



Quests for Humanity

By Jeff Tidball

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To be human is to be part of an unstoppable force in the world. Humans have always possessed great perseverance and versatility above all other traits. The potential for heroism and glory lives inside each one, because by its nature the human race does not settle for second best. For thousands of years human nations, institutions, and individuals have pushed back frontiers, overthrown those who opposed them, and built mighty civilizations on both virgin territory and the moss-covered ruins of earlier cultures.

Humans' versatility shows in every task they undertake as a group. Give them nothing to start with but a sea of baking sand, and they develop a culture of unconquerable nomads for whom heat is strength. Forbid enslaved humans to carry their traditional weapons, and they turn their very hands and tools against those foolish enough to presume their subjugation. The history of the human race is made up of myriad such tales of triumph born from adversity.

The indomitability of humans is both a blessing and a curse. Their unshakable resolve drives them to keep fighting even when the cause seems lost—and often that very refusal to quit can turn the tide of a conflict. But this same adamant will also drives humans to villainy, subjugating all who stand against them and pursuing ultimate power no matter the cost to others. The seeds of human empires' inevitable downfall are sown in such insatiable desire for expansion and control.

The last human empire, Nerath, reached to the far ends of the world, bringing strange and distant lands under its sway until it too crumbled to dust. Now, a century later, the scattered remnants of old Nerath

are being unearthed and restored by its determined and resourceful heirs. Perhaps you will be the one to bring a new age of human glory to the world.

WHAT'S YOUR HUMAN NATURE?

If you're playing a human character, you already identify with that race's versatility and ambition. The quests described below can help you set goals for your character that feel quintessentially human but are also relevant to your Dungeon Master's campaign. Undertaking one or more of these quests lets you express fundamental human qualities in D&D® worlds: indomitability, thirst for power, near bottomless reserves of strength, resourcefulness, determination—and even hubris.

If you decide to pursue one of these quests, talk to your Dungeon Master about what you have in mind. He or she can determine how best to fit it into other elements of the campaign and set an appropriate reward for achieving it, including experience points and perhaps a monetary or magic treasure award. It's up to the DM to determine what obstacles lie in the way to reaching your goal and to give you the opportunity to overcome those challenges.

Each of the descriptions below indicates whether the goal is most appropriate as a major or minor quest. In general, a quest shared with your party is major; a personal one is minor. Many of these quests, especially at lower levels, are minor—they're intended to express the unique outlook, strengths,

and circumstances of your human character (unless everyone in the party has the same history). Some quests have a short-term goal, while others should keep you returning to the wilds—even driving the whole campaign for a time.

Heroic Quests

These quests are appropriate to the beginning of your character's adventuring career. Although limited in the grand scope of the world, they prepare you for more important things to come. Heroic tier quests often focus on personal development, or on the problems of your immediate region.

Breaking Bonds (Minor)

You are either enslaved or indentured, to an individual or to society. Perhaps you were born into servitude, captured in a recent military campaign, or forced to pay off some debt (whether or not you were responsible for it). Your master could be fair or cruel, and your work honorable or intolerable. You are resolved to win your freedom, whatever the cost. You would rather die free than live as a slave.

Your master might be willing to free you if certain conditions are met. If you are indentured, you might buy your freedom if you can come up with the funds. Alternatively, your master might promise to release you on successful completion of some special (and dangerous) mission—assuming you survive. On the other hand, your only hope might be escape, perhaps further complicated by the need to avoid pursuit by creative measures (such as staging your own death).

A party of slaves seeking freedom can make for an interesting campaign. In such a case, completing the quest should earn rewards for all members.

Unjustly Accused (Minor)

You have been charged with, and perhaps convicted of, a crime you did not commit. You might have been

deliberately framed, been a convenient patsy, or taken the blame completely by accident. Whether the accusation is terrible or petty, you cannot bear to have your name and honor tarnished. You are determined to set the record and the matter straight, although you have few if any clues as to the actual perpetrator.

Your culture could offer a framework for clearing your name: Protesting your innocence and pledging some sort of security might allow you limited freedom to set things right. If you are not so fortunate, the first step in your quest could require you to get free of your bonds, perhaps en route to the scaffold. One way or another, achieving this objective will require all your wits and resources.

This could be a major quest, and the basis of a unique campaign, if all the members of your adventuring party were set up for the same crime.

Only One Remains (Minor)

You are the last survivor of your family, village, city, or culture. The others might have died long ago or recently. Were they wiped out in war, killed by some horrible disease, or felled by a massive natural disaster? Perhaps you survived by accident, having been away from home when tragedy struck, or a random factor spared your life, such as being immune to the plague or unnoticed by the attackers. Maybe some deity, or destiny itself, intervened on your behalf.

Whatever happened, you will not let your heritage die, even if you should fall. You might not know where to begin, but you are the only one left to defy the forces that laid low the rest. Those to come—a generation or a millennium from now—will see of what stern stuff their forebears were made.

Although a minor quest, this goal has great scope and can set the campaign's tone. Others in your party might become involved if they have a stake in the resurgence of your line or culture; this situation can transform your personal journey into a major quest.

Paragon Quests

As you move into the paragon tier, your quests push you beyond your homeland or your established base of operations to fight against enemies that threaten entire nations and menace great institutions. The deeds you undertake at this point in your career set the stage for the destiny that you know awaits you.

The Highway of Old (Major)

In the days of the empire of Nerath, a great road linked two human cities. This safe overland route was a source of prosperity as well as pride for both cities, but it was destroyed in the war that ended the empire. Now the wilderness has overgrown the paving stones, fell creatures threaten any who dare the road, and commerce between the cities has become impossible.

Perhaps you are a scion of a noble family or merchant house of either city. During your early adventuring days, you did much to reclaim your home from the encroaching wilderness. Now you turn your gaze outward. Perhaps you will not feel worthy of the name you bear until you restore the greatness of that highway of old. You might simply want to reestablish the road and the commerce it represents to increase your wealth. Or you could be driven by the need to control your surroundings and stem the tide of chaos in the world.

Now you have taken it on yourself to reopen this artery of travel. Doing so will mean fighting back the creatures that prowl the highway, clearing many leagues of thick overgrowth, and repairing a century of damage. Once those tasks are complete, you face the toughest challenge of all: Convincing the cities' inhabitants that they do not endanger their lives by traveling the road once again.

Such a massive undertaking is best tackled as a group, whether each hero's individual motivation is coin, glory, or something else.

Vengeance for the Fallen (Major or Minor)

One of your parents, or another important figure in your life, has been killed by a terrible monster, such as a dragon or a marauding giant. You will not let this crime go unpunished, and by this point in your adventuring career you have earned enough power to make sure of it.

Although you seek vengeance against the perpetrator of this crime, you are determined to show all such powerful monsters that humans will stand up to tyranny, repaying blood with blood. Such a goal is

a matter of honor, but it is also practical: Others will think twice before raiding your lands. To carry out your vengeance against such a mighty enemy will require not only tremendous resolve, but also careful planning and cunning use of resources. You must be wary of excessive pride, which can cause you to over-extend yourself and bring all your effort to naught.

This quest might involve the other members of your party, depending on whether they also honored the slain. Even if they have different reasons for opposing your enemy, your fellow adventurers might share your cause.

Epic Quests

At the epic tier of adventuring, you have reached the pinnacle of what mortals—and even some immortals—can accomplish. You set your sights on the highest goals that can be dreamed, and some that others cannot imagine. Perhaps you began your path with an epic goal in mind, or learned only later of hidden birthrights and prophecies foretold before your birth. You might have formed epic ambitions as you traveled the world and beyond over the course of an adventuring career.

Banish the Scourge (Major or Minor)

Although the Ruler of Ruin has returned to the Abyss in the wake of Nerath's destruction, the great gnoll horde that crushed that empire remains. Their camps stretch as far as the eye can see in the fallen empire's central lands, where slaves labor ceaselessly to serve their evil ends. Even now, a century later, the gnolls make war on any points of civilization's light that attract their attention. They show no signs of leaving—indeed, they seem intent on expanding their presence until the world is one unending, noxious gnoll warren.

Until this blight is dealt with, no human culture can aspire to greatness, and no reclaimed or rebuilt civilization can be considered stable. You intend to clear the path for humanity's resurgence by eliminating the horde of gnolls that blocks it. Whether you raise a great host, perhaps enlisting the aid of powerful creatures or deities, or unleash powerful arcane forces to eradicate their war bands, the human spirit will rise again in your wake.

To clear the way for rebuilding human civilization might be your own minor quest, while others in your party have different and equally personal reasons for destroying or driving the scourge to some far corner of the Abyss. A party composed largely or entirely of human characters might well share the same goal.



Nerath Restored (Major or Minor)

When Nerath fell, all of humanity fell with it. As one of the most powerful humans in the world, you feel the depth of that fall more keenly than most. You are also one of the only mortals capable of doing something about it.

You will see Nerath restored to its former glory, or at least, found a new human empire that spans continents, bridges oceans, and reaches to the sky. In every hamlet and city, on the walls of every keep and castle, indomitable humans will be vigilant against any force that seeks to tear down their accomplishments, whether abyssal, divine, elemental, or something else.

Your whole life has led you to this point. Achieving this ultimate goal might be a minor quest, in that it applies only to you, but it comes as the culmination of a series of quests both major and minor that can span a career, often in the company of your comrades. Such a path can lead naturally to the God-Emperor epic destiny described at the end of this article.

To Slay a God (Major)

Secret cults tell of a cast-out god who lies chained in the depths of the Abyss. As you and your companions relieved its foul worshipers of their miserable lives and petty treasures, you learned that these cults claim their deity is the true creator of humanity. According to those teachings, humans' ultimate purpose is to free this being so that it can resume its rightful dominion over the cosmos and slay the gods who imprisoned it.

Everything you know in your heart to be true rebels against this mythic history as a willful misrepresentation of the gods' justice. Yet these cults continue to spread like noxious but vigorous weeds, taking root in the wilderness among creatures both actively malign and simply dangerous. Their tendrils reach into human cities, spreading lies and corrupting human destiny, but like the hydra's heads,

crushing one coterie of these depraved mortals only causes two more to crop up.

You believe that the only way to halt these heinous cults is to find the prison of this ancient deity, descend into the Abyss, and slay the vile god. The cult's black heart will be stilled that day once and for all. You will need the cooperation of every member of your company—and the assistance of many others besides—to carry out such an ambitious deed.

EPIC DESTINY: GOD-EMPEROR

You place your strong hand on the tiller of the greatest human culture that has ever been built, guiding that ship ever toward the horizon until your will is so ingrained that it sails itself, evermore.

Prerequisite: 21st level, human

As you performed ever greater deeds throughout the cosmos, uniting the scattered humans of the world into a new empire greater even than Nerath, more and more have called you lord—even savior. And as those who look to you for leadership multiply, the whispers begin that you are more than human. Not only are you set apart from mortals, but your destiny is to ascend even further, beyond the petty concerns of the material world. This ascension will mark not only your own greatness, but also that of the civilization you champion.

At first you remain a physical presence in the capital of your realm, guiding your governors and generals with a firm hand, but over time your laws and commandments take on their own life. The leaders of your society increasingly divine your will from this body of knowledge rather than hearing it from your lips, while your focus gradually moves to the planes-spanning affairs of gods and demigods. Eventually, you fade from the world and join their ranks, a



great patron invoked in ceremonies and on holy days, to whom the greatest achievements of your civilization are dedicated.

Living the Destiny

You do not plan to ascend to the Astral Sea in a blinding flash of glory, because you understand that abandoning your empire so suddenly would undo it. A slower transition meets your obligation to those who revere you, as well as giving you time to adjust to the new duties that the gods require of you.

The Temple of Your Dominion: As your empire grew, your citizens built a mighty palace for your abode, where those who seek your advice or your blessing come to listen to your words. You hear their petitions, hand down laws, and admonish them to fight for themselves against adversity. But as time passes, your people require your physical presence less and less, while your thoughts turn to weightier matters. As the centuries pass, you are seen less frequently, though none can say where you go. Eventually, your priests realize that you are present everywhere in your empire; you are its guiding spirit more than its physical ruler. Your ascension, in that hour, is complete.

Level 21: Gifted Ruler

You are recognized by those who follow you as the ultimate embodiment of the empire. You become the physical and spiritual epitome of humanity.

Benefit: You increase two ability scores of your choice by 2 each.

Level 24: Unquenchable Spirit

You are the soul of the empire. Mere physical death cannot put an end to what you have created—or what you have become.

Benefit: Once per day when you start your turn at 0 hit points or fewer, you regain hit points equal to your bloodied value.

Level 26: The Sovereign Will

You speak with the authority of a god. All harken to your every word, and to the words of those you hold closest.

The Sovereign Will God-Emperor Utility 26

Your commanding presence radiates from you to grant authority to your companions.

Encounter ♦ Aura

Minor Action

Personal

Effect: You activate an aura 2 that lasts until the end of your next turn. When you or any ally in the aura makes a Diplomacy or an Intimidate check, instead of rolling a d20, resolve the check as if that character had rolled a 20.

Level 30: Your Protective Wing

Your awareness and guiding hand extend to all who follow you. No enemy will despoil any who fall in your service; you return them to your side where they can be healed, or at least buried with honor.

Benefit: When any ally you can see drops to 0 hit points or fewer, you can teleport that ally to a square adjacent to you as a free action.

About the Author

Jeff Tidball is an award-winning writer and game designer with a roiling wake of stories, board games, card games, and roleplaying games in his rearview mirror. Marquee credits include the *Horus Heresy* board game, the *Pieces of Eight* pirate coin combat game, and the book *Things We Think About Games*. Jeff holds an MFA in screenwriting from the University of Southern California and recently moved to Kansas City to become the CEO of RiverKey Creative, an animation, video production, and interactive design firm. His website is jefftiddball.com, and he spews forth on Twitter as @jefftiddball.

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