VERSE TABLETOP · PRINTABLE CHEAT SHEET

When your players go off script

Keep this by your screen. When the table walks away from your adventure, follow it, keep your prepared pieces, and let the world react.

Quick reference

IF YOUR PLAYERS...	TRY THIS	WHY IT WORKS
They ignore your hook	Ask what they hope to do, then follow it	They chose it, so they care
They chase a minor character	Tie that character to your villain	Your prep comes back by a side door
They skip the place you prepared	Move its best scene or enemy to where they are going	Nothing you made is wasted
You freeze and don't know what's next	Call a five-minute break	A breath beats a bad guess
They do something clever	Let it work, then let the world react	Wit is rewarded, and your story returns
The game drifts with no direction	Have a character with an agenda act	The Pendulum swings back to you

The five moves

1. **Don't be precious about the plot.** Forcing players down the road you prepared kills what makes tabletop games special.
2. **Ask whether their direction is better than yours.** Often it is.
3. **Keep your prepared pieces. Move where they appear.** The villain, the set piece, the clue: put them where the players are going.
4. **Let the world notice what the players do.** Characters with their own agendas react, and that is how your story gets back in.
5. **Wait for the Pendulum.** The players lead for a while. Then the world pushes back and the focus swings to you again.

The Pendulum

Leadership at the table swings like a pendulum. Sometimes the players drive the story and you facilitate; then the world pushes back and the focus swings to you. Your job while they lead is to keep the world moving, so the swing back comes naturally.

Read the full article, with the story of the heist that never happened: versetabletop.com/players-go-off-script
Free for your table: The GM's Emergency Kit (ten pages of quick fixes for any game) · the Nova City Heroes QuickStart · The 1-Minute Game System videos
By Nick Shepley, who has been running tabletop games for thirty years. versetabletop.com