For Glory, Nothing More

One morning, a bright light shines on the horizon as if a new dawn were breaking—only a hundred times brighter. A powerful breeze then sweeps across the entire countryside, blowing open doors and lasting more than a minute. The smell of jasmine lingers and then slowly fades away. A new object is now blazing upon the horizon: what appears to be a star, twinkling on the surface of the world. It’s bright enough to see during the day, and it provides a pale blue light all night long, illuminating the darkness yet not interfering with sleep.

What is this new “star”? Is it a hundred miles away, or a thousand? Is it a blessing or a harbinger of doom? Is it magical or divine? Most important of all: Who will be the first to reach it?

Hooks include being hired as part of an expedition, a dream of the star landing the night before it actually does, preventing a rival from reaching the star first, or plain old fame and glory. On their journey to the star, the PCs should encounter hazards along their way, as well as competition in the form of NPCs who will try to thwart the PCs’ advancement. Whether this is malicious or merely friendly opposition is up to you; a mix of both may work best.

The PCs should also encounter groups that fear the star and want to prevent anyone from reaching it, as they believe it is an object of evil. Of course, there are groups that worship the star as well, and they try to prevent anyone from reaching it because they believe it to be sacred. The fun of this plot is that no group actually knows what the star is, yet they will fight one another for various reasons related to the mysterious light.

The true nature of the light source is completely up to you. Keep the focus on the race to be first at the scene. You can do this by having multiple teams in play and letting the PCs gain the lead on one team only to lose it to another.

Artist: Laine Garrett

Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) investigative, isolated area, magic, race, religion, rivalry, travel

Weird Science

A scientist is experimenting on monstrous creatures, creating monster repellents and charms to exert control over them. He needs parts from certain creatures to complete his experiments, but his assistants have run off due to the danger involved. He’s currently looking for new, braver assistants. The PCs may meet him because one of the party members is a monstrous creature from whom he tries to take a sample, run into him in a bar bemoaning his lack of good help, or find themselves in an unexpected fight with a captured creature that escapes its bonds. Once met, the scientist will try to hire the party to help him capture creatures or acquire certain parts and byproducts.

The experimenter will send the PCs after many different creatures, tagging along and offering humorous advice: “Fourth spleen on the left,” “The weak point is in his pinkie,” or, “Hmm, this beast’s sputum tastes like marmalade.” The experimenter always rewards the party well for hunts, but is upset when vital parts or limbs are destroyed. He should be played as an eccentric mad scientist, unaware of the danger he puts others in. Create hunts for creatures that are exotic, or that the group might not usually face in other adventures—you can even run this adventure straight from a book of monsters as a side quest, dropping in a hunt whenever players are absent or you need a quick adventure.

After sufficient monster hunts, the final confrontation of this adventure arc is combat with a large, terrifying, and unique creature. As the final piece of his project, the experimenter needs it alive and has a sedative that can knock it out. The scientist doses the creature early in the combat, but the dose is too weak. Success will require controlling the situation and protecting the scientist until he can get in another shot. The creature should be capable of multiple attacks and will target the experimenter every round if the PCs don’t control the battle well.

Once the creature is defeated, the experimenter offers an extra non-monetary reward to the party, such as fixing an ailment, boosting stats, or providing a formula that grants a monster-based ability.

Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, escort mission, monster, race, tactical planning, travel
Orcs in the Dragon’s Den

A half-orc stumbles into the PCs’ camp in the middle of the night, gravely wounded, and begs for their aid. In exchange for healing, he offers them a golden opportunity to destroy what remains of his tribe—including their chieftain, a vicious killer responsible for numerous recent attacks in the area. He explains that the tribe (which has never accepted him, treating him as the lowest of the low because of his mixed blood) just fought a dragon, evicting it from its lair at the price of many, many orcish lives. They took over the lair, but the tribe has been decimated—and their chieftain is seriously injured. If the PCs strike while the orcs are licking their wounds, they can kill the chieftain and claim the dragon’s hoard. To convince them of his sincerity, the half-orc produces a handful of dragon scales covered in fresh dragon blood.

The half-orc warns the PCs about their first obstacle—scouts on nearby hilltops and around the mouth of the lair—but is unaware of the other two impediments to reaching the orcish chieftain: a rival dragon who wants the lair for himself, but is too young to claim it alone, and the destabilizing effect the battle with the dragon had on the lair’s actual structure.

The first encounter is with the scouts, who must be eliminated before they can sound the alarm. They are spread out, with every scout’s location in view of at least two others, and are adept at their craft. The PCs will need to remove them from the picture quickly, quietly, and without alerting any of their fellows.

Entering the lair complex is the second encounter. While there are few defenders, stealth is still important. Observant PCs may notice that the caverns seem unstable (weakened by blasts of dragon breath), and can take advantage of this to cause a cave-in—provided they don’t mind missing out on the treasure.

In the third encounter, the PCs face the chieftain. This battle should be challenging, as the tribe’s two war shamans are uninjured and ready for trouble, but not insurmountable. Midway through the battle, the cavern complex will begin to crumble, raising two possibilities: Stranding the orcs inside would eliminate them, but striking a bargain with the chieftain might allow the PCs to acquire some of the treasure in exchange for helping the orcs escape.

The Cloud Fortress

While resting in town at the conclusion of an adventure, the PCs hear a commotion in the town square. When they go to investigate, they see a fortress floating in the sky—a fortress which could only have appeared just moments ago.

Upon entering the fortress, they will find that it’s not empty. Rather, it’s full of all manner of extra-planar and elemental creatures. They all seem focused on the keep in the center, which they’re taking turns attacking. The keep looks battered, and is defended by a force of equally battered humans. The humans spot the PCs, motion for them to come inside, and let them into the keep.

The humans explain to the PCs that this structure is a prison, and that it was anchored in the astral plane until one of the creatures unraveled the ritual magic that was holding it there, setting it adrift. The creatures can’t exit the prison because the humans have in place a series of wards holding them within the building. The only way for the creatures to escape is to kill the humans and dispel the wards—setting them loose upon the PCs’ world.

The humans are badly wounded, and have lost too many people to both hold the keep and complete the ritual for creating a new astral anchor. The PCs can help by taking over the fortifications of the keep and holding off the attacking creatures.