

***BUILDING A  
QUEST  
ADVENTURE***



# **Building A Quest**

**An ebook by Joe Dean**

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# INTRODUCTION

or...

## How it all got started...

Over the past 20 years, probably the single most challenging question I get is “What do you do for a living?” Although I’ve gotten better over the years at explaining my adventures verbally, it’s so much easier to just show them (which isn’t usually an immediate option.) For some, seeing an evolutionary progression is helpful...and this introduction is dedicated to that effort.

Thirty two years ago, at the age of nine, I began to take a serious interest in treasure hunts. I chose to use the word *serious* here because it was at this time that I began to spend exorbitant amounts of time thinking about different ways to create clues. I was an insecurely quiet, straight A student who was struggling to find a challenging mental activity that would occupy my time in between assignments in elementary school. I began to think of different ways to mix up words and pictures. I became more fascinated by maps and directions. My teachers were just content that I was sitting quietly.

Once I saw the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* that following year, though, I was inspired like never before. The first scene would forever be burnished on my mind and imagination. I dreamed of excavating tombs and temples, of writing in dead languages and losing myself in history. The next several years were spent attempting to recreate the excitement and thrill I felt watching an archaeologist translate a foreign language on a tattered map as he searched for lost treasure.

At the age of 12, my then six-year-old brother was old enough to be a guinea pig for me and my adventures. I enjoyed creating the hunts and he enjoyed going on them. It was a terrific arrangement. Now, I began introducing makeshift booby traps to my hunts. I began experimenting with different ways to treat paper to make it look old and worn. Most importantly, it was at this time that I began introducing *storylines* to my hunts (more about this later...)

In high school I was finally able to break out of my shell and became extremely involved in student government. Now I finally had the opportunity to try out my hunts on groups of people rather than just my brother, that is). In my sophomore year, I first heard about murder mystery dinners and became quickly intrigued with the entire format. I used all the tricks I developed during my years of designing treasure hunts to host original Murder Mystery evenings for several different groups of people. It was during these years I realized the incredible potential of adding live characters to my hunts.

By the time I had graduated from high school, I had set up well over 100 treasure hunts along with several Murder Mystery events.

College itself consumed most of my time but I still found some to put on an elaborate hunt or two a year (at least one a year for my brother still...). While earning my Bachelor of Arts in Art History, I took several courses of interest (that eventually advanced my hunt designs) such as Japanese and ancient Greek, several archaeology courses, theater production, and studio art. Throughout college, I received phone calls from past participants (or friends of past participants) of my hunts and Murder Mystery dinners; all asking for help with their dinner parties or

organization events. These calls gave birth to Quest Experiences, the company my younger brother and I launched in the summer of 1995.

Through Quest Experiences, we renamed our treasure hunts *quests* in an attempt to express the level of sophistication we were offering. By this time, we were casting actors for roles, working with a costume designer, and purchasing props like fog machines and stage scenery. Most of our clientele were companies looking for something different for their annual BBQ's and Christmas parties, and boy, did they get it!

Simply put, designing these *quests* is my passion.

My hope is that you will see the endless possibilities for creating bigger-than-life adventures for your friends, family, fellow church members, and social organizations. I've included examples from past Quests I've designed and facilitated as well as a provided an actual 'mini' Quest to put on for someone (Chapter 3). I've found the best way to describe what a Quest is to SHOW you one. Let these be a catalyst for your own ideas as you are creating.

PLEASE NOTE: This resource book is FAR from complete. It's meant as a foundation for others to understand what a Quest is and how to begin enjoying the creation process. Periodically I will be posting resource articles on our site to assist in working out bugs as you plan and in general making the experiences as 'over the top' as you want them to be! Visit our site at <http://www.questexperiences.com> for more info.

# Chapter 1

## Where do you begin?

*"It's always best to start at the beginning."*

*Glinda the Good Witch (The Wizard of Oz)*

*"Start at the beginning"*

*"Yes, and when you get to the end, stop."*

*The March Hare and the Mad Hatter (Alice in Wonderland)*

Who could argue with such wisdom?

In the past, when I've been hired by clients to set up a Quest, it's typically not until the actual event that they truly understand what it is that they've paid for. No amount of photographs or slide presentations can fully illustrate a Quest because we're talking about an *experience*. If I've done my job well, the participants forget that what they are going through isn't real...they get absorbed into the world I create and find that it's a LOT of fun!

So...what IS a Quest? Well, the best definition I can provide at the onset is this:

Quest: noun. A fabricated experience designed for the sole purpose of providing someone with an as true to life adventure as possible within the constraints of the theme and resources. This is constructed and executed using any number of tools including (but not limited to) live characters, mail and email, phone calls, storylines and physical activities.

*"So it's like a treasure hunt?"*

Well, that depends on whether or not you WANT it to be a treasure hunt. One of the very first steps in creating a Quest for someone else is that you must come up with the goal for the participant(s). Will they be searching for pirate's treasure? Trying to recover a lost Aztec idol? Those sound like a lot of fun...but let's think beyond that for moment...Why not have them break someone out of jail? Or maybe hunt down an actual vampire?

In a Quest, I attempt to create an adventure through recreating a theme, usually, but not always, historical. For example, if I were designing a pirate quest, I would put the teams smack dab in the middle of an actual pirate town with stage props, lighting, sound effects and live characters walking around. The players would need to actually *place* themselves mentally in that environment in order to move along in their adventure. By speaking to different characters, they would learn as a team of some great adventure just waiting to be undertaken. Perhaps they would hear of a woman who had been kidnapped, or of a treasure that waited to be found. No matter the goal, the teams would actually move throughout the physical world I have created (however elaborate due to budget, or sometimes lack thereof).

*"I don't know...this sounds a lot like one of those Live Role Playing games where everyone gets in costume and pretends..."*

Although Live Role Playing can be a blast for those that enjoy that game format and experience, Quests are very different in two major ways. The most significant difference is that the experience requires the participant(s) to be THEMSELVES. True, you could absolutely set up a Quest within a Live Role Playing game campaign (for those of you LARPer's reading this) where the participants are experiencing the adventure within character. However, one could argue that Quests are just as much fun, if not more, to play as YOURSELF. It's a REAL test to see if YOU have what it takes to be a spy, archeological adventurer, etc.

The second major difference is that the entire experience is fully designed and scripted from beginning to end...but NOT for the person ON the Quest. The illusion is that the adventure is organically happening. The careful, behind the scenes planning allow for elaborate storylines, narrow escapes and intricate plots connected to real problem solving that you just can't accomplish if everyone was 'improvising as they went along.'

As I describe details for designing a Quest, I'll be referring to two different large scale Quests that I've designed through my adventure company Quest Experiences: *The Search for the Holy Grail* and *Nosferatu*.

In a quest I designed for Halloween, entitled *Nosferatu*, my guests traveled through the streets of Crimson Hollow, a fictitious Transylvanian town I imagined. They literally ran from vampires as they searched for the town's few survivors in hopes of learning how to overcome Luther, the Head Vampire. They met a priest in a church, collected some bones from an old graveyard, and even plucked some fur off a sleeping werewolf!

In *In Search of the Holy Grail*, guests worked together to reclaim the infamous chalice for Camelot. They traveled throughout my own English countryside facing wizards, knights, and even King Arthur himself as they raced against time to be the first team to recover the Holy Grail.

One might guess that these were all for children's parties, right? Wrong. In fact, 90% of my quests through Quest Experiences have been EXCLUSIVELY for adults (18-60 years old).

So, how do you get started?

Indulge me for a minute. I promise it will not hurt, much. I want you to remember a time (usually after reading a great book or seeing an exciting movie) when you wished you could have been one of the characters. Have you always wanted to be a knight and rescue a princess from a dragon? Perhaps steal secret foreign plans to avoid a third world war? Ever want to be Indiana Jones or perhaps a Jedi Knight in *Star Wars*?

I will wait while you do this.

Waiting...

Okay, do you have your character? Good. If not, well lie and tell me you do. Chances are that if you felt inspired to be that character, then others have as well and the moviemakers and/or writer did his/her job. Through your quests, you are going to give your guest(s) an opportunity to live out an exciting adventure. How are you going to do that? I'm glad you asked.

## THEMES AND STORYLINES

The theme and storyline will become your lifeline. If your lifeline turns into a flat line, what happens? The whole body is dead and lifeless. It will not matter how much muscle you may have developed in your legs, if the body is flat lining, then you ain't goin' nowhere. All your clues, characters, **everything** will revolve around keeping your theme and storyline alive.

"Ok, I've worked with themes before...but what do you mean by a storyline?" Once again, I am glad you asked. You are going to be asking your participants to go on an incredible mission. What mission? Well, that is your storyline. Within your theme, you need an overall exciting goal for your guests to attempt (and ultimately succeed in) achieving. Are they looking for pirates' treasure? Are they trying to save a French Aristocrat during the French Revolution? Are they trying to smuggle war plans across enemy lines during the American Civil War? Get the idea? All clues and characters will lead and help them on this mission.

You do not need to decide upon a theme and storyline yet. However, it is IMPERATIVE that you have both BEFORE a single decision is made in designing your quest.

Below are several considerations in choosing a theme and storyline:

First, choose something that inspires YOU. That's right, YOU. If you find it exciting, you can make it exciting for others. Simple truism.

Keep your participants in mind. Is it something that THEY could be interested in? (Although, my experience shows that EVERY theme is interesting if presented the right way.)

Keep in mind your surroundings. Will you have access to a wooded area? Perhaps you'll want to search for Bigfoot or discover an ancient idol in India. Do you have access to the top of a tall building? Sounds like a great place to meet a British Secret Service agent.

Although props and costumes aren't imperative for a successful Quest, it might be a good idea to look around and see what kind of items you have access to. For instance, the fundraiser I mentioned above chose the quest, *In Search of the Holy Grail*. The benefit was being held in a beautiful mansion that had lots of wood and old European style furniture, giving it a possible medieval feel. The theme fit the surroundings and it did not take a lot of decorating!

## FORMATS

A quest can be enjoyed in numerous formats.

1. A Quest for an individual. In its purest form, a Quest is an adventure for an individual. They are the easiest to set up because you don't have to worry about 'resetting' any of your interaction stations (more on that later.)
2. Dinner Party – for groups of 4 to 4000 where guests come to enjoy a meal and an activity – your Quest.

3. Car Rally – where teams are in cars. Ideas and suggestions for this format are described later, but the basic goal is to arrive at a final destination after completing the mission over a certain area of a city or larger geographical area.
4. Combination of the car rally and dinner party is when participants do not know where dinner will be held. All guests meet at a predetermined site, the Quest begins, and when they have succeeded, they find the location of the final destination where dinner is being served.
5. Progressive dinner. This can make for an exciting evening if organized well. Each course is served at a separate home or location in the normal progressive dinner style. (A progressive dinner is commonly experienced with a group of guests traveling from location to location, eating one course at each stop.) However, the Quest unfolds as they figure out which house/location is next. For example, if you chose a pirates' treasure hunt for your theme, you could have your guests meet a mapmaker somewhere in the city who will give/sell them a map and tell them the beginning of a tale of sunken treasure. This map leads to a location where hors d'oeuvres are served. When the guests leave for their next course, they go to another location on their map where they meet the ghost of a pirate who sank with the ship and learn that he knows where the treasure was secretly hidden before the ship sank. Then off to the next location where salad is served. The guests learn more about the sunken treasure as they travel from location to location, utilizing clues they gather along the way to learn the whereabouts of each course's location.
6. Your format could simply be a party and everyone will participate in the Quest at the party's location.
7. A more elaborate Quest could be expanded over several days. For instance, when my brother graduated from high school, I planned a two-week Quest for him to the theme of Batman. During these two weeks he got to live the life of Bruce Wayne as he met different characters for lunch, received phone calls at home and work, and even outwitted villains in order for his high school transcripts for graduation to be properly handled (my storyline).

Let your format enhance your theme and storyline.



# Chapter 2

## Building the Adventure

Once you have your skeleton (theme and storyline), it is time to put flesh on it: the tasks and obstacles your guests must overcome to achieve their goal. Simply imagine a movie that would epitomize your theme. What would absolutely HAVE to be present in the movie to make it true to the theme (or the movie itself, if you chose a specific movie as your theme)?

In *Nosferatu*, my brother and I made a list of things we felt the guests must experience to walk away from the event with the solid feeling that they had just experienced an adventure battling vampires. We came up with the following:

- Meeting a Head Vampire (one that controls the others)
- Defeating this Head Vampire as the climax
- Meeting a character that has been bitten by a vampire
- Exploring a graveyard
- Consulting a priest
- Visiting Transylvania
- Being chased by vampires
- Discovering a cure for vampire transformation
- Translating some Latin text.

You need to create a list like this with your theme. Notice I did not use nouns, but verbs. I never mentioned blood, fangs, or bats. These are not actions, although they are great for building the mood (discussed at a later time). The actions are what will lead your guests on their mission.

To further illustrate, in *Nosferatu* we needed to come up with an overall experience wherein our guests could live out all the above-mentioned actions (as many as we could, that is). We set up the warehouse like a small town in Transylvania (equipped with road signs, the works). Certain parts were sectioned off with black tarp. We explained that each team of four would have to enter this 'small town', complete three thoroughly explained tasks, confront the head vampire in his lair, and then return to the dining area. We told them that vampires had plagued the town for decades and the only survivors left in town are in hiding. The three tasks were to find out the following:

1. How to keep from falling under the hypnotic spell of the Head Vampire (Luther).
2. How to steal the power away from Luther
3. How to escape from his lair once you have done the above.

Sure enough, there were characters in town that knew the above information, but they were difficult to find and did not readily talk without a favor or two being performed for them. For instance, one female character had been bitten by a vampire and laid sick in bed. The doctor, a character I had stationed with the sick person volunteer, said he needed certain items to make a serum in order to combat the vampire transformation. This same girl was inside Luther's lair when she was bitten and somehow escaped through a secret exit. She agreed to tell the team

where the secret exit was if they would just gather the items on the list (one of the items called for exploring a graveyard - remember from our list of actions?).

As you lay out your actions, you want a balance between those that the teams are specifically told to do (i.e. find Luther's lair, discover a secret exit) with ones that they discover on their own as they work through their mission (i.e. retrieving the items for the sick girl). This creates a feeling of self-accomplishment as they use their problem solving skills to move ahead in the adventure. You see, as I initiated the Quest, I told them that they had to enter the town and that they had three goals...how they achieved those goals was up to them. Now, you can probably guess that there was only one way to find out certain information, but it was not perceived this way by the teams. It was up to the team to find the woman. They were the ones that thought of befriending her. They were the ones that found out that Luther himself had bitten her and that she had been in his lair. Their questions led to her asking them the favor. They earned the information. Make sense?

Do your best to make sure that you have a strong variety in the activities you choose. For instance, with the pirate theme, it might get monotonous if your actions were finding a map, finding a cannonball, and then finding the treasure. Instead, maybe have them gamble with a pirate, steal some deeds from a colonist, and then hire a crew to sail for an island. Get the idea?

## CLIMAX

Decide what the most exciting of all the tasks would be. We chose defeating the Head Vampire as the most exciting. With very rare exception, the final challenge that the guests take on needs to be the most exciting. They will need to utilize all the skills and knowledge they have collected along their mission. For instance, I had a vampire that would allow participants to enter Luther's lair only once. This means that the team had only ONE chance to defeat him, so they had better make sure that they had done all their 'homework' before they confronted him. This was the climax and tested that they had done what they were supposed to do beforehand. If a team discovered how to keep from being hypnotized and learned how to steal his power but failed to learn where the secret exit was, they would have been trapped inside with a very angry vampire!

In *In Search of the Holy Grail*, the climax came when the teams found Morgana's lair and faced her and her magic. During their journey, they learned what to do and say to combat her spells as she tried to perform them. Once Morgana realized her magic was not affecting them, she threw them in her dungeon, where the teams met the character that was guarding the Grail itself. They befriended him and he let them escape with the Grail and their lives. Definitely a memorable ending!

# Chapter 3

## Characters

When I began experimenting with murder mystery evenings, I really enjoyed creating the characters to set the desired mood. I tried my best to create an open arena without rules, tapes to play, game boards, clue cards, or prepackaged scripts. I merely invited eight to ten guests under the pretense that someone would die before the evening was over. I staged, as realistically as I could, an actual murder (it was all arranged and rehearsed), and then let everyone solve the mystery using whatever skills they brought with them. I really wanted them to feel like it was real and let them experience solving a real murder. As I struggled to come up with a diabolical murder that would challenge the guests, yet leave everyone saying, "Oh, I can't believe I didn't catch that..." I began to see the power of creating characters. You see, not all of the guests for these evenings were really 'guests.' I always had a small group who was 'on my payroll.' I learned to control these characters to say and do whatever I needed them to in order to create the perfect murder. I was able to write a murder mystery as controlled as a novelist while the guests marveled at how 'everything just seemed to come together.' When I transferred this idea to my Quests, a brand new dimension was added.

### WHY INSERT CHARACTERS?

Do not let this addition intimidate you. This is what everyone will be talking about long after your dinner party, fundraiser, or youth event. Characters may not seem worth the effort at first, however, if you were creating an exciting adventure with a storyline, characters are essential and the return for your effort is astronomical. The following are a few characters that I have used in *Dark Fortune*, a pirate themed Quest I did for Sam's Club, and their part in the adventure:

Bartholomew was a drunken pirate in a tavern. He overheard an argument in the Captain's Quarters on board the S.S. Dark Fortune just before it mysteriously sank. Although a bit on the incoherent side, he does not mind telling the teams whatever he knows as long as they keep his rum glass full.

The barmaid was named Clarise. She did not tolerate any drunkenness in her tavern and threatened all offenders with a free night in the local jail. She seemingly did not know anything about anything, except how to keep people's glasses full.

From Willoughby, the mapmaker that sold the teams the map, they learned of a crazy woman who mumbled about an argument she was in with the Captain aboard the SS Dark Fortune. She, they also found out, was being held in a prison cell for the time being.

The crazy woman (who turned out to be mute from the shock of the sinking experience) was named Rose. Rose knew the actual longitude on their map of where the lost treasure was located. However, how would they get to speak to her, she was in prison?

The prison was not coincidentally right next to the tavern...or NOT coincidentally. Teams figured out that if they made enough commotion in the bar, Clarise would make

good on her word and summon a soldier to take them to a cell in the prison area, where, it just so happened, they would end up sharing a cell with good ol' Rose.

This entire chain of events took about 15 minutes for the teams to experience, from when they first buy the map, to meeting Bartholomew, to learning where Rose was, to getting thrown in jail, to finding out the information that they needed, to even escaping from prison soon after. Now, not a single character told any team that if they acted drunk in the tavern they would get to find out the longitude, the teams figured it out for themselves, and that made all the difference in their adventure. If done properly, each team will finish feeling as though their own experience was unique to everyone else's and that if they did it over, they could have done it entirely differently. You know better, but they do not.

## CHOOSING YOUR CHARACTERS

You'll choose your characters when you are designing your Quest. They come out of necessity. You'll find that at some point you'll need to give your teams a map. Well, how will you give them that map? It looks like you might need a mapmaker in town to sell them one...and slowly your world/community builds.

Ideally, you will have an unlimited supply of professional actors (like the movie *The Game* with Michael Douglas) but that is likely not the case. I have worked with casts of 1 to 30. The number of characters you have does not determine the level of your success, what you do with them does. I've found a good ratio of characters to players is one character for every two teams (this concept does not apply if there is only one person/team going through the adventure.) Now, I have not said one character for every two participants, which brings us to the subject of teams.

## TEAMS

I have planned Quests for crowds and individuals over the years. I have experimented with many ways of grouping people together. This is what I have found to be CONSISTENTLY true for all age groups:

A single participant – If he were the only one participating in the Quest, I would still advise having someone going along with him, even if that means you. Funny things happen. Exciting things happen. It can be disappointing for someone to laugh and/or get scared all alone.

Teams of two – This can potentially work very well for smaller groups. I have found, though, when a disagreement occurs about what to do or where to go and there is no one to 'break the tie' the pair may return a bit on edge.

Teams of three – Not ideal at all. It definitely breaks the ties, but it also creates the 'third wheel' effect in a most powerful way. Two people end up getting more excited than the third, leaving the third out of several, if not all decisions. When all is said and done, your participation ratio will drop from 100% to 66%.

Teams of four – The best for groups of 15 or more. The dynamic of four seems to solve all problems. Although there is an even number of votes when deciding on certain actions, the individuals tend to be more open minded to possibilities when there are more people involved.

No one is left out, for if two members are speaking to each other, two others are able to engage in a conversation of their own.

Teams of five and larger – Forget it. Enter the ‘committee’ effect. Teams hardly achieve anything as a group because they cannot agree on any action. Factions within the group form and things can get ugly.

You could very well create a Quest that is so fantastically different, that some of the above guidelines might not apply.

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Now, where were we...oh yes, character to team ratio. Again, an ideal number to try for is one character for every two teams. Why? Mostly for the sake of traffic. By traffic, I am referring to the actual movement of your guests on your Quest. This is deceptively more important than it might seem at first glance. You see, if you have a character that demands five minutes of every teams’ playing time, and you have 10 teams playing, that leaves 50 minutes straight of this character talking to teams, one team at a time. Imagine the chaos of four teams trying to ask a single character multiple questions, all at the same time! Now, if this character is one of the first you would like your guests to meet, that would mean that at about the time one team is finishing up their quest, another team is still in line waiting to speak to their first character. If you aren’t able to meet this ratio, it’s not a deal breaker...there are LOTS of ways to work around it. I’ve designed Quests before with NO live characters. These are only guidelines.

## FINDING PEOPLE TO PLAY CHARACTERS

Depending on your resources, this can be a very challenging task. Let me dispel a couple of fears first. The best people to play your characters are not necessarily trained actors. It depends entirely on the personality of the character that you want to bring to life. There have been numerous times when I needed to create a character entirely around what I thought a certain person could pull off, because a severe lack of volunteers. In no way, however, am I insinuating that the quality of the character suffered from it. Most of the actors I’ve hired were not actors at all, but rather personality types who enjoyed having fun for a little bit of cash. If I needed a boisterous barmaid, I simply found that “character” (or someone that COULD be that character) in my life and asked them to participate. You would be surprised how many people would love to participate when you put it in the right light. With few exceptions, I have not had problems finding enough people to play my characters (some even had a hard time accepting money for their time because of the great fun they had! A few individuals actually refused once the event was over.)

Another thing to clarify is the degree of difficulty involved. In your own mind, you have to arrange the relationships of your entire little world...who knows what and to what degree. Where certain things are hidden. How long. When. Why. How. AHHHH!!! However, your characters do not. This is worth repeating. Your volunteers/actors do not have to know anything beyond what their own character would know, which is usually very little. I found out early on that the actors get confused about what information they were and were not allowed to release to the teams. They actually knew too much. The best thing is to tell each actor what he needs to know for his specific task only. This way, there is only a fact or two to remember. For example, the only instructions that I gave to Clarise, the barmaid in the previous example, was that teams would be coming into her tavern and that she needed to treat them like customers.

In addition, at some point in serving them, warn them about getting drunk in her tavern and about the possibility of spending the night in jail over it. I also told her that if teams DID cause a ruckus, then she needed to follow through with her threat, and call a soldier of the neighboring prison to take them away. She literally knew NOTHING MORE, which is exactly what Clarise would probably have known if she had actually existed. The actress playing Clarise had a great time enjoying her role, watching teams trying to act drunk and getting a little rowdy attempting to get themselves thrown in jail. It was not until after the Quest was all over, when all the actors got together, that they got a chance to compare notes to figure out what exactly happened. Everyone had fun telling their fellow cast members what their crucial piece to the puzzle was.

So, who would qualify as a potential actor/actress? Family members (young and old), friends, co-workers, casual acquaintances, anyone and everyone. It depends entirely on your characters. Preferably someone reliable and who is quick on their feet. It is okay to have a volunteer who is a real stick in the mud...providing you give them a character that would fit that personality! See what I am getting at? Create the world with what you have.

### TRAINING YOUR ACTORS/VOLUNTEERS

Communication is the key. Once you have approached your potential volunteer character, set a time over coffee when the two of you can be alone without distractions. Prepare for this meeting ahead of time so you will know everything you need to say, and ONLY what you need to say. Remember, the less they know, the easier it is for them and chances are the more successful they will be. If they want to know more, tell them enough to satisfy their curiosity without giving away too much. Inform them that when the event is over you would be more than happy to explain the entire story.

Write it all down for them. Make it clear on a single sheet of paper everything that you are discussing with them. They can reassure themselves that no matter how nervous, that they know exactly what is expected of them and they only need to know their small part.

Make sure they understand that they need to be ON TIME, no matter what time you set. Being late, even if only minutes, will not be an option. Have them arrive IN COSTUME, if possible, ready to go. If they need help with costumes, then make sure that they have what they need according to your expectations for the character.

Okay, so you have chosen your volunteers/actors and they understand exactly what they are supposed to do and what relevant information they possess that the teams will need. However, how quickly should they reveal this information? Would it be best to have a character simply walk up to a team and blatantly tell them a key piece of the story? Since more than likely there will be more than one team competing, I developed The Reward System. This is described as having all your characters in an initial state of a severe lack of awareness and interest in the teams that are invading their town/world. Therefore, it is up to the teams to initiate the conversations, to figure out how to 'get to know the character.' The stronger the effort that the actor feels the team is making to really try to get into the story, the more quickly the actor will reveal what he knows. For instance, if a team walked up to the drunken pirate Bartholomew in the above example and just started saying things like "Can you tell me how we can win this treasure hunt?" then he might respond by passing out on them. However, if the same team came in, sat down at his table, and told Clarise to pour a glass for everyone at the table (including old Bart), I think they would have Bart's attention. The way to penalize a team is to

waste their time. The way to reward them is to give them exactly what they need quickly. Remember the former example from *Nosferatu* about the sick girl who needed certain items to combat her vampire transformation? Well, what I didn't mention earlier was that there was a doctor that was guarding her bed making sure that she got her rest and that she didn't have any visitors. One team, when stopped by this doctor, had a member that thought quickly and immediately rustled up some fake tears and explained to the doctor that the sick girl was her sister and they had some important news from their dying father. The actor that played the doctor thought that that kind of quick thinking was worth rewarding and let them through without any more delaying. This team got the most out of the adventure and, not coincidentally, was the first team to finish.

## SOME FINAL NOTES

Do your best to have a variety of characters' personality types. Even if all your characters are pirates, they can have different personalities. A big gruff type, a small weasel/pick-pocket, a compulsive liar, a drunk, a scam artist, a stutterer, etc. Perhaps you could have a tavern keeper, the head of a brothel, a couple colonists, some Spanish soldiers, a sea captain, a couple children....let your variety create your realism. In real life, there are all types of people. Your Quest should reflect that reality.

Name all your characters. Even if their names are never mentioned, it will help the actor/volunteer be more convincing if he/she feels like their character actually exists. It will also help you as you are planning and creating.

A character does not have to have anything to do with what the participants need to finish their mission, goal or Quest, too. In *Dark Fortune*, I had two college students who did nothing but roam the streets of the small town dueling each other. They knew nothing about the storyline or what the teams were trying to accomplish. They merely continued fighting every time they saw they had an audience. Sometimes they chose a frequented pathway to block for a couple of minutes just to add an obstacle for the teams. It did wonders for adding atmosphere. Another character was held in leg shackles near a much-frequented part of town. Above his head was a sign that read "Liar." I explained to this character that his sole job was to stop teams and try to delay them, typically by trying to elicit help from his bonds. Despite the sign, you would be surprised at how much time the teams wasted with this person. Halfway through the Quest, most of the teams had caught on to the fact that he actually didn't know anything and was only a distraction. He was probably the most memorable and talked about character of the entire Quest.

# Chapter 8

## Building Your First Quest

Ok, enough theory...let's start creating a Quest already, shall we?

This final chapter will step you through the creation of a VERY simple Quest. It's very short and not very complex (as Quests go, that is...). However, once you see step through the process and set up our example adventure, you'll have a much better understanding of what a Quest is and their potential for REAL life adventure for you and your family and friends. It's a working Quest that you can actually set up for someone (or use it as an episode of sorts within a larger Quest you design yourself.)

Let's begin with a theme. For the sake of relate ability, I'm going to choose an Indiana Jones style, dirty art dealer encounter adventure. For the sake of illustration, let's set it up for our good friend 'Bob.' Bob's a good natured guy who likes to have fun and who's a big Indiana Jones fan, which is a bonus for us (which helped pick our theme.) It's Bob's birthday and I want to give Bob a unique experience for finding his way to his surprise birthday party. All he knows is that I asked him to reserve the night for me and that I have something special planned for him. Although I've designed some Quests that take weeks to experience, this particular experience will take approximately an hour for Bob.

The following is a narrative to explain exactly what will happen to our friend Bob that night. Of course, some variables might be a little different based on some minor choices that Bob makes, however the overall story and experience will remain the same.

### *The Hand Off*

*On the Wednesday before the Saturday night party, Bob received a mysterious package in the mail, with postage from Honduras. Inside was a small, decorative gold box and a short note that simply said "I doubt I'll be able to make the delivery...you're probably going to have to take it to the buyer for me. I'll contact you later. Jared." Along with the message was some scribbles that Bob couldn't make out – perhaps some kind of code?*

*Puzzled by the package, Bob holds onto it and takes it to work with him, showing his co-workers the gold box and the note. Knowing his birthday was only days away, he begins to guess that it has something to with it. He approaches his friends, too, but no one fesses up to knowing anything about it.*

*Now remember, we arranged in advance to take Bob out for his birthday so he's expecting a casual hang out time that evening...little does he know that a party is waiting for him. That Saturday morning, Bob gets a call on his cell phone. It's Jared. Jared explains that he's still delayed in Central America and can't make the trade. Bob is confused at first as he has no idea who Jared is or why he pulled Bob into his business. Jared then explains that Bob will need to meet the buyer at 4:00 pm at a designated spot about 15 minutes from Bob's home and that in return, the buyer will give him an envelope containing further instructions. Realizing that 4:00 is*



coincidentally the time that we were scheduled to meet up with him for his birthday, Bob puts the pieces together and realizes that we're behind it all.

Playing along, Bob says that he'll agree to make the delivery to the buyer. Jared thanks Bob, but not before warning him that the buyer, known only as The Doctor, is a bit 'rough' and that Bob should be a little careful when dealing with him. He then explains to Bob that he needs to first go to a drop off point to pick up the translator code for the message that Jared originally sent. It turns out that The Doctor prefers to authenticate all messengers by requiring passcodes for all transactions. Jared gives Bob a phone number to call The Doctor directly to find out where the keycode will be delivered.

A little nervous, Bob hangs up and begins to dial the number for The Doctor. When the other line picks up, a deep voice answers and Bob explains the call he received. The Doctor says that he doesn't like last minute changes and is a little reluctant to continue with the transaction. He finally agrees and details a park in the city and a specific park bench. He explains that he'll have one of his 'men' drop off the key code there by 3:00 that afternoon.

Bob, a little excited now, begins to plan his day, making sure he gets to the park at a little after 3:00. Once there, he finds the exact park bench described by The Doctor and reaches underneath as instructed. Sure enough, he finds a small envelope which he nonchalantly tucks in his pocket and heads back to his car. Upon opening the envelope, he removes a small piece of paper with scribble marks similar to those he saw on the letter originally sent by Jared. Next to each scribble is a letter of the alphabet. With this in hand, Bob is able to translate the original note to reveal the phrase "Crockett fell at the Alamo." Not sure if it meant anything, Bob committed it to memory just in case.

At 4:05, Bob arrives at the meeting place described by Jared to hook up with The Doctor, an outdoor café. Bob was a few minutes late because he had some trouble finding parking. After The Doctor warily warns Bob that he's not accustomed to be kept waiting, he asks Bob for the passcode. Bob says "Crockett fell at the Alamo." With this, The Doctor smiles and asks for the box and Bob hands it to him.

The Doctor begins to hand Bob a sealed envelope while relishing the view of his new treasure in his hands. Before he completely hands it over to Bob, though, his face turns to a puzzled frown and puts the envelope pack in his pocket. There's something about the treasure that isn't right. "This is a fake! You honestly tried to pass off a fake?" The Doctor stares down Bob while Bob fumbles to figure out what to say next. "Are you trying to double cross me? Did you think that I wouldn't notice?" The Doctor continues to drill Bob.

Thinking quick, Bob gets the idea to call Jared (Jared's number still in Bob's phone from the call earlier in the day.) Bob explains to Jared the situation and Jared asks to be put on speaker as Jared speaks "Hey Doc! Well, you can't blame a guy for tryin'! Alright, I put the real box in the planter 10 feet from where you're sitting. I arranged for the real one to be placed there earlier this afternoon. Go easy on Bob, he wasn't wise to the switch."

With this, The Doctor walks over to the planter as described by Jared and finds an identical box. He examines it cautiously, then seems relieved at what he holds in his hands. He then walks over to Bob, hands him the envelope he took out earlier and smiles. "I can never trust that scoundrel, but he always delivers..." He hands Bob the first box (the fake) and says "Here, you

*can keep this, too. Consider it a souvenir for the day..." and walks away on the crowded sidewalk.*

*Bob opens the envelope and in it are directions to the location where his surprise birthday party is. Upon arriving at the party, everyone is anxious to greet him...and he's anxious to find us to ask how we arranged such a cool experience!*

Now...let's explain how to pull it off!

What you'll need:

- Print out the documents in Appendix A. There you'll find notes for the volunteers playing Jared and The Doctor. Also, you'll find the note that gets mailed along with the key code that your adventurer will find in the park (or other location of your choice.)
- Read through the two character sheets so that you fully understand what the two volunteers are expected to do in case they have any questions. Also, in the appropriate spaces on the character sheets, fill in the appropriate blanks that are specific to your city (where your adventurer will find the coder and where the hand off will take place, the times, etc.)
- Two cheap dollar store jewelry boxes (two identical ones – preferably ones that are decorative and have some weight to them.)
- Some gold spray paint
- An envelope with a note to hand to the adventurer from The Doctor at the end of the hand off (this one is optional.)

To Do:

- Spray paint the two small boxes with the gold spray paint (a couple coats for extra gloss.)
- Take one of the boxes and wrap it in a mailing box, along with the note from Jared (from Appendix A)
- Find two different volunteers to play Jared and The Doctor. It's preferable that your two volunteers are NOT known by your adventurer, to make the experience more 'real.' Hand the instruction sheets from Appendix A to each of your respective volunteers and explain their parts.
- PRACTICE with your two volunteers in advance so that they feel comfortable. You want them to be natural with it.
- A week before your adventurer is to experience the Quest, arrange for them to receive the package with the gold box and the note (leaving it on their front porch, having someone strange hand deliver it to their workplace, mailing it via US postal, etc.)

Voila! You're all set. Ready to start the adventure.

On the day of the Quest, make sure your Jared volunteer calls your adventure as described. Also, make sure that you place the coder paper (inside an envelope optional) at the spot you told Jared to explain on the phone BEFORE the time also detailed.

Arrange for your Doctor volunteer to arrive at the hand off location you've chosen early so that you can answer any last minute questions and so that you can find a safe place to watch the fun. Also, make sure that you hide the second gold box at in a safe place near where the hand off will take place. Finally, call your Jared volunteer (who's awaiting your call) to explain exactly where you placed the second gold box so that he can detail the location in his phone conversation.

Once your adventurer arrives, you're all set to watch the fun. Once The Doctor leaves, you can either choose to reveal yourself, or stay hidden in case you have something planned (per the note you had The Doctor hand them.)

It's an amazing experience, with little set up. It takes a lot of written 'words' to explain the scenario, but when it's played out, it's really quite simple...to set up. You're adventurer will be have a great time, even through the awkwardness of seemingly handing the dirty art dealer a fake!

For added fun, consider the following extra ideas:

- Have a big guy dressed like a thug stand behind your Doctor character the entire time. They don't need to say a word, only look menacing.
- Videotape the experience so that your adventurer can watch it later

In the weeks to come, I'll be offering more scenarios, storylines and even some adventure props to help you get started creating more adventures.

Now a challenge for YOU...set up the Quest and see how exciting it is setting up REAL life adventures!

# Appendix A

There are four separate sheets of paper to print out.

1. Character sheet for your Jared volunteer – Familiarize yourself with the instructions. Make sure you detail exactly when they are to call your adventurer and when they can expect a call from you on that day detailing the exact location of the second gold box (so that they can await the other phone call from your adventurer soon after.)
2. Character sheet for your Doctor volunteer – Familiarize yourself with the instructions. You may want to practice with them a little beforehand so that they understand (and remember) their part. Additionally, make sure you detail on the sheet exactly where you'll hide the coder piece of paper (having scouted out a location in advance.)
3. Note to accompany gold box mailing – For added fun, you might consider rewriting the note in personal handwriting (including the coding.) Although not necessary, it will have a realistic feel to the delivery.
4. Decoder to be found by your adventurer that day. This can be put in an envelope if desired, but not necessary. If placing it outside, you might consider placing it inside a sandwich baggie so that it stays dry. **MAKE SURE THAT YOU DON'T HIDE THE CODER WHERE OTHERS WILL SEE YOU OR THERE IS A CHANCE OF IT BEING TAKEN!!!** The Quest hinges on that coder being there when your adventurer arrives to get it (which is why it's suggested to place the coder at the last possible hour before it's found.)

# Jared

Thank you for volunteering to play a character in *The Hand Off* adventure! There are three separate phone conversations that make up your portion of the adventure.

Phone Call #1: The call to the adventurer. You will call \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of adventurer*) on \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*) at exactly \_\_\_\_\_ (*time.*) In that phone conversation, you will say the following:

“Hey, this is Jared. Did you get my package? Listen, I desperately need you to help save my skin. I promised to deliver that gold box I stole from an Meso-American temple here in Honduras to a buyer on \_\_\_\_\_ (*date of the adventure.*) I ran into trouble here and I still haven’t been able to leave the country. If that box isn’t delivered to the buyer by that time, I’m a dead man. Will you help me?”

Don’t proceed until they agree. Once they do, say

“Perfect. This is what you’ll do. I only know the buyer as The Doctor, as it would seem he likes his anonymity. Here’s his phone number \_\_\_\_\_ (*phone number for volunteer playing The Doctor*). You’ll need to call him to ask him where you can find the coder. You see, he’s a little ‘cautious’ and requires all exchanges to begin with a coded message, for security reasons. Just tell him that you’re making the exchange instead of me, he’ll explain where he’ll have the coder placed. Then, get the coder and translate the message that I sent. That is what he’ll need before he’ll deal. Understand?”

Make sure they understand and, just before you hang up, say “And...uh...be careful, eh?”

Phone Call #2 – The call from the person setting up the adventure just before the actual hand off is to take place. They will call detailing the location that they will have hidden a gold box. Write it down so that you can accurately relay the information in a call that will soon follow from the adventurer.

Phone Call #3 – The frantic call from the adventurer during the hand-off. You see, in the adventure story, you sent them a fake and tried to have them pass it off to the buyer. They will have gotten caught and will call you to find out what to do. They could be in any number of states when they call (worried, angry, sheepish, etc.) Simply reply with “Put me on so that The Doctor can hear, too.” Once you know they both can hear, say:

“Hey Doc! Well, you can’t blame a guy for tryin’! Alright, I put the real box (*detail here the location you wrote down from Phone Call #2*). I arranged for the real one to be placed there earlier this afternoon. Go easy on Bob, he wasn’t wise to the switch.” The person playing The Doctor will walk over to the location you detail and say “You’re a scoundrel, Jared, but you always deliver” at which point you reply with “Of course. Hey, \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of person on adventure*) no hard feelings, eh?” Then hang up.

# The Doctor

Thank you for volunteering to play a character in *The Hand Off* adventure! There are two separate interactions that make up your portion of the adventure.

The Phone Call – You will receive a phone call early on the day of the adventure. The adventurer will call you explaining that they will be making the hand off that you are expecting to take place with Jared. They should also explain that they need to know where they can find the coder for the exchange. When they call and explain the situation, say:

“I don’t like last minute changes...but I’m really looking forward to getting my hand on the piece. I’ll have one of my associates drop off the coder sometime before \_\_\_\_\_ (*earliest time that adventurer can pick up coder*) at \_\_\_\_\_ (*exact spot where the coder will be placed.*) Once you have it, meet me at \_\_\_\_\_ (*exact location where the hand off will take place.*) Understand?”

Once they affirm they got the information, hang up.

The Actual Hand Off – You will be waiting at the location you explained in your phone conversation to them EARLY so that you are there before they arrive. Once there, understand where the person setting up the adventure hides the gold box so that you can retrieve it later during the interaction. In your pocket will probably be an envelope with a note (if the person setting up the adventure has something for you to give the adventurer at the end of the exchange.)

When the adventurer approaches, they will say “Crockett fell at the Alamo” at which time you will look serious and ask “Do you have the item?” Do not speak to them UNTIL they say the Crockett line.

When they give it to you, look happy at first, but then carefully examine the gold box they give you and turn your smile to a face of concern. Then look up at the adventurer and say

“It’s a fake! Did you really think that you could fool me!”

Wait for them to squirm a little. Then say in an angry tone

“I’m going get Jared for this...the question is, what do I do about you?”

If they don’t already suggest it themselves, tell them that it would be a good idea for them to call Jared for some answers. They will have a short conversation with Jared, while you continue to look angry. The adventurer will then hold up the phone so that you can hear Jared explain where he hid the ‘real’ gold box. Go over to the location (it will be the place that the person setting up the location hid it earlier) and pull it out. Examine it carefully then smile calling out to Jared (still on the phone)

“You’re a scoundrel, Jared, but you always deliver.”

Continue smiling at the box until the adventurer ends their conversation with Jared. At this time hand the adventurer the envelope (if the person setting up the adventure has one for you to give) and then give them the ‘fake’ box they handed you earlier and say

“Here, you can keep this...I’m afraid it’s not worth more than a cheap souvenir.”

And with that, walk away and leave, not looking back...