

RANDOM GM TIP: PINEAPPLING

by [Justin Alexander](#) - January 19th, 2024



During [my last Twitch stream](#), we were taking a peek at [Keeper Tips](#), a pocket book of collected wisdom published by Chaosium for the 40th Anniversary of *Call of Cthulhu* and featuring snippets of useful advice curated from a couple dozen creators. One of the tips we looked at was:

The pineapple on the sideboard. Only put into a scene, session, or scenario what you want your players to investigate. If you put a pineapple on a sideboard in a room they enter, they will investigate it.

The point being that almost anything noteworthy or unusual that you describe in the game world will almost certainly attract the players' attention, and if they can't figure out *why* this thing exists or *what* it does — often because it is, in fact, just a pineapple — it will only fuel their curiosity. Beware of trivialities metamorphosing into voracious timesinks that can swallow a session whole!

But I noted that there was, in fact, a practical purpose to which these pineapples could be put:

What if you *wanted* the players to get distracted?

For example, imagine that the PCs have suddenly veered right and driven off the edge of your prep. You could, of course, call for a break or end the session early, but another option would be to put a pineapple on the nearest sideboard. As the players descend upon the pineapple, vociferously debating with each other about its true meaning and purpose, you're suddenly free behind your screen to rapidly sketch out a new dungeon level; pull together the stat blocks for a flock of Triad mooks; google blueprints for a mansion; throw together [a quick 'n dirty social event](#); or whatever else the occasion might call for.

Chat immediately dubbed this technique "pineappling."

Iconoplast: Dude. I think this GM is pineappling us!

Kevin: No way, man! This has gotta be a clue!

You could even keep a small stockpile of such enigmas in your notes, ready to be deployed whenever an unexpected scene needs to be filled. ([101 Curious Items](#) could, in fact, serve such a purpose.)

OPPORTUNISTIC PINEAPPLING

Of course, as the original tip suggests, there'll likely be plenty of pineapples in your campaign that appear out of nowhere. You'd think you'd need to put the pineapple some place conspicuous, but you can just as easily put it in a fruit bowl or store it in a pantry, and you'll still inevitably hear a player say something like, "A pineapple is a tropical fruit and out of season! What is it doing here?" or even, "Why would you put a pineapple in a fruit bowl?"

"Because it's fruit...?" you'll think to yourself, but it's too late. The obsession has begun.

And the broader tip here is to take advantage of these moments. Whether the PCs are puzzling over pineapples or debating strategy amongst themselves, learn to identify these periods of grace and shift your attention away from what the players are doing so that you can focus on other tasks:

- Review your notes.
- Check your [adversary roster](#).
- Clear away the stat blocks and minis from the last combat.
- Put your paperwork and rulebooks back in order.
- Pre-roll some random encounters, including [non-focal encounters](#).
- Look at your [campaign status document](#).

Take chaos and restore it to a state of order.

But when your work is done — or if you have no such maintenance to perform — it will be time to get the players to put the pineapple down. At this point, there's a key question to ask:

Are the players having fun with their pineapple?

If so, then more often than not, it's fine to just let them have their fun. If possible, [default to yes](#) and see if you can find some way to give the players some small reward for their efforts. (Even if it's just a laugh at themselves as they realize the absurdity of dissecting a pineapple.) For example... why *do* the Thorndikes have a pineapple in their fruit bowl out of season? Could it have been given to them as a gift by the Tharsian merchants who are trying to buy the jade lion? Maybe!

When fun threatens to become frustration — or if you can see the eyes of the non-obsessed players at the table beginning to glaze over despite their comrade's enthusiasm — it's time to bring things to a close. Broadly speaking, you're looking to either provide a distraction from or a definitive conclusion to the pineapple peering.

Distractions, for example, could include:

- The PCs hear some bad guys in the hallway outside the pantry.
- If the PCs have split up, cut to the other half of the group. When you cut back, use a leading prompt to push players away from the pineapple: "Okay, let's go back to Iconoplast. Now that you're done examining the pineapple, what are you doing next?"
- Ask an uninvolved player what their character is doing while the pineapple is being studied. Resolve that, and then, once again, use a leading question to push the pineapple PC into a new activity.

A definitive conclusion, on the other hand, can be achieved by:

- Opportunistically identifying a skill check and then framing the outcome of the check to clearly declare that there's nothing to be done with the pineapple. (e.g., "After several minutes of intense scrutiny, you conclude that this is, in fact, an ordinary pineapple and nothing more. What do you want to do now?")
- Asserting a cost and seeing if they're willing to pay it. "You've spent several minutes talking about this pineapple. How long are you planning to continue examining it?" If they've become sufficiently obsessed to pay the cost, that's fine, just make sure you actually apply the cost. (For example, start making random monster checks. Make sure the dice are ominously loud as you roll them.)
- As mentioned before, opportunistically give them some small reward ("This is clearly a Tharsian pineapple; it couldn't have come from any of the local farms") and then immediately prompt them for a new action. "Okay, now what are you going to do?"

Each of these, you'll note, features a strong pivot and prompt asking the players for *what they do next*. Stubborn players may nevertheless stick with the pineapple, but most will take the hint — often subconsciously doing so without ever realizing the hint was given ("What do you want to do now?" is, after all, a question they hear all the time at the table) — and move on.

When it comes to that stubborn player, however, the ultimate solution is to break the fourth wall and simply declare out of character — as the game master speaking directly to the players — that they have found everything there is to find and there is nothing more to be achieved here.

You can soften the blow by giving them some final bit of information for their efforts (again, that opportunistic reward) while saying, "And that's all, folks!" Alternatively, you can often achieve a similar effect by asking them, after definitively establishing that they've learned everything they can/need to, if there's anything else they want to do before the scene ends. (This is a little bit of psychological judo, since it puts them in the driver's seat.)

What you want to make sure you avoid, however, is having the pineapple turn into a grenade. (Pun intended.) The most important thing here is to make sure that you're not judging them or mocking them for their interest in the pineapple.

After all, pineapples are fun!