Pathfinder Society

GAMEMASTERING 201

This document is for Game Masters, coordinators, and store owners and builds on material found in Gamemastering 101. 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/prd.**

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ADVANCED ROLEPLAYING

In Pathfinder—most roleplaying games, really—the players portray characters of their own design with personalities, backstories, quirks, and a host of rules mechanics to back it all up. Many players can jump right into character, keeping each other amused with their in-game banter and antics. Others require a helpful nudge in the right direction to see how things are done. Both types of player rely on the GM to paint a picture of the world, illustrate the results of their actions, and present non-player characters that are engaging and memorable. How does one do this? First, let's take a quick look at what you probably already know.

A QUICK RECAP FROM ROLEPLAYING IN GM 101

- **Stand up:** This gives you full range of movement, command of the table, and keeps you focused.

- **Use gestures:** Communicate in more than just words.

- **Keep eye contact:** We connect through eye contact; if you're not looking at your players, then your players probably aren't looking at you.

- **Liven up dialogue:** A GM reading text in a monotone is tough on a player's ears and attention spans.

All of these are important starting assumptions, and in Advanced Roleplaying the aim is to further explore and expand on these and other ideas.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

In creative writing there are three commonly recognized ways to learn about a character:

- What the character does
- What the character says
- What others say about the character

All of these are powerful tools in introducing an NPC to the players and convincing those same players to actually care about the NPC.

Realizing the right amount of accent, inflection, and personality in one's voice is a tricky balance and varies slightly for each group. Like so many aspects of GMing, each group is different, bringing with it different needs and expectations. What might work for one group could be distasteful to another. Put some ranks into Sense Motive, and be prepared to adjust on the fly when GMing for strangers.

DISTINGUISH, BUT DON'T DISTRACT

Each of these techniques is a double-edged sword; you can use it to great effect with some practice, but if you apply it too carelessly, the technique is apt to harm the table's experience more than help it. If you make a mistake, apologize and move on to get the game back to being fun.

ACCENT

When assuming an accent, far more often than not, less is more. A subtle shift in accent helps to distinguish a new NPC, reinforce that the PCs are in a new area, or just provide a change of pace. People notice subtle changes like these. Avoid using silly accents such as always adopting a forced falsetto voice for female characters or using a preposterously caricatured French accent; instead of paying attention to what you are saying, players will have trouble looking past how ridiculous you sound. If the players' groans seem to be anything but good-natured, it might be time to back off the present accent and move on.

ATTITUDE

Humans are usually responsive to others' emotions, and a GM can use this to her advantage. Try calmly describing the appearance of a room and the people inside, and then jump into an excited or angry NPC's dialogue. In the short term this establishes something for the players to remember: the NPC's attitude. In the long run it also allows the GM to create engaging contrasts later in the campaign; when the same excitable character acts timidly, the players take note (to the adventure's benefit).

Exercise some restraint when first experimenting with NPC attitude. Not everyone at the table might be completely clear as to when the GM is acting a certain way and when it is instead the NPC's behavior.

EXPRESSION

So much of the information conveyed in roleplaying games is done through speech, maps, and random number generation that it's easy to forget how much we say with our bodies. Start with the face. An NPC might have a perfectly normal voice and attitude, but perhaps he always smiles in a certain way or silently assesses the PCs' words with a raised eyebrow. Because the players and GM are fairly close to one another, changes in expression don't have to be exaggerated. Even so, it's quite gratifying to make a scary face while half-describing, half-pantomiming the horrific beast that just emerged to eat the adventurers.

POSTURE

This came up in GM 101. Stand up so that you can use your body convey an NPC's actions and appearance. Does your NPC slouch, hunch over, stretch regularly, or move around in a peculiar way? You can tell the players that that's the case, but it's much more effective to show them. Don't force the issue; otherwise you'll end up with a campaign setting full of hunchbacks.

GESTURES

With some variation between cultures, there are gestures to express a wide range of attitudes and feelings. Again, show and don't just tell the players how your NPCs react. A single gesture may carry much more impact than a simple sentence. Always having a hand or arm in the same position (perhaps the NPC always holds a wine glass) can also be enough to distinguish a character.

Be careful with your gestures. Some mean completely different—and possibly rude—things to players of different backgrounds and nationalities.

IDIOSYNCRASIES

Most of the above is about visual and audible behavior, but the strongest hook for an NPC is often a single idiosyncrasy—a quirk, habit, or shtick. Does the character make a point of complimenting the PCs equipment? Does she always compare the present predicament to an eccentric family member? Does he begin or end every other sentence with the same phrase (e.g. "wouldn't you agree," "So the thing is," or even interjecting "um" between every clause)?

ANALOGIES

When in doubt, change things up with a bit of creative telling to augment the showing. A few choice adjectives can do wonders, and every Bestiary entry begins with a one- or two-sentence description of what a creature looks like. One of the most successful techniques is the choice analogy, metaphor, or simile. The now-cliché "his head explodes like a ripe melon" is tried and true, but exercise your creativity by coming up with something truly unique.

"The zombie's intestines writhe like a shovelful of indignant worms unearthed in a backyard garden." Ew.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

If you have a good sense of who your NPCs are, you can even switch between several in the same encounter to the players' delight. The players can learn about an NPC through other NPCs, and seeing how two NPCs interact with one another can show a lot about the two characters very quickly. Be careful about how often you use this tactic and how much you might dominate the dialogue; the players should have a chance to participate, too! Roleplaying games should not be spectator sports.

Remember: Consistency for an NPC is key. Make the character's typical quirks short, sweet, and memorable so that you can reinforce it later or break from the character's normal behavior to signal that something's the matter.

WHEN PLAYERS WON'T LEAD

No matter how charismatic their characters are, sometimes the players just don't want to take the lead in roleplaying and dialogue. This often leads to an overreliance on dice-rolling to resolve social situations. For some groups that's just fine, but for GM 201 we'll assume that it's suboptimal.

It may be that the players don't know how to say something as well as their characters would. If that's the case, try to figure out what a player's intentions are. Just like in combat, where a new player might struggle to come up with a solid strategy, the player may be having a problem coming up with a social strategy. Try to draw the person out of his shell by having an NPC ask follow-up questions, but be forgiving; with some frequency the PC is more eloquent than the player.

Not everyone has patience for roleplaying. Know when to back off the issue and move on; pushing the players to do things that are not at least somewhat fun for them is a sure way to bring a scenario to a grinding halt. Here's where a bit of flexibility pays off. Groups with little patience for noncombat might approach social situations with Intimidate. Let them. Don't force PC to be polite unless the adventure requires they act with respect. Also let the NPC(s) react intelligently. Fireball can't kill every creature, and Intimidate can't solve every problem.

ADVANCED TACTICS

The Pathfinder system includes hundreds of pages of rules, creatures, and character options, making it virtually impossible to predict every combination you might see as a GM. Compound this with the many distinct player personalities you are likely to meet, and anything could happen. That's why the game needs a GM; there's plenty of room for creativity, interpretation, and spontaneity in every game.

Advanced Tactics deals primarily with balancing the extremes of GMing, employing subtlety, and managing high-level games.

THE BALANCING ACT

Rules are both a blessing and a curse. They provide structure for the game, allowing players to predict a path and assess the likelihood of accomplishing a task. They provide you with a framework for controlling the action and adjudicating success or failure. On the other hand, rules dictate how a character, ability, or feature behaves in exact terms, leaving little room for interpretation. Sometimes a rule is left intentionally vague or open-ended to allow each group to decide for itself how to interpret the rule.

This probably would not be so big of a deal were it not for myriad characters' builds depending on a particular interpretation of a rule being correct. Arguments about Rules as Written and Rules as Intended are the cause of many verbal scuffles at the table, and it's important to know how to balance them to have a fun time.

Rules as Written (RAW): RAW at its extreme is the practice of determining how a rule behaves based only on what its rules text says, often involving grammatical dissection and other close analysis. A supporter of RAW has the logical high-ground because no matter what was intended originally, the final text is ultimately what is important. On the other hand, RAW can come across as rigid, expressing "if it isn't explicitly stated, it isn't allowed."

Rules as Intended (RAI): RAI endeavors to understand what a rule intended to accomplish, even if its rules text might inadvertently make the intended effect difficult. Sometimes this interpretation is based off of an ability's flavor text, which might imply an effect not supported by the rules text. RAI tends to be more flexible in allowing more and prohibiting less.

Players sometimes lump RAI together with the Rule of Cool philosophy.

What is right?: When running a home game, a balance of the two philosophies is usually right. Players and the GM should be comfortable discussing their interpretations and coming to a compromise.

In an organized play setting, it's important to stick closer to RAW. Those players who use an option based around a RAI interpretation may find table variation when different GMs rule differently on whether a particular ability works in the player's favor. Be cautious about embracing a 100% RAW perspective, especially when adjudicating in-game effects that do not rely on character build. The game does not have a rule for everything, and on occasion it's more important to create a quick ruling that everyone will enjoy in the short-term. Just don't set up false expectations about how the game works with a one-time ruling.

Whatever your stance, remember that it's not a crime to forget a rule or be wrong. A lack of perfect rules knowledge or system master is not synonymous with cheating. Be civil, discuss a point quickly, and shift the focus back to the fun adventure.

TABLE MANAGEMENT

Everyone's different, and not everyone gets along. These are two of the earliest lessons that a GM learns. The following are common player types that can cause problems at the table— they are not always a problem and require the GM's judgment. For all of these, remember that each player is a person and deserves to be treated as a person.

Chronic power-gamers: This player always plays the most powerful character type on the market. In turn he might dominate encounters, making others feel irrelevant. A variant of this type is the Critic, who tries to push people to match his level of system mastery, which not everyone might appreciate.

The chronic power-gamer wants to win and often seeks recognition for his excellent rules knowledge. Sometimes it works just to take this player aside and request that he allow others a round or two to shine before he trashes the encounters. Curiously enough, this player is often one of the best GMs. Recruit him to help you run events.

Socially disruptive players: There's an unspoken social contract shared by players who sit down together. The socially disruptive player either inadvertently or purposefully breaks that contract through loud complaining, rude or domineering behavior, or even unwelcome physical contact. Assess whether the player is doing this on purpose or not. If the behavior is on purpose, take the player aside and establish what you expect. If the behavior continues, repeat yourself and state what will happen if the player does not correct his actions. If it continues more, eject the player from your game. It is not worth making others uncomfortable just to accommodate a jerk.

Accidental misbehavior is harder to correct, especially if it stems from a mental disability. Ideally, speak with a friend or family member of the player and ask for advice about how to handle the problem. This is a delicate issue, so be polite and willing to make accommodations to help the player both feel welcome but also respect the rules of the community.

Dominating/Submissive Couples: When a player brings his or her spouse to a game, sometimes the more established player dominates the actions and character choices of the other. In more extreme cases, the second character might be built primarily to further augment the first, leading to an "I play two characters, and my partner watches" phenomenon. More often than not, this stymies the growth of the less experienced member as a roleplayer.

As a GM, make a point to ask the less experienced player what (s)he wants to do. Politely request that the more experienced player allow the other to make decisions. Although most couples prefer to play together, occasionally they might be willing to split up for a game. Use this as an opportunity to build the less experienced player's confidence and system mastery.

Taking big steps to correct a perceived problem in a couple's table behavior is risky business. Be polite and know when to back off the issue. So long as it's not causing the other players consternation, it's not a problem that begs correction.

Young players: Players under the age of 15 are among the most enthusiastic roleplayers, and there is little reason to exclude them from a table. That said, a younger participant might also be disruptive on purpose or on accident. Use the guidelines for socially disruptive players above, but remember that the player's perspective is not necessarily going to be the same as yours.

At least at the table, promoting and rewarding good habits is often more effective than punishing bad habits. Show children how much more fun they can have when they respect the community's rules than when they break them.

People who can't stand children: Not everyone enjoys gaming with children, and that's fine. Ideally your event is large enough that you can seat this type of player away from children. This only becomes a problem if someone acts inappropriately around the child, including but not limited to swearing and bullying.

"Low-hygiene" individuals: A stereotype of gamers is that they have poor hygiene, and sometimes a player embraces this status rather than fighting it. Assess whether the appearance or smell of a player causes problems for the other players. If it does, consider whether there is an easy and subtle fix, such as sharing mint gum with everyone at the table. If there's a serious and continually unresolved issue (body odor that wilts flowers or breath that can stun a insect in flight), take the person aside and politely describe the problem. Usually the best time to do this is after a game; that way the player has still had fun and can actually do something about the issue without having to worry about missing out on the game.

THE ART OF CONSPIRACY

It's hard to run certain tropes—mystery, suspense, investigation—when everyone can hear the dice rolling and the GM asks everyone to make a Sense Motive check. A GM is also hard-pressed to keep a fun game moving along if the dice are against the players. Here are some techniques for pulling the wool over your players' eyes for everyone's enjoyment.

Fudging Dice: Fudging dice refers to a GM's altering, disregarding, or inflating die rolls for her own purposes. When the players know that the GM is fudging, they have little reason to believe that they have any control over the game; the GM is just deciding the results according to her own whims. It's not a big leap to seeing the act as antagonistic, with the GM fudging in order to "win."

That said, there are many reasons why a GM might want to fudge dice—reasons that are not to the players detriment, but rather to increase the enjoyment of the game. The most common example is to prevent player death/dismemberment/incapacity, especially for first-time players. Another common example is to increase the drama of story moments. Keep in mind that fudging for dramatic purposes is tricky, especially when what the GM thinks is the most fun is not necessarily the most fun for the players. Fudging is just one tool in a GM's arsenal, and like any other power, should be used sparingly and judiciously.

Regardless of if you choose to fudge or not, there are plenty of completely legal ways to alter the results of a roll to get a desired result. Read your NPC or Monster stat block carefully, checking especially for feats and special abilities. A few great tactical choices that you can make to secretly help out the players include fighting defensively, forgetting to flank, not casting defensively, using Power Attack (the penalty might reduce the attack's chance of hitting from "unlikely" to "nigh-impossible"), and Combat Expertise.

Elicit skill checks without raising suspicions: Certain rolls always set players on edge: Knowledge checks, Sense Motive checks, and Will saves. Just asking for any one of these can

ruin an encounter by inviting metagaming, particularly if the players can see their low results.

Try asking for these rolls beforehand, ideally at the beginning of the scenario. If you anticipate needing plenty of these rolls, pass around a chart that requests 3–5 results each for Perception, Sense Motive and saves. Usually the players won't remember what they rolled earlier. If you suspect they might, roll a die to determine which of their pre-rolled values you use. Cross off these values as you use them. You can also ask to see character sheets beforehand and write down relevant modifiers so that you can roll them as appropriate. This works especially well for a rogue with the trap spotter rogue talent.

Hiding your own dice rolls in this way is a great way to manage player suspicions, but the best method is to exhibit casual nonchalance; if players don't spot you smiling evilly or intently staring at a certain stretch of dungeon, they are less likely to put up defenses. Just to keep them on their toes, consider adding in a few red herrings, such as asking for a Fortitude save, nodding sagely at the result while making a note of it, and then never addressing the consequences. Used sparingly, this helps to throw off metagamers who would otherwise watch for cues from your behavior.

Thwart Metagamers: It can be very disappointing as a GM if you've been building to a climactic encounter, only to be deflated by players who already know all there is to know. Or, players save their resources as "this is only Act 3!". Traps, storyline, and more can all be disrupted by the use of player knowledge. How can you deal with this, or better yet, take advantage?

Like above, being an unreliable narrator is one way to turn metagamers' skills against them. Describe monsters in broad terms ("It's sort of a skeleton!") or describe them in ways that are slightly different than their Bestiary entries. A creature can have different coloration, accouterments, or other physical attributes. Insert yet more red herrings...if you have a crowd of identical skeletons, give the one in the back a flimsy crown and have it wave its arms around.

Secondly, truly enforce the identification rules. Remember that common creatures like goblins and skeletons start at DC 5, so it is in fact entirely reasonable that most adventurers know something about them; however, most creatures start at DC 10 plus the creature's CR, and rare ones start at DC 15. Players may protest that their characters have encountered that type of creature before, but in return you can tell that that fighting a creature once is not the same as spending hours learning about it.

Handling extremely creative solutions: Always be prepared to roll with the punches. Your job as a GM is to give your players the best experience possible, and there's always the chance that the players will attempt a completely unforeseen solution. They should be rewarded for their creativity, not punished.

Be prepared to improvise. If you need more time, give the players a small break and consult the most relevant rules. Most of the time, you can simply accept their solution (if it seems reasonable). Don't give victory to them for free; make them work for it via roleplaying or skill checks. If the players were supposed to pass through a gate by convincing the guards to let them through but instead choose to catapult themselves over the wall, use the time that would have been taken up by the social interaction to ask for Knowledge and Craft checks to help you adjudicate the final result. In this case, the creative solution doesn't take anything away from the game.

Other times, players can attempt to use their cleverness to utterly thwart an adventure. Just as you should be prepared to reward their creativity, be also prepared to hand down the consequences. If the players bypass two encounters, then they might lose all of the loot from those encounters. Worse yet, when they engage the mastermind, she might be able to call in all of the encounters at once. Use your creatures and NPCs to react naturally to the situation.

HIGH-TIER GMING

Once characters reach level 7 or so, the nature of the game begins to change in subtle ways. Spells that definitively end encounters become more common, and these are not only combat spells. Teleportation and divination magic allow the PCs to potentially bypass entire encounters. Non-spellcasters gain abilities that catapult their combat effectiveness, Armor class, skill bonuses, and more to impossible values. What's more, the stronger the PCs become, the less they have to kowtow to NPCs in the setting; many GMs have horror stories of the PCs rampaging around the world after realizing they were each powerful enough to take on a small nation.

On top of that, your creatures become increasingly powerful and complex. This, at least, you can prepare for. Look up creatures' spells ahead of time, and consider writing out the most important information on notecards. When a creature has five or more abilities scattered throughout its Special Abilities, Special Attacks, Special Qualities, and Special Defenses, it might help to write out a one-sentence summary of each on a notecard, allowing for easy perusal when the clock is ticking.

Players' turns often become very long when rolling handfuls of dice and/or having to choose one spell to cast out of five dozen. If combat turns are dragging on and on, don't hesitate to institute a time limit for a player to complete a turn. You might even ask for a quick estimate of the damage a character might deal with her attacks, estimate that the target will still be alive, and move onto the next player's turn while the first calculates the exact damage. Players are often as interested as you are in speeding up the action, so whatever you suggest will be received well.

BUILDING A ROLEPLAYING COMMUNITY

The "traditional" community for roleplaying games is typically small, often not stretching beyond a single gaming table. RPG enthusiasts might chat, GMs swap notes, and players occasionally jump between different game groups, but ultimately there's little reinforcement of a larger local identity. In a home game, players are informally bound by an easy-going social contract to regroup regularly to continue one storyline. Everyone knows whom to expect at the next session, and dropouts are usually infrequent. Recruitment might be piecemeal and even clique-ish, and a group can readily close its door to curious outsiders. Are these people doing anything wrong? Absolutely not. Ultimately it is more important that everyone is having fun.

Organized Play offers a different spin on the isolated group paradigm by encouraging players to mingle and play RPGs with a wide variety of people with no long-term commitments to a long-running campaign. It is an extraordinarily rewarding strategy, but it also comes with difficult challenges. Players may come and go, leaving players with higher-level characters without enough friends to tackle higher-level scenarios. Many organized play events take place in public places, making it difficult to control who attends events. As recruitment takes off, more participants must step up to be GMs, all of which assumes that recruitment is strong in the first place. An organizers area might not even have anyone else who seems inclined to play RPGs.

There's a lot to cover, so let's break it into pieces.

WHY BUILD A COMMUNITY?

This is a lot of work and often requires a lot of patience. Why go to all that effort? By creating a community of roleplayers, you create a large pool of players and GMs who show to play games, ensuring that whenever you want to participate in Pathfinder or any other game, there's somebody available to join you. A healthy community also takes turns at organizing and GMing so that no one person shoulders all of the responsibility and workload. A community allows many different roleplayers to meet one another, encouraging friendships that might extend beyond the game table. Finally, a community can provide a safe environment to have fun and a positive support network. It's worth the investment.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Find a location: A participant's home is usually easy to reserve, but it's a poor choice for community building. Ideally find a public place that already attracts roleplayers: a game store, comic book shop, library, or bookstore. Sometimes less obvious venues can be wildly successful depending on the region's demographics; some areas host wildly successful weeknight games at local pubs.

Get permission: You will be a guest in someone's place of business, so be sure to speak with the owner or another official to explain what you would like to do. Prepare ahead of time so that you can suggest a date for the event (or a schedule for the first several events), what resources you need access to, and what hosting the occasional organized play event can do for the venue. Attracting roleplayers to a business often boosts sales of game-related products and refreshments. Building a positive working relationship with the business is an important step, and you should check in with the store representative regularly to maintain this relationship.

Venture-captains and storeowners on the messageboards at paizo.com are often available to suggest other benefits that might help someone convince a store to welcome organized play.

Get started: What is arguably the hardest part about building a community can also be the easiest: just start playing. So long as it's obvious that you and whomever you're with are having fun, passers-by will become curious. Invite them to join in, if possible. Even if they cannot or are too busy, have a business card or a sheet of information about the game and the schedule handy to hand out. Sometimes it takes just a few minutes to gather enough people for a game. Other times it might take a few months of playing a small game before you recruit a critical mass.

Sometimes there's just nobody who is willing to dive right into a roleplaying game. RPGs have a bit of a learning curve and do not come naturally to everyone. Instead of forcing RPGs, start with board games—not a traditional "roll a die, move that many spaces, end your turn" style but instead something with a bit more strategy and involves slightly more robust rules. Once your community enjoys board games, you can introduce them to the Beginner Box and expand their interests with Pathfinder.

Put others first: Even if you have a perfect game going when a handful of excited newcomers arrive, be prepared to smile, step away from that game, and run something for them. A few sacrifices like these make a big difference. It shows newcomers that they are welcome. It shows other players that it is important to reach out to first-time players. Start the interaction with a smile, focus more on everyone's having fun than getting the rules 100% correct, and follow up with the players afterward. Let them know that you had fun, that you look forward to seeing them again, and that they can find more information online.

Both in execution and presentation, this is so much easier if you have pregenerated characters already printed out, spare dice, and extra Pathfinder Society player numbers.

Push preregistration: Early on, it is not important to announce what scenario you will run ahead of time. Beginning players will all be able to play low-level scenarios, and there are enough of these scenarios that it's unlikely that a community will need to run one a second time. Planning ahead becomes important when players' characters reach level 5 and when a location needs more than one GM. At that point certain players either can't always or won't want to play alongside one another.

Preregistration alerts the community when games of various levels will occur and allows you to coordinate who is GMing, how many spaces are left in a game, and whether another table needs to form. Not using preregistration typically leads to chaotic shuffling of players between tables, underprepared GMs, lost time, and sometimes players being left without a space at a game.

Promote GMs: You can't run the entire operation by yourself; you will need at least a few others to handle GM responsibilities. Ideally, nearly every participant should try his or her hand at running a table at least once, and some of the healthiest communities are those in which at least half of the participants serve as GMs at least part of the time.

Pathfinder Society Organized Play already rewards GMs by giving them character credit, but you can help to make your GMs feel appreciated in several other ways (depending on your budget). One popular strategy is preferential seating; those who GMed a game at the previous event get to sign up to play before others. Other coordinators like to reward GMs by running "Slot 0" events, referring to running a new scenario for a group of players who then intend to run it for others. A Slot 0 is attractive because it allows others to experience a scenario first by playing it before spoiling the surprises by reading through it. If you have a bit of a budget, you might even purchase small amounts of store credit for GMs as a thank you gift.

What matters most is that participants learn to see GMing as fun and as an important means of contributing to the community. Instill this in new players. Develop a culture of thanking the GM after every game.

Deal with troublemakers: You're likely running a public event, but that doesn't mean that you have to allow everybody to participate. Some players make a negative impact on the community for any number of reasons, but typically one can correct these issues by taking the player aside, talking things out, and coming to a compromise if need be. On rare occasions a player fails to recognize his problem, cannot accept that there is a problem, or continues disruptive behavior despite complaints. It is this type of player that you may have to ban.

There are several steps to take when banning a player, assuming you have already attempted to correct the difficult behavior. The first step is to gather information. Players may have already approached you about the troublemaker; jot down notes about the experience and save those emails.

Second, discuss the issue with your contact person in charge of the venue. Storeowners typically dislike disruptive clients—especially those who chase away other business—and will endorse your group's self-policing decisions. If the venue is a convention with paying customers, you might not have any power to ban an attendee.

Third, inform the player that there is an issue and that he gets several warnings. Tell him what the effects of failing to shape up would be, but avoid being accusatory. Just state the facts. If he continues to cause trouble, let him know when each warning occurs. Finally, ban him from the events that you run. Some players will actually improve after realizing that a coordinator is serious about banning someone, and you may find it is worth issuing a temporary ban, allowing the player back after several months, and seeing if he has improved.

If you have a venture-captain nearby, he or she can provide you additional support in policing your community. If an issue seems particularly serious, you may also contact the Campaign Coordinator Mike Brock for guidance.

You're the face of the RPG industry: Whether you realize it or not, you are an ambassador of the gaming industry when you organize a community. When you are professional, organized, and courteous, your actions encourage others to view RPGs—and often the particular system you want to play—with interest and respect. Should you be sloppy, unprepared, or rude, it reflects poorly instead. This hurts everyone because if no one respects the games you love, no one will play them with you, either.

USING PROPS TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

Props play an important role in tabletop RPGs. They serve to fill the voids between an adventure's text, the game master's ability to describe the scene, and each player's imagination. While not usually considered "necessary" to play the game, props add value to the game by:

- Inspiring awe at the table.

- Helping to convey information in a loud room.

- Speeding up game-play.

- Assisting the visual learners at the table.

- Reducing the need to repeat information.

- Making up for a lack of descriptive ability.

TYPICAL PROPS

- **Flip Mats and Map Packs:** Pathfinder Society Scenarios are written with a limited custom map budget and thus rely on preprinted GameMastery Flip Mats and Map Packs, usually chosen by the author, to represent many similar environments.

- **Battle Mats and Custom Maps:** When an adventure calls for a custom map or a preprinted map isn't available, draw a map on a battle mat or on large gridded paper. Drawing a map before the adventure starts significantly speeds up game play. Taking the time to draw most of the small details of a map adds to the experience for players. It helps set parts of a scene that may be missing from a verbal description and the inclusion of some objects like tables or beds, can inspire players to come up with creative tactics.

- **Miniatures:** Pathfinder Society Scenarios assume the use of miniatures to represent both Player Character's and their adversaries on some form of gridded map. Much like how using a detail map fills in the gap between the description of a room and the player's imagination, an accurate or appropriate miniature can help immerse the players into the encounter.

GOING BEYOND THE TYPICAL

- **Condition Cards:** Whether they are custom made or preprinted and purchased (such as GameMastery Condition Cards), having handouts for the myriad of conditions in Pathfinder is one of the best tools a GM can have. They remove the burden of remembering the details of each condition and can force the responsibility for tracking the condition on to the player. These cards can have a dramatic effect on the pace of play in addition to making a visual impact.

- **Spells & Buff Cards:** Much like condition cards, having cards with the details of the most common spells and class abilities will speed up the game by reducing the amount of time spent flipping through the rule books. Paizo does sell a GameMastery Buff Deck with the most common spells, but it is more limited in its versatility when compared to the Condition Cards due to amount of vast quantity of spells and class ability variations.

• **Spell and Effect Templates:** Another type of prop that is more commonly purchased instead of crafted are spell and effect templates. These templates, often made of plastic coated wire provide a quick visual reference for various common cone and spherical effects such as a fireball's blast radius. These templates are a great way to educate new players to the unique shapes of spells within Pathfinder and usually speed up game play. Occasionally, however, some players will focus on placing their spell in the perfect location to get the best possible effect which can slow the game down and often pulls players out of the moment.

• **Flight Indicators:** Nothing complicates game play quite like characters and creatures taking flight. While an aerial battle with an ancient wyrm is one of the most epic scenes in all of fantasy gaming, adjudicating such an encounter can be a nightmare. When running any game with characters of about 5th level or higher, be prepared to track flying characters or creatures. Simple methods for doing so include placing a die near or under the appropriate miniature. Placing a miniature on top of an empty dice box gives a stable base while giving a clear visual of flight and allowing for small miniatures to fit underneath. There are many commercial options available as well, including Combat Tiers from Paizo.

• **Creature Images:** A picture is worth a thousand words. In gaming this comes into play the most when describing rooms and creatures. When detailing what the player characters are encountering, it's best to back that description up with a picture, especially if the miniature or map being used isn't entirely accurate. Most creatures player characters will encounter come from published sources with full color pictures. Simply showing the page of a Bestiary to the players is quick and easy, but this often increases the amount of metagaming at the table. To minimize this, try extracting the image from a pdf or copying the page from a book while omitting the creature's name.

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

• **Region Specific Maps:** Pathfinder Society Scenarios take place all over Golarion and beyond. It's often difficult for players, both new and experienced, to keep track of where in the world they are traveling. Almost every Pathfinder Society Scenario includes a "Where in Golarion" section for the GM. Bring this to life for the players by printing sections of the world map or maps from a region-specific supplement. Additionally, images from other resources can provide a different perspective for a given area. One good example of this are the Storval Stairs. Featured in Pathfinder Society Scenario #4–04: King of the Storval Stairs, these stairs, built by giants are massive in scale. The top-down battle-map type image provided in the scenario fails to adequately illustrate the grand scale of the
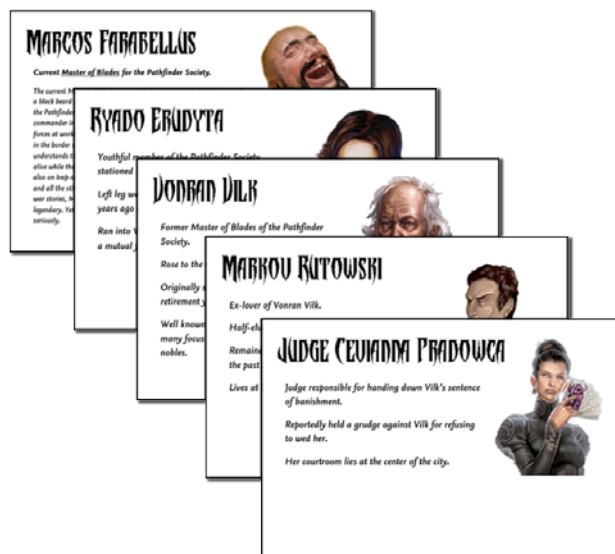
stairs. However, a couple of other images from other Paizo resources, show a different view of the stairs, helping immerse the players in the environment.

• **Important NPC Handouts:** Ever have players forget the name of an important NPC? Forget which Venture-Captain sent them on their mission? Ever repeat parts of the initial mission briefing? End that by creating individual handouts for every important NPC in an adventure. Include any information about each NPC the players need to know

beyond their name, even going as far as including the entire mission briefing. These handouts save the Game Master's voice during a long convention, spark interest in the NPC, and put the responsibility of understanding and interpreting the information on the players. This is especially important in adventures that contain several NPCs and a high level of intrigue. See an example below, from Pathfinder Society Scenario #3-16: The Midnight Mauler which 5 key NPC contacts the players must remember.

• **Important Information Handouts:** Often, Pathfinder Society Scenarios include a series of knowledge checks at the beginning of a scenario to aid the players with their mission. Much like the NPC handouts mentioned above, including this information in a handout removes the need for players to memorize or write the information down and eliminates the need to repeat the information by the GM. As an example, here is one knowledge check from Pathfinder Society Scenario #3-20: The Rats of Round Mountain—Part I: The Sundered Path. It's presented as four handouts, each successive handout offering additional information based on the best result of the knowledge check achieved at the table.
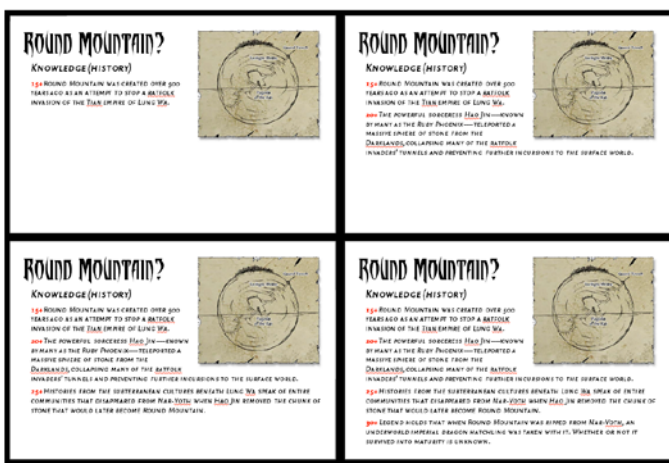
• **Unique Miniatures:** Some encounters can be taken to the next level by the use of a creative miniature. For example, modeling clay can be used for various ooze type creatures. In this example, if the characters cause the ooze to split, it's easy to rip the clay in half and move it around the map. Using a unique miniature can add visual impact to the game, however, it can also break the verisimilitude for some players. Use with caution.

• **Three Dimensional Terrain:** Perhaps the biggest prop (literally) a GM can bring to the table is 3D terrain. There is no bigger draw to your table at a convention that reproducing a scene in three dimensions. 3D terrain can be made from carving foam or wood, folding cardstock prints, using ceramic castings, or be made of fake grasses and plants from a local hobby store. It can also be as simple as adding a few popsicle stick to a 2D map to represent a

ladder or bridge which the characters can physically move or remove as necessary. While there is no denying the visual impact of 3D terrain, it's important to make sure the terrain doesn't distract the players from the story or prevent the players from viewing or interacting with the entire scene.