

## Bonus Chapter 1

# Ten Major Quests

When you need an adventure idea in a hurry, this list of ten major quests can provide quick inspiration. Each of these quests can have any number of variations, but they cover the very basics of a lot of fantasy and other fictional plots. Each of the quests described here includes a list of questions that will help you flesh out the details into a full-fledged adventure plot.

A great way to add some depth to an adventure is to present the player characters with two quests that apparently or actually conflict with each other, forcing the players to decide which quest they want to pursue. They might approach the question from a mercenary angle, weighing the rewards of the quests against each other, and that's fine for some situations. You can also force them to consider the quests from an ethical perspective — which is the right way to go? Which will bring greater good to the world, or the least harm? Who's telling them the truth?

### *Acquire an Important or Valuable Item*

The characters need to venture into a dangerous place in order to find a specific item. The quest for the Holy Grail is a lofty expression of this quest, whereas an attempt to steal the Hope Diamond is a similar quest at the opposite end of the moral spectrum.

- ✓ **What's the item?** It could be a mighty artifact, a precious gem, a magic item, a relic of some lost civilization, a key (to what?), a ritual scroll, a cure for a specific disease or poison, a book, a map, an egg, or anything else you can think of.
- ✓ **Why is it important?** Is it powerful in its own right? Does it contain knowledge that's otherwise unknown? Is it just worth a king's ransom?
- ✓ **Why do the characters want it?** Do they want its power for themselves? Or has someone else hired them to retrieve it? Can their patron be trusted?

- ✔ **Who has the item now?** Who else is trying to get it, and why? Are there other people or creatures competing with the characters to get the item?
- ✔ **Where is it?** Is it lost in some ancient ruin, or on display in a high-security museum? Are the characters stealing it from someone else's possession or claiming it for the first time?

## *Escort a Person or Carry an Object*

The characters need to make sure that a person or object gets from point A to point B safely. This might initially seem like a straightforward task, but whoever entrusts this task into the PCs' hands has good reason to fear for the person's or object's safety. Characters might be hired as caravan guards to protect a merchant's goods as they cross the dangerous wilderness, or maybe they're to be guides and bodyguards for a gentleman adventurer who wants to see some ancient ruins with his own eyes.

- ✔ **Who or what are the characters escorting?** Is it a young nobleman traveling to a distant city for his wedding? A child headed to the grand temple to be consecrated? An ancient seer with an urgent message for the duke? A king's ransom — literally — that the characters must deliver to his captors before they escort the king safely home?
- ✔ **What's the danger to this person or object?** Is the road infested with goblins who attack anything that looks important or valuable? Is an evil cult trying to kill the child before he can be anointed a prophet? Has the young nobleman arranged for his own kidnapping in order to avoid his wedding?
- ✔ **Why are the characters involved?** Does the person they're escorting, or a relative of that person, hire them for the job? Is the object they're carrying something that they discovered on an earlier adventure, realizing on their own that it needs to reach a safe place?
- ✔ **Is there a time pressure or other circumstances that complicate the mission?** If the wedding takes place in three days, and the young nobleman runs off in the night after the PCs fight off the brigands he hired to kidnap him, the mission has an extra sense of urgency.

## *Guard or Protect a Location*

Similar in principle to a quest to escort or transport a person or object, this quest differs in that it doesn't involve travel. The characters might be called upon to defend a pass from orc invaders or protect a temple from servants of Vecna who seek to plunder its secrets. This kind of adventure offers a twist on the traditional dungeon adventure, putting the characters in the role of the defenders.

- ✔ **What's the location?** Is it a strategic point of defense for the barony? A sacred place to their faith? A treasure vault? A village? An astral dominion?
- ✔ **Who are the characters protecting it from?** Is an enemy army trying to break through their defenses? (Naturally, the characters don't have to defeat the whole army by themselves — but a small group can hold off a much larger force from the right position. Part of the challenge might be finding that position!) Are marauding orcs trying to burn and plunder the village? Is a thief hoping to steal the Seven-Faceted Gem of Thur Kadar?
- ✔ **What's the measure of their success?** A quest needs a clear end point, which comes when the characters know whether or not they've accomplished their mission. Do the characters just have to hold a pass until reinforcements arrive, or do they have to keep fighting skirmish after skirmish until the enemy is routed? Do they have to kill the would-be thief to make sure he doesn't come back, or do they just need to protect the treasure until sunrise?
- ✔ **Why are the characters involved?** Are they the only ones aware of the threat? Are they the only ones capable of staving off the threat? Or has someone hired them to protect a key location or priceless treasure?



## Rescue a Captive

The characters need to find and free a person who is being held against his or her will. Freeing the princess who's been captured by a dragon is a hackneyed form of this quest. Freeing a prisoner from the fortress-prison of Dreadhold is a different take on the same basic quest.

- ✔ **Who is the captive?** Is the captive a public personage like a noble or guildmaster? A friend or relative of the characters? A spy at risk of revealing crucial secrets to his captors?
- ✔ **Who are the captors?** Are they sophisticated thieves hoping for ransom? Evil cultists planning a sacrifice on the night of the eclipse? Hobgoblin soldiers hoping to extract information from the captive? Evil dwarves forcing prisoners to work in their mines? Or a legitimate authority detaining a prisoner?
- ✔ **Where are the captors holding the captive?** In a jail or a real dungeon? A remote cave in the wilderness? Somewhere in a hostile city the characters must navigate? On another plane or an extradimensional space? Under a volcano that's about to erupt?
- ✔ **Why do the characters want the captive freed?** Do they have a personal interest in helping a friend? Has a relative of the captive hired them for this rescue mission? Are they hoping to get information out of the prisoner while keeping him or her in their own custody?

## Escape from Imprisonment

Breaking someone out of captivity usually means getting in to a place where the captive is held and then getting back out — which might be trivial, if the characters did enough damage on the way in. In this quest, though, the characters are already in, and they have to find a way out.

A common challenge in this kind of adventure is that the characters begin without any equipment but the barest minimum of clothes. If they're being held as slaves, they might have tools or other limited gear, but often their first objective is to find weapons and armor they can use.

Ask yourself the same questions you would for a quest to rescue a captive, except that you already know who the captives are (the characters) and why the characters want to free these captives. You need to decide who the captors are and where the captors are holding the characters.



It's probably best to let this quest grow out of another adventure. Don't just start a session telling the players that their characters have been captured and have to break themselves out, unless it's the first session of a new campaign. Instead, this quest could be the natural next step after an encounter that unexpectedly left the whole party unconscious, and actually represent a reprieve (the players thought their characters were dead) rather than an arbitrary punishment.

## Gather Information

The characters need to collect information about the activities of a person, the behavior of a monster, the defenses of a place, or the terrain of an area. This can be a hands-off sort of surveillance where the PCs need to avoid contact with the enemy, or it can involve plenty of combat and mayhem. For example, they might be asked to find evidence that the duke's nephew is conspiring with a band of hobgoblins to overthrow his uncle. This could involve surreptitious observation of the nephew's movements, or it could be all about killing hobgoblins until the characters find the nephew's letters to the hobgoblin leader.

- ✔ **Who or what are the characters investigating?** Is it a suspected traitor? A wild animal that might become dangerous? A monster that's too powerful for them to fight? An enemy army? Enemy defenses, or a likely battlefield?
- ✔ **What's the goal of their investigation?** Are they asked to prove some wrongdoing? To assess a threat? To map an area?
- ✔ **What complications arise during the observation?** What if the person they're observing gets into trouble and needs help — do the characters risk blowing their cover in order to help? What if they find that the person they're observing is observing them as well? What if the characters discover that the person who hired them to find incriminating evidence is actually planting such evidence?

## Solve a Mystery

The characters have a mystery to unravel. Some crime or evil deed has been committed, and they must figure out who did it and possibly some other details of the circumstances or purpose of the crime.



As mentioned in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 84), one way to plan an adventure around a mystery is to treat the crime as a logic puzzle and make sure you plant the clues the characters need to solve the puzzle. You should make sure that you either place more clues than the solution strictly requires, or create multiple ways to uncover each clue. That way, bad luck, bad dice rolls, or a single mistake won't bring the adventure to a crashing halt because the mystery can't be solved.

- ✔ **Who did it?** It's worth noting that your criminal doesn't have to be a truly evil villain in a mystery adventure. Many crimes in classic mystery stories are committed by people caught up in a sudden rage or even by accident. Really evil villains sometimes don't go to great lengths to hide their crimes, but generally benign people who do bad things do. Was it the furtive shopkeeper? The arrogant priest? The greedy merchant? The captain of the watch? The baron's nephew, or the baron himself? (It's probably best to avoid mystery adventures that end with the revelation that the butler did it.)
- ✔ **Why did the criminal do it?** A clear motive is important, though it should be buried in secrets at the start of the adventure. Did the shopkeeper kill the woman who seduced her husband? Did the merchant steal the gem in order to put it on a secret altar to Tiamat in his cellar? Did the priest kill his friend in a fit of rage after years of secretly envying the other man's higher status?
- ✔ **What was the crime?** Murder and theft are the classics, and with good reason. It's hard to get too involved in a mystery that revolves around whose cat shredded the tapestry in the temple — unless you're running an adventure for young children. Keep the stakes high.
- ✔ **Who else had a motive to commit the crime?** It's a good idea to make sure that there are some promising leads characters can follow that ultimately get them nowhere. This keeps the mystery from being too straightforward.
- ✔ **How do the characters get involved?** Unless you're running a campaign where the characters are professional inquisitives (which might work particularly well in the *EBERRON* campaign setting), the characters need a hook to get them involved in the mystery. Are they personally connected to the victim? Is one of them falsely accused of the crime? Do they witness the crime? Or was something stolen from them?

## Explore New Territory

The characters are explorers, blazing trails in unexplored wilderness. They might be chartered agents of an imperial power, seeking out new trade routes or opportunities for colonization. Or they could be scouts for an elf tribe, seeking out a new home far from the marauding gnolls that burned the forest.

Or they could seek knowledge for its own sake, searching out ancient tiefling ruins and mapping the extent of ancient Bael Turath.

- ✔ **What's the unknown territory?** Is it a huge continent like the Americas before Columbus? A fairly small archipelago? The lands surrounding an old keep they have claimed for themselves? A vast subterranean network of caverns? A series of ancient ruins?
- ✔ **What's there?** Are there civilized races the characters can interact with? Hostile orcs they have to fight? Strange aberrations oozing out from a Far Realm portal at the heart of the unknown land?
- ✔ **Why are the characters exploring?** Did someone give them a commission? Is there a public reward offered? Do they have a personal stake in it?
- ✔ **What's the end point?** As a major quest, this exploration needs to be fairly limited in scope. (You could easily build a whole campaign around this idea of exploration, but then you're not dealing with a single quest any more.) Think of the goal as filling in a map of fairly limited size — the size of a barony or a large island. If you want the characters exploring for more than a few levels, break up that exploration into smaller, quest-sized chunks.

## *Foil a Villain's Master Plan*

The characters need to put a stop to some great evil, whether it's goblins raiding the farms on the outskirts of town or an evil mastermind plotting to conquer the world for Bane. Killing the monsters involved is its own reward (in terms of experience points), but what matters for the quest is making sure that the villain's plan doesn't take effect — the plague the villain concocted doesn't spread across the countryside, the villain's infernal machine doesn't turn everyone in the village into a zombie, or the villain doesn't succeed in turning the baron into a mindless puppet.

- ✔ **Who or what is the villain or monster?** Make sure to spend some effort making this creature clearly evil, a villain the characters can enjoy hating. See Chapter 21 for more on creating memorable villains.
- ✔ **What's the master plan?** Make sure the threat is truly villainous, evil, and despicable. A greedy bureaucrat's nefarious scheme to raise taxes is not a threat most players can get passionate about foiling. An Orcus cult's plan to raise every corpse in the city graveyard as a zombie might be a bit cliché, but it works because it's so blatantly evil. If the characters fail (or do nothing), the results should feel really disastrous.
- ✔ **How are the characters involved?** Does the lord mayor put a bounty on the head of the villain? Are the characters out for personal revenge?

## Set Things Right

The characters are too late to prevent some catastrophe, but they can work to set it right. They might need to track waves of debilitating necrotic energy to their source at the heart of the ancient ruins, or fight their way through hordes of corrupted plant-monsters and warped animals to the Far Realm portal in the heart of the forest.

You can use this quest as a way to follow up an adventure where the characters actually failed to stop a villain's plan from unfolding, but it works fine on its own, too. The catastrophe can be an accident, a natural disaster, or something the characters just had no way of predicting.

- ✔ **What happened?** Did someone open a portal to the Nine Hells, the Abyss, the Far Realm, or some other place of evil and horror? Was it a more limited summoning of a single powerful terror that's now rampaging through the town? Was it a natural disaster, perhaps with a strongly magical flavor?
- ✔ **Was the catastrophe accidental or the result of a villainous plan?** If the latter, what happened to the villain? Is the villain still around, or was he or she a casualty of the disaster unleashed by the evil plan?
- ✔ **How can it be reversed?** Is there some way to deal with the problem at the source (closing a portal or shutting down an infernal device), or do the characters just have to deal with a finite number of repercussions (seven horrendous monsters unleashed upon the city)? Do the characters need to find some artifact or tome of lore before they can solve the problem?
- ✔ **What are the repercussions of the disaster?** Are there gangs of monsters the characters must fight? Hazards that threaten innocent citizens as well as the characters? A spreading vortex that might suck the characters to another plane?