypes and imitate characters from movies or shows as models for interesting speech patterns.

THE GM AS A NARRATOR

The players see the world through you as a GM, so conveying information is a key part of your role. Use description to put an image in the minds of your players. Use details to flesh out the world, and go beyond the box text, NPC stats, and combat rolls. Additionally, encourage your players to describe their actions, and then respond to them. There is a big difference between: "I roll an 18, and I hit for 4 points of damage" and "The goblin giggles maniacally as he stabs the fighter with an 18, dealing 4 points of damage and coating his weapon bright red."

This is a core principle of showing instead of telling. When a narrator tells the audience about an action, it is a simple statement of fact. On the other hand, a narrator who shows an action describes the results of the action, allowing the audience to envision it in greater detail. Telling does not encourage the listeners to use their own imaginations, but showing allows a GM to implant a vivid sense of an event's magnitude and to let the players' minds do part of the work.

THE GM AS A DIRECTOR

In Pathfinder Society Organized Play, the GM has less freedom to go where the players want to go, leading to "railroaded" scenarios. There are several things that you can do when the players wander off the proverbial path.

Out of Character: "Hey folks, that's really beyond the scope of this scenario." Politely ask for your players to get back on track. This is the most straightforward and least time-consuming method, but it breaks verisimilitude.

Improvisation: "Sure, you can do that!" Doing what your players want is encouraged; however, remember to keep an eye on your time, and use the improvisation to lead the players back to the adventure.

Don't Stagnate: However you choose to handle player choice, remember that the worst thing that can happen is the adventure going nowhere, especially with PFS time constraints. You are in charge of the table; do whatever you have to in order to keep the story moving and to prevent your players from growing bored.

READING BOX TEXT

Many players lose focus when a GM reads box text. Here are some tips to make it more engaging:

Be an actor (see above). Show your players the actions; don't just read it in monotone.

Repeat important points. Make sure your players pick up on mission objectives

Engage your players. Have the Venture-Captain address the players in character and react to them. If they aren't paying attention, admonish them. If they seem confused, ask them if they understood.

ADJUDICATING ROLEPLAYING

When players are interacting with NPCs, it is all too easy to fall into dice rolling. Encourage your players to roleplay first, without any dice rolls. Take note of what players say and who says it. Only when they have made a request or reached a critical point in the conversation should you ask for rolls—and *you* should decide what skill was used, not the player. Were the players being diplomatic, deceptive, or threatening? Additionally, instead of allowing players to metagame and all assist the character with the highest skill modifier, ask the player who was leading the conversation to make the check, with the others assisting. Take note of what players say and give circumstance bonuses and penalties for the appropriateness of their conversation. Players may protest, but by using these techniques, you encourage more natural and thoughtful interactions at your table.

DECEIVING YOUR PLAYERS

Like any great magician, the GM must deceive the audience in order to awe them with his magic. Remember that *all* players metagame, and the only way you can minimize the breaking of immersion is with illusion.

Description: Describe actions, monsters, and abilities, instead of stating what they're named in the rules text. Keep your players guessing unless they have relevant skill checks. Remember that NPCs and monsters do *not* have their classes, alignments, or names tattooed on their foreheads.

Starting Combat: Putting down the battle map, asking for Perception checks, or pulling out a *Bestiary* are surefire ways to alert players that a combat is starting. Ask for marching orders at the start of the game. Don't put out the map until after combat starts, or put out a map for every encounter... even if there isn't supposed to be combat.

Rolling Dice: If you only roll dice when you need to, this will alert players when a NPC is lying or something is otherwise up. Get into the habit of rolling dice during NPC conversations, especially whenever there is an opposed check (e.g. Sense Motive) even if the NPC is not opposing the PCs.

Red Herrings: This technique—dropping a distracting yet irrelevant clue—can definitely be overused, so reserve it for occasions where the deception is truly necessary. If you must pass out a note, pass out notes to every player. Pull a player aside, gesture toward the party, and quietly ask him what his favorite cheese is. Alternatively, ask everyone in the party to roll a d20 and look at the dice and players intently.

LORE AND YOU!

While no one expects GMs to be an encyclopedic font of knowledge about Golarion, there are certain broad details that every GM should know. Know enough about the following to have at least a rough idea of what they are.

Pathfinder Society: Purpose (Explore, Report, Cooperate), Goals, Organization (Field Agents, Venture-Captains, the Decemvirate), and Enemies (Aspis Consortium, Red Mantis Assassins, Rebel Shadow Lodge)

PFS Organized Play Campaign: Shadow Lodge (Season 2), Ruby Phoenix Tournament (Season 3), Year of the Risen Rune (Season 4)

Factions: Be able to give a 2-minute rundown of all ten factions.

Golarion: Aroden, Absalom, five major countries. (Hey look, you know them for the factions already!)

Religion: Aroden (yes he's that important), 20 major gods

WHERE TO FIND MORE

More important than knowing everything is knowing where everything *is*.

Inner Sea Primer: Though intended as a player companion, it's the easy, cheap way to learn lore.

Inner Sea World Guide: If you're serious about learning lore, this hardcover is essential.

Pathfinder Society Field Guide: This is part of the Core Assumption, so you should own it anyway! It's a great resource for learning lore about the Society, with a focus on mechanics and rules.

Seekers of Secrets: Similar to the *Field Guide*, this is even more lore-oriented.

Pathfinder Player Companion and Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Each of these 36-page books contains focused information—both rules and lore—about individual regions, races, or aspects of Golarion.

GameMastery Guide: Several sections from this handout are based off of this book. While not necessary for Pathfinder Society Organized Play, it is a great resource for learning to become a better GM.

RULES: ENABLING AWESOMENESS, RESTRICTING ABUSE

This is a game dictated by rules. The *Core Rulebook* is over 500 pages long, and it covers most situations that you will run into during a game in Pathfinder Society. The rules exist to make the game predictable, fair, and balanced; they grant equal footing to both players and GMs so that they have an idea of what to expect during the game. You don't need to know every rule in the book, but you need to be familiar with the main rules as well as how rules generally are structured.

BASE CLASSES

Be familiar with base classes. You don't need to know every ability that a class gains, but you should be aware of how the class's main abilities function. Know how a paladin's Smite Evil, a cleric's Channel Energy, a druid's Animal Companion, and a bard's Bardic Performance work. This will give you the familiarity to be able to adjudicate these abilities when they come into play, as well as letting you play your own NPCs more intelligently.

COMBAT

For better or worse, combat is the most rules-heavy portion of a PFS game. This is where most of the time in a scenario will be spent, and where you make or break a player's love of PFS. Knowing the rules well can let you have fast paced, exciting combats, while still giving the players ample time for roleplaying and exploration.

WHAT RULES DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Not surprisingly, the Combat chapter in the *Core Rulebook* is the most important resource for learning the combat rules. While there exist a few corner cases and rarely used guidelines, you'll use most of the rules over the course of a scenario. After GMing a few times, you'll end up memorizing most of the rules, but it is important to make the initial investment of reading through the whole chapter at least once. Some of the most important rules to know include surprise rounds, difficult terrain, attacks of opportunity, and combat maneuvers.

There are only a few rules from other chapters you need to know for combat. You'll want to read the most common feats, spells, skills, spellcasting tactics, and additional rules so as to better know how they work.

Skills: Acrobatics, Diplomacy, Knowledge skills, Stealth, Use Magic Device

Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Diehard, Improved Disarm, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Mounted Combat, Point-Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Spring Attack, Step Up, Vital Strike

Spells: *cure spells, haste, dispel magic, protection from evil*

Spellcasting: casting defensively, how spell ranges and areas work, different casting times

Additional Rules: ability damage, disease, invisibility, poison (check the Paizo FAQ!)

Conditions: fatigued, helpless, stunned—condition cards work amazingly well

HOW CAN YOU MAKE COMBAT FASTER?

Presented are a few tips that you can use to make combat go quickly, both for your own turns as well as for players turns.

Stand up! It's amazing how much standing up can speed up combat, but it does make people go faster. You can ask for everyone to stand up as well—just be considerate of your player audience.

Track initiative. Paizo's magnetic initiative board works exceptionally well. Postcards or note cards work as substitutes so long as players (not just you as the GM) know when their turns are coming up.

Read the adventure beforehand. Make sure to know the tactics, classes, and terrain rules of the adventure before you start playing. Looking up the environmental rules during gameplay can eat up a lot of time.

Don't let a player think too long. A player's turn should rarely be longer than the GM's. If a player doesn't know what his character's going to do, inform him that his character is delaying; when he knows what he wants to do, he can jump back into the initiative.

Don't allow rounds by committee. Let a player play her own character. She will appreciate the game more, and so will everyone else. If she makes mistakes, let it play out as a learning experience and fodder for interesting roleplaying.

Roll all your dice at once. When rolling your attack dice, roll the damage at the same time. If you have multiple sets of dice, you can even roll all of the natural attacks or multiple creatures' attacks at once. This can shave minutes off of each turn. Encourage your players to do the same; it gives more time for roleplaying and interaction with the environment.

Enforce Rule Zero. If you aren't positive of a rule, or if there is an argument with a player, you are right. Generally, don't look up the rule yourself, but be willing to look at a page that a player hands you. In general, a single ruling won't change the outcome of a battle, but if you think you're right, stick to your guns.

WHEN DO YOU IGNORE THE RULES?

Use the *Core Rulebook* and supplemental texts when at all possible to create rulings. Because PFS aims to offer a predictable, fair, and balanced experience at all tables internationally, sticking to the texts is critical to ensuring an even play experience for all players. See the Advanced Topics handout for more information on adapting to unexpected character actions.

WHEN DO YOU FUDGE ROLLS?

Fudging dice rolls should never be commonplace, but there is a time and place for adjusting tactics: helping a low level and/or inexperienced table group that has fallen on a streak of bad luck. One of the fastest ways to lose a new player is to kill off his character, so as a GM you have some leeway to help these fresh faces succeed, have fun, and have a reason to come back to play again.

SEASON 0'S AND DIFFICULTY

Season 0's often use Pathfinder Beta rules. Some monsters may have different challenge ratings between the two

versions. If a monster's CR would not change when converted from D&D 3.5/Pathfinder Beta rules to those of Pathfinder RPG, use the updated Pathfinder RPG creature. If the monsters have different CR's, use either the printed stat block or an equivalent monster of the intended CR. For example, if a Season 0 scenario uses a CR 5 dire crocodile, but the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* dire crocodile is a CR 9 creature, use the CR 5 dire crocodile stats.

KILLING PCs

PC death should be fairly rare. A GM's job is to create a fun time for the players, so don't adopt a GM vs. player mentality. That said, PC deaths do happen for any number of reasons. A GM should try to avoid PC deaths with less-experienced players and lower tiers. PC death is more acceptable at the higher tiers and with more experienced players.

HOW TO MAKE RULINGS

In order to keep play moving during a scenario, it is often necessary for a GM to make rulings on the spot, especially when something is not covered by the rules or when no one is sure how a particular rule works. Remember that an event coordinator or a fellow GM can be a great resource when trying to decide how a rule works. If you make a ruling for an unclear situation, stick with it for the rest of the scenario but make sure that your players know that it applies just for this game session.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The list of additional Paizo products allowed outside of the *Core Rulebook* and *Pathfinder Society Field Guide* can be found at the link: <http://paizo.com/pathfinderSociety/resources>. Check it every few months. It can be helpful to keep a semi-recent copy of the page printed out. Remember that it is up to the player to prove that her resource is valid. If she doesn't bring the copy of the additional resources page as well as a copy of the Paizo material, then you have every right to refuse to allow that feat, spell, class, etc. This comes into play especially with some of the more complicated classes such as summoner, inquisitor, ninja, etc.

RUNNING THE GAME: THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE ART

HOW TO PREPARE

- **Read the Scenario.** Twice.
- **Research your villains,** print out *Bestiary* entries, look up spells, and read over tactics.
- **Spot problem areas** like environmental effects, Will saves, puzzles, etc.

WHAT TO BRING

- **The Scenario:** Include faction missions, handouts, chronicle sheets, and a reporting sheet.
- **Core Assumption:** *Core Rulebook*, *Bestiary*, *Field Guide*, and the *Guide to Pathfinder Society Organized Play*
- **Mapping Tools:** Battle mats, maps (pre-drawn if possible), markers, miniatures, and tokens
- **Equipment for New Players:** Pregenerated characters, PFS numbers, extra dice, extra pencils

STARTING THE GAME

- **Be a good host.** Arrive early, introduce yourself, and facilitate character/player introductions.
- **Fill out the Reporting Sheet.**
- **Determine Average Party Level** and subtier.

ENDING THE GAME

- **End with enough time** to handle business.
- **Resolve faction missions.**
- **Fill out chronicles and the reporting sheet.**

THIS IS A SOCIAL GAME

Pathfinder brings together people in a unique way, to collaborate, overcome obstacles, and have a shared experience. But as with any social gathering, challenges will always arise. As a GM, you are a referee, mediator, organizer, and dictator all rolled into one. Always keep in mind the goal of the game: bring people together to have fun. When considering what

actions to take as a GM, do what is best for your players, your game, and Pathfinder Society as a whole.

YOU ARE IN CHARGE

One of the most important things for a GM to remember is that you are the one in charge of your table, and you must assert your authority appropriately. This does not mean that you can gleefully crush the life and joy out of your players without abandon. It does mean that you are the final arbiter of rules and social situations (within the framework of PFS). Do not allow players to bully you, whether it is over a rules dispute, with power gaming, or with inappropriate behavior. If needed, simply state Rule 0: The GM is always right.

YOU ARE THE FACE OF PFS

With all of that in mind, remember that GMs are the number one representative of Paizo, Pathfinder Society, and their regional lodges. Use your judgement, and be diplomatic. No one is right all of the time, and no one expects you to be. Handling a situation well is more important than being right.

ORGANIZING A GAME

As an event coordinator, there are many things you must take into account when setting up games. First, know your player base. If you are running PFS home games, then you don't need to worry so much about setting schedules, as you can run at a pace that is comfortable and easy for your home players. At stores, your mindset needs to be different and take several factors into account: setting dates that the majority of players can attend, marketing your game days, making sure to not overlap game days or scenarios with other stores in your area, and ensuring that you have enough GMs for all the slots. Remember that neighboring Venture Officers can provide advice and support.

MANAGING THE TABLE

It's easy to become biased as a GM, and everyone does it to some degree. Step back to try and split your attention evenly between all of the players instead of focusing on just the most fun, pleasant, enthusiastic, loud, power gaming, or annoying players. Make sure that everyone has a chance to shine and participate. Tone down overbearing players and encourage the quiet ones. Do your best to draw everyone in so that everyone can have fun.

DEALING WITH PROBLEM PLAYERS

When dealing with groups of varied players, coming up against players who don't mesh with your GMing style is inevitable. Most of the time, it's best to grin and bear it. However, there will be times when that doesn't work.

Talk to the player. Ask the player politely to stop his inappropriate behavior. It might be best to simply ask at the table, or to pull the player aside privately—just use your best judgement. The vast majority of the time, this is enough to curb the player and get on with the game.

Warn the player. Pull the player aside and warn him that if he continues this behavior, it will result in you asking him to leave. Give him reasons why his behavior is unacceptable. It is highly recommended that you have this conversation away from the table and in private, or the player will get very defensive.

Kick the player. If at this point the player is still causing problems, then it is time to ask him to leave. Fill out his chronicle sheet, awarding him for whatever gold he's earned or faction missions that he has completed. If he completed 3 encounters, he gets an experience point. Remember, it is better that you kick one player than for your entire table to have a miserable game.

DEALING WITH NEW PLAYERS

Everyone was new at one point. New players are the lifeblood of PFS, and our goal is always to give them a good experience and have them come back to the game. However, they frequently need extra attention, explanation, and patience. Don't overwhelm them from the start. Hand them pregens or help them make characters, and only tell them the highlights. Let them learn the details as the game unfolds, pointing out what to roll if needed. Better yet, have a veteran player help them through the game. Make sure they get PFS numbers, and quickly explain the factions to them and help them pick theirs.

DETERMINING APL AND PLAYING UP

Average Party Level, or APL, is one of the most important things in determining how you run scenarios. This is not something you want to get wrong, because being wrong will easily lead to a TPK.

Some tables will want to play in the higher sub-tier, especially if their APL falls between two sub-tiers. Kindly remind your players that the challenges for playing up may be too overwhelming for them, regardless of their character levels. If they want to play up, then have at it, but make sure each player is okay with the decision. If any player wants to play down, you should respect those wishes even if the others are pushing otherwise.

FACTIONS AND FACTION MISSIONS

Factions are one of the things that makes PFS unique, but they can also be a source for a lot of problems, both in character and out of character. Players often single-mindedly pursue faction missions, there can be misunderstandings with them, and players can get very upset if they don't achieve them. Remember that a player is supposed to average only 1.5 Prestige Points per scenario, and that players are not entitled to their prestige. Adjudicate the faction missions according to the scenario requirements. Try not to explicitly give hints to players about their faction missions, but do remind them to read their faction missions, clarify them if a player is confused by poor wording, and ask "is there anything else anyone would like to do?"

CORRECT TERMINOLOGY

Please use the correct terms when referring to the game. We play **Pathfinder**, not D&D. You are a **Game Master**, not a Dungeon Master. We play **scenarios**, not mods, unless you are playing a long adventure that is a **module**.

ADVANCED TOPICS: WHEN THE UNEXPECTED STRIKES

RUNNING SCENARIOS COLD

You won't always have several days to prepare a scenario. Perhaps you're running a scenario that was just released, or maybe eager players have cornered you and asked you to run a particular adventure that you've never seen. When the clock is ticking, there are a few steps you can take to familiarize yourself with an unknown scenario to give your players a great experience.

SECURE TIME-SAVING EQUIPMENT

A bit of variety in writing utensils can go a long way when deciphering a scenario's secrets. Have a few colorful pens or highlighters for marking critical passages, and keep some sticky notes on hand for bookmarking the scenario and the *Bestiary*. Having Flip-Mats and map packs with you also saves a considerable amount of time compared to drawing out your own maps.

AVOID COMPLEX ROLE-PLAYING/PUZZLE SCENARIOS; PICK SIMPLE ADVENTURES WITH SIMPLE MAPS

Dungeon crawls tend to be easier to run than scenarios with complicated social encounters. If, while casually flipping through the scenario, you see a very long description with no creature statistics, you may have to deal with a complex roleplaying or puzzle encounter. Also, higher-tier scenarios tend to require more preparation than lower-tier scenarios. Likewise, Season 0's scenarios tend to be a bit shorter—and thus easier to prepare—than those of later seasons. Below is a partial list of some of the more complicated adventures you should avoid running cold, as well as a few straightforward scenarios that are fairly easy to pick up and play.

COMPLICATED

2-03 *The Rebel's Ransom*
2-11 *The Penumbra Accords*
2-16 *The Flesh Collector*
2-24 *Shadow's Last Stand—Part II: Web of Corruption*
3-10 *The Immortal Conundrum*
Any module

STRAIGHTFORWARD

Any Tier 1-5 or 1-7 scenario from Season 0
1-29 *The Devil We Know—Part I: Shipyard Rats*
1-30 *The Devil We Know—Part II: Cassimir's Locker*
3-04 *The Kortos Envoy*
First Steps—Parts I, II, and III

READ SUMMARY SECTION

If you don't have time to read through the entire scenario, you can get an idea of how the scenario is intended to progress by reading the Summary section provided at the beginning of the adventure. Remember, the scenario's maps, boxed text, tactics, and room descriptions can be read in greater detail while running the game.

SKIM THE STAT BLOCKS

A Pathfinder stat block contains a wealth of information, but a GM can get a sense of how an enemy should behave without reading the whole thing in detail—much less memorizing it—by checking eight aspects:

Attack Line	Any particularly high attack or damage bonuses?
Feats	Power Attack, Combat Expertise, Deadly Aim, or combat maneuver feats?
Special Attacks	Does any special attack not require a standard action?
Special Defenses	Resistances, damage reduction, and spell resistance?
Spell-Like Abilities	Any high-level spell-like abilities?
Spells	Any spells with complicated effects that you should research?
Starting Position	Is the enemy in the open, or is it hidden, flying, swimming, or ethereal?
Tactics	What a boon! It's like the summary section for a creature.

HIGHLIGHT FACTION MISSIONS

Even though each act contains its own notes about faction missions, the myriad clues and cues are easy to miss when you're running the scenario for the first time. Mark the faction mission details either by highlighting a key phrase or by writing the faction's name in the margin. Some find it helpful to make a quick written note about whose mission each is and what the type of mission is, e.g. Osirion: object, Andoran: message (secret), or Shadow Lodge: body. Just make sure to read the faction missions section for each section before finishing an act so that the PCs do not lose the opportunity to earn their Prestige Points.

ASK ANOTHER GM FOR HELP

One of the most valuable resources when running a scenario cold is another GM who has run the scenario. The GM can give you ideas on how to run NPCs, warn you about trouble spots, point out things you should watch for, alert you to creature abilities, and advise you about the encounters to which you should pay the most attention.

ASSESS YOUR PLAYERS AND MAKE A DECISION

A GM must decide how candid to be about his or her level of preparation. Players tend to be happy that someone has stepped up to GM a game, and (using the above advice) they might not be able to tell that you picked up the scenario 15 minutes ago. Still, there are those who may see your lack of preparation in a negative light (no matter the circumstances). As your players settle in and introduce themselves, make a decision about whether or not you will mention your minimal preparation. This decision may be different for different GMs and different tables.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BREAKS

Most players are happy to have an official break in which to grab snacks, stretch their legs, or use the bathroom. Use this time to read through the next Act in greater detail or to ask a fellow GM for clarification on an upcoming encounter.

KEEP THINGS MOVING AND HAVE FUN

At the end of the scenario, the most important measure of success is whether the participants had fun. Stay honest to the scenario as much as possible, but keep the game fair, lively, and amusing. Everything else will fall into place.

TIPS FOR IMPROVISATION

Sometimes your players head down a completely random path or approach an unnamed NPC for information. By remembering a few pointers, you can present plausible, organic descriptions and social encounters while still keeping your players pointed in the right direction.

SAY “YES, AND...”

When you allow a player to pursue a creative solution, you reward the player’s ingenuity and promote similar creativity in other players. By adding your own insights, interpretation, or inspiration, you can help to direct that creative solution so that it remains within the bounds of the scenario and the rules.

DON’T HOG THE SPOTLIGHT

No matter how interesting a particular NPC might be, the GM should direct roleplaying, not dominate it.

KEEP THINGS MOVING

Allow players the opportunity to interact with and respond to people and obstacles alike. Remember that you still need to get through the rest of the scenario, and don’t spend too long on a diversion.

THE LESS YOU MAKE UP, THE MORE BELIEVABLE IT IS

Make use of the vast lore of Golarion as a starting point for adding details or NPCs to a region. Players with a solid grasp of Golarion’s geography will appreciate your informed descriptions, and newer players often enjoy learning about the campaign setting by “seeing” new lands “in person.” Reading about the adventure’s destination before running the game can help immensely with creating plausible characters, sites, and motives.