

Flutter's Guide for Pathfinder Society Newbies: PF 1 edition

Hello new Pathfinders! Come in and have a seat. Tea and cookies will be served shortly. Don't worry about the bullette, he's friendly. Erm.. and he's eaten already. But just to be safe halflings should move to the opposite side of the room.

What is the purpose of this guide?

To introduce new players to Pathfinder Society (PFS) first edition . [The Guide to Pathfinder Society](#) is a great set of rules for organized play, and every new player should take a look at it, but it's a little dense, heavy, and not at all new person friendly. It's written rather legalistically to keep the Asmodeus worshiping lawyers in line, not provide clear, readable, and succinct idea of what's going on. As a druid I prefer a more forest than tree approach.

So how does this work?

As pathfinders you play agents of the Pathfinder Society, a loose collection of murderho... erm... "gentlemen explorer archeologists" who travel Golarion in search of lost lore. When considering what kind of character to play, keep in mind someone who would either love to explore, or at the very least wouldn't mind being paid to beat on things while working for such an organization.

The DM (game master, judge, person behind the screen) has a pre-written adventure and has hopefully read it. You make a character, go on the adventure, and get a chronicle sheet saying that you went on such and such an adventure, got X amount of loot, and Y amount of experience points (usually 1). Get 3 xp, level up! Wash, rinse, repeat.

Your characters can be played in any PFS game anywhere in the world at a variety of conventions, game days, and meetings both in person and online.

Where can I find a game?

There is [a partial map](#) of places where PFS is played.

[This page](#) has a list of venture officers .

If you don't see your city or a nearby city listed, don't worry. There are lots of other flat rolling surfaces where PFS is played, but they're a little scattered and uncoordinated. Some groups use Warhorn, some use Meetup, some use Facebook, some use an email list. If you're in the

wilderness (and why wouldn't you be?) Your best bet for finding a group is to go to the [pathfinder society message boards](#), sign up, and make a post saying "I'm near x city is there any PFS going on?" A similar strategy on [the Pathfinder Society Facebook](#) will get the same results. You can also ask for help on the [discord chat program](#)

What happens at a game?

Let's say the game starts at 7.

- **6:45-6:55 -- Arrivals.** People start to trickle in. Folks eat, gossip, get settled in. If you're new, I cannot overstate the importance of arriving early. Everyone, especially the DM, is going to be extremely busy once the game starts and if you have any questions before the game is the place to do it. For your first session you want at least 15 extra minutes to find the place and half an hour to check in and introduce yourself.
- **7:15 -- Geek sudoku!** People finalize how many people they have for which table. The veterans will then decide who's playing what character, trying to balance out levels, tiers, and party composition. The DM desperately tries to sneak in one more reading of the scenario.
- **7:30 -- The Scenario Begins.** People get going. There's a mission briefing to which savvy players pay attention and take notes. Try to be one of those players. Mission briefings will often have crucial clues that will help you later on. (Other players during this time may be finding dice and minis, or checking character sheets, phones, and chronicle sheets to make last minute purchases.) You will get a flurry of five or six mispronounced names without much clear idea whether Drendle Drang is a person you're talking to, a place you want to go, or a particularly nasty curse you want to avoid. Don't worry! You'll have a chance to ask questions, gather information and make knowledge checks to get some idea of what you're in for.
- **7:40 onwards -- The Main Action.** There will be ~ 4 encounters, usually some mooks for one fight, a trap or three, some sort of a skill or social challenge, some sort of strong monster that's usually more likely to kill you than the boss, and then a solo or near solo boss fight. These will inevitably involve some back and forth between the GM and the players. "I'm over here; he's over there!" "What are you doing?" "How are you searching?" "How does that rule work?" The questions and comments will be short and sweet, so that everyone can keep the game moving.
- **Challenges.** The encounters will likely test adventuring basics. Can you attack at both melee and ranged? Can you deal with swarms and other unusual creature types? Can you deal with damage reduction and incorporeal critters? Other challenges may involve social skills (charming people, misdirecting enemies or intimidating mooks), puzzle solving, or figuring out how to travel through difficult terrain.
- **10:30 -- Boss Fight.** You finally found the big bad that has been causing you all the trouble! Hurry!
- **11:05 -- Chronicle Sheets.** The DM hurriedly signs chronicle sheets and fills out the required boxes, then hands them to you to complete for your records.

- **Post Game.** Grab stuff, get out the door, hang out in the parking lot for a bit to come back to reality and then head home.

What you should know

Your character is a member of the Pathfinder Society: the out of game and in game group of “gentlemen explorer archaeologists”. This is ~~the excuse to have you all together and adventuring without descending into cannibalism~~ a bit of backstory you should think about when it comes to your character. WHY are they with these people? “They’re paying me” is an acceptable answer, but not necessarily the most fulfilling.

Go on a pre made adventure. Finish it. Get a chronicle sheet. Usually you get 1 xp. Get 3 xp, level up. Wash rinse repeat.

What kind of character should I make?

The one you want to.

If you’ve read the latest splatbook and gotten a really cool idea for the Cuisinart of Whirley Death and want to play that character, go for it. There will be enough for your character to do in the game to make it worth playing. If you have a fun idea that’s not uber optimized, PFS isn’t usually so hard that you need to minmax to the hilt or die. The society has enough in game reason to take either character and send them on an adventure: pathfinders inevitably run into something that needs a sword to the head and unique talents often come in handy.

If you are deciding between a hyper specialized character and more of a generalist though, I would recommend the generalist. In a home game you can figure out who’s playing the meat shield, the wizard, the skills guy and the healer. In PFS you play with whatever bag of mixed nuts sit at the table with you, and the venture captains send their characters all out on the mission. More experienced groups often have multiple characters they can swap out for better party composition, but even then sometimes the rogue with use magic device and a wand winds up as the party healer. It’s far more important to be self sufficient and able to cover multiple roles in PFS than in a home game.

You really should be competent at 2 things in combat, and at least one or two things out of it. Combat is a large part of the game, but so are investigations, deadly decadent courts, archaeological digs, and exploration. *Skills have a much larger role in Pathfinder society than they might in other games.*

How to make a character:

You don’t HAVE to make a character, especially your first night. You can use one of the pregenerated characters. Some of them are pretty good.... and some of them are saved only by

their animal companions. But for me and many others half the fun of the game is creating your own character in both build and personality and getting to say "IT'S ALIVE!" when they meet a situation that fits them like a glove. Assuming you want to make your own monsterbait...erm...adventurer, here are some useful things to know.

- **Stats and money.** [Point buy calculator](#) 20 point buy. Minimum of 7 and maximum of 18 before racials. 150 starting gold. Jacks and one eyed kings wild.
- **Classes.** MOST class options in PFS are legal. A few exceptions are the Regular summoner (the unchained one is fine), the vivisectionist alchemist, and the undead lord cleric.
- **Races.** Races are a little more narrow, limited to those in the core rulebook, Oread, Slyph, Ifrit, Undine, Tengu, Nagaji, Wayang, and Kitsune. Other races have been legal before, and there are boons (special certifications) that open up more, so you may see some even weirder pathfinders in your group.
- **Level** Start at level 1
- **Alignment.** Any non-evil. Characters can worship evil deities but must be within one step, so you'll have to match them exactly on the law/chaos axis
- **Traits:** Two traits no drawbacks

Is X legal?

For a beginner, your best bet is to google the item you want and "archives of nethys." For example, let's look at the [helm of the mammoth lord](#).

See the funny white X on top of the page?  That's the glyph of the open road, symbol of the pathfinder society. That means it's PFS legal.

You can double check it by looking on the [additional resources](#) page. Hit ctrl F and the source it's out of to find the source, and then look for the item. Some of these entries are written as "X Y and Z are legal" and some are written as "everything BUT XY and Z are legal."

Please keep in mind that for anything outside of the core rulebook you have to be able to show the DM the book that it came from, either as a dead tree book, on a tablet, or a print out from a watermarked pdf. This generally means you need to buy the book in some form to use it for PFS.

What's this piece of paper?

At the end of the game you'll be given a chronicle sheet. DON'T LOSE IT. I highly recommend a 3 ring binder or prong binder to keep track of these, as they're very helpful if you can keep them in order.

Wow, there's a lot of stuff on this chronicle, I'm rich!

Whoa there.

The gold you get from the scenario is on the upper right hand side. This is usually your reward. Just about everything else on the chronicle sheet merely provides access to the item, not the item itself.

It doesn't matter how much gold you have, the society is not just going to hand anyone a vorpal sword. They're not going to spend the time and expense of finding, making, or stealing. Acquiring such an item for just anyone either.

Your character usually acquires access to equipment from the society in 4 ways:

- 1) **It's on a chronicle sheet.** You were the one that brought the item in for study, so you can buy it back once they're done studying it in between adventures.
- 2) **It's on the always available list.** The society will let any members, including their most junior, buy mundane and alchemical weapons, armor and gear made of normal and special materials (other than dragonhide), alchemical equipment, scrolls and potions of first level spells.
- 3) **You can spend 1 or 2 pp to buy an item worth up to 150 or 750 gp.** Many adventurers use their first two PP to purchase a wand of cure light wounds or infernal healing this way. Even if they can't cast it themselves, they can hand it to someone who can. This way, you pay for your own healing, even if someone else is operating your wand.
- 4) **And most importantly, Fame.** You can buy any legal item from the society that you meet the fame score for. (See the chart in the guide.) As you adventure your fame grows, and the society is more willing to open their vaults or have their craftsmen make items just for you. This means that if you have a character concept that requires a flaming, shocking, mithril kusarigama you don't need to pray that you find one on the chronicle, you can get it made. Your purchase limit USUALLY exceeds the amount of gold on hand. While chronicle sheet loot looks very important, in practice only rare items, partially charged wands, and items you can't normally buy (like an elven cloak of resistance) really matter.

Factions

While everyone is a pathfinder, saying "I'm a pathfinder" when everyone else in the party is also a pathfinder doesn't say much about your character. Factions provide a way of saying something about your character and giving you a little screen time to showcase your personality.

The Exchange: Make money by trade. Meet new and interesting people and sell them stuff. Rewards let you make more money and buy better stuff.

Sovereign Court: Unite the nobility of the inner sea and foster a sense of noblesse oblige. Rewards give you your own personal Q , a network of spies, and a training montage for your allies.

Silver Crusade: Knights in shining armor. They want to use the societies enormous resources and knowledge for good. Paladins, do gooders, and general Gryffindor types. Rewards let you take people alive for trial easier, whack demons harder, and get you a discount from some good clerics.

Liberty's Edge. Free the slaves and ensure FREEEEEDOOOOOOM! for the inner sea. Rewards include an Entourage of freed slaves, kicking slaver butt, and ways to insure you and your allies are not bound by the literal and metaphorical chains of the oppressors!

Grand Lodge: House Hufflepuff, loyal to the society as a whole or non aligned. Rewards give you bonuses on skill checks, and completing society goals.

Dark Archive: Collect, study, and preserve artifacts of a “questionable” nature. Not evil since AR 4714. Really! Rewards let you borrow some scrolls and give bonuses on knowledge checks.

Concordance of Elements maintain a balance of elements and the elemental planes. Rewards protect you from elemental damage and let you smite foes with the power of fire and lightning.

Each faction has special rewards for its members accomplishing goals of that faction. See [Faction Journal Cards](#) for each factions rewards and activities that a faction might expect from it's members

Fame and Prestige

Some adventurers go into the tomb, slay the mummy, grab the eye of the Pharaoh and run out the door. Other adventurers go the extra mile, wrap the mummy in chains in their own sarcophagus, haul them back to Absolom and have them dictate their life to historians. The more extra credit you do during the adventure, the more you DO for the society the more the society will do for you. Try to think about things an archaeological association might be interested in: Artifacts, secret information, and NOT trashing the place so that you can work without the locals trying to run you out of town are some of the more common ways to gain extra recognition.

Prestige is awarded, usually at 1 or 2 per scenario depending on whether you just completed the mission, or if you did something(s) above and beyond the bare minimum. You

can “spend” prestige to call in a favor as simple as getting a free wand of cure light wounds, or even have someone scrape you off the floor of the dungeon and bring you back from the dead. I would highly advise spending the first 2 prestige points (pp) on a wand of cure light wounds, and then saving up the 21 points needed for a body recovery and raise dead.

Fame is a measure of all the prestige you’ve ever earned. It rarely to never decreases or is spent. Fame is incredibly important because it determines the maximum gold value of items the society will acquire for you.

In conclusion

Don’t be afraid to give it a try. It’s a great way to meet some new geeks, get in a few extra games, and try out some new characters. You’ll probably find that once the dice start rolling not nearly all that much different than a home game.

[Download this boon for your 1st first level character to get you started!](#)