

SECRETS OF HEROQUESTING





JONSTOWN COMPENDIUM



SECRETS OF HEROQUESTING ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

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Editing by Frank Montellano, Layout Advice by Nick Brooke, Sense Checking by Darren Happens.

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PROLOGUE

One thing that has fascinated me in nearly 40 years of roleplaying in Glorantha is the idea of HeroQuesting and HeroQuests. I never tire of reading or thinking about HeroQuesting. Although a lot has been written about the subject over the years, much of it is fragmentary and self-contradicting. *Secrets of HeroQuesting* is an attempt to bring together my thoughts on HeroQuesting, combining multiple sources and reworking them to bring in the most recent ideas and gaming experiences.

Secrets of HeroQuesting focuses mainly on theistic HeroQuesting and concentrates on Central Genertela.

Author's Comment

The Malkioni have their own form of HeroQuesting, but I do not understand it well enough to comment. Similarly, the Mystics of Kralorela have a form of Inner Questing to reveal their innermost powers, but again I do not understand this. As we all know, one of the principles of mysticism is to accept that we know nothing, so I must truly be a mystic, knowing nothing myself.

Hopefully, this supplement will serve as a framework for Games Masters and Player Characters to use and enjoy HeroQuesting in their adventures. It provides enough of the theory and practical knowledge to be a useful tool for all Gloranthaphiles, no matter which system they use.

Due to the lack of official rules about HeroQuesting and a reluctance of many Games masters and Players to run or play HeroQuests, nobody knows a lot about HeroQuesting. Most Games Masters and Players make it up as we go along.

In Glorantha, the Arkati, God Learners and Lunars have mastered HeroQuesting and the Heortlings have used it to great effect, most notably by performing various Lightbringer Quests.

The following is all my opinion and is probably wrong. But, as HeroQuestors know, anything is possible and if enough people follow in my path, then this way will define reality...

Author's Comment

This whole supplement assumes that Games Masters have accepted that adventurers can perform HeroQuests and that HeroQuesting is not solely for Heroes. If, as a Games Master, you do not think this then why purchase a supplement on HeroQuesting?

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Chaosium has an excellent rules system called HeroQuest. However, it is not really focused on HeroQuesting, so HeroQuest the game system will be referred to by its generic name of QuestWorlds, except in the review of HeroQuesting in various game systems.

The word "HeroQuest" can be written as "Heroquest" or "heroquest". The author much prefers HeroQuest, so has used this form through *Secrets of HeroQuesting*. The use of HeroQuest is not a challenge to the HeroQuest Trademark in any way, as Gloranthan HeroQuesting was a term used before the HeroQuest system came about.

The term Adventurers is used for Player Characters, fitting in with the idea that RuneQuest is all about adventuring. The QuestWorlds game uses Heroes, but that would be confusing in a supplement about HeroQuesting.

Author's Comment

Although 13th Age in Glorantha is a valid ruleset, I have not included many rules, as I do not really understand the rules system. I have used some limited rules references, but only at a superficial level.

WHAT IS A HEROQUEST?

In its most basic form, a HeroQuest is the overlaying of a myth onto the world. The world becomes altered by the myth and this allows HeroQuestors to interact with both the myth and the world. That interaction depends on the myth used, the location, and how it is applied.

YES, BUT WHAT IS A HEROQUEST?

A HeroQuest is a magical, divinely-inspired, strictly-regulated mythical journey leading to great rewards if successfully completed. They allow participants to perform Heroic deeds that would not normally be possible. In fact, HeroQuesting is often described as "Achieving the Impossible."

In many ways, all of HeroQuesting is a cult secret. Although many people in Glorantha know that HeroQuesting exists, very few of them know the details of HeroQuesting. We have become blasé about HeroQuesting, as both Games Masters and Players have used HeroQuesting in the past, so are familiar with the concepts. This is not the case with most Gloranthans.

Generally, only Initiates of a cult know the secrets of HeroQuesting. They can learn (Cult) Lore and can learn HeroQuests. Such knowledge and magic is not normally shared with outsiders and can be closely-guarded secrets.



Arkat was powerful because he learned the inner secrets of many cults and used them to create new secrets, using HeroQuesting.

WHAT DOES A HEROQUEST LOOK LIKE?

When someone performs a HeroQuest, they overlay the myth onto the current world. What this means, in practice, is that elements of the HeroQuest become overlapped with the Mundane Plane, assuming the HeroQuest is being performed on the Mundane Plane.

This has several effects:

- Participants on the HeroQuest are both themselves and the deities they are emulating on the HeroQuest, so a HeroQuestor is both Stormy Bob and Orlanth at the same time. This can be confusing.
- Locations from the myth overlap with locations in the Mundane Plane. So, a HeroQuestor performing the **Sandals of Darkness** HeroQuest in order to steal a pair of magical boots from a troll in the Big Rubble will find that the troll's town house in Troll Town is both a semi-ruined structure *and* Kyger Litor's caverns in Wonderhome. It will be dark, draped in shadows, strange creatures will be seen out of the corners of your eyes, rooms will look different to how they normally appear and so on.
- HeroQuestors view the world as if they were wearing Virtual Reality goggles projecting a model of the HeroQuest overlaid onto the real world. This double-vision affects how they see things, places, people encountered and themselves.
- People witnessing HeroQuestors notice they are not quite right. Perhaps they have a glow or aura about them, they may move in slightly jerky ways, or have a blurring around them.
- People encountered on a HeroQuest become the Deities involved in the original myth and take on a Mythic nature. Encountering a Dark Troll guard during a **Sandals of Darkness** HeroQuest allows the HeroQuestor to trick him into letting the HeroQuestors pass, as Eurmal does, or allows them to fight him to get past, as Orlanth does. Sometimes the most bizarre things succeed or work on a HeroQuest that wouldn't work normally, just because it is a HeroQuest.

Author's Comment

Providing rules for HeroQuesting is problematic for several reasons:

- Glorantha uses HeroQuest, RuneQuest and 13th Age Glorantha as official rule sets, so any rules either need to be vague enough to not contradict these rules or specific enough to be different for each set of rules.
- HeroQuesting provides many unusual game effects not covered by the standard rules.
- Some people consider HeroQuesting as being outside the rules and that rules spoil the larger-than-life nature of HeroQuesting.

The following, however, provide a rules framework that can be used with HeroQuesting.

GETTING HERE

Author's Comment

Having played RuneQuest for many years, our campaign reached the point where the only way to advance was by HeroQuesting - the Adventurers had achieved all that could be achieved through normal play. This led me to investigate various HeroQuest rules.

We looked at HeroQuest systems by Steve Maurer and Stephen Marsh, but found that they did not suit our style of play or what we wanted to get out of HeroQuesting.

In particular, there were aspects of both systems, and other similar systems, that just did not suit what we were trying to do:

- **Will:** The idea of Will is quite simple, it allows you to impose your will on the Hero Plane and mold it to your own purposes. Will, while on the face of it a good idea, soon showed its weaknesses. It was possible to make relatively large changes for a relatively small cost. Adventurers could create permanent spell effects with tiny costs, admittedly at small chances, but some players think nothing of taking risks with dice rolls if there is the chance of major gains. Will also had the strange effect that the more experienced one became, the lower the Will, with Adventurers locked into the Hero Plane having no Will at all. This is not a problem except for the fact that Will also provided the means to cast magic on the Hero Plane, so people with 0 Will could only produce special effects by a rules fiddle which meant that experience reduced the Will needed to produce the effect. So, Orlanth could make the wind blow because he is good at making the wind blow. This always seemed a little lame to me.



- **Runes:** Using Runes to perform magic seems like a great idea, especially as RQG is going down the same approach. However, this system also ran into difficulties. Generating a rune score based on membership of cults meant that multiple cult membership gives you an inflated Rune Score. Obviously, starting with Runes as RQG does makes this problem go away. However, an unsatisfactory situation occurred, using Runes to produce flexible effects. Thus a Storm Khan could use his Storm Tie to summon Storms, fly on the wind, blow things over and so on. Fair enough perhaps, because he is on a Storm HeroQuest after all. However, the players questioned how a Storm Khan, belonging to a Storm cult which had no weather-causing effects, could summon a storm. Also, a Voria Heroine, member of the Spring Virgin cult of innocents, could easily cast Earthshaker magic, having a strong Earth tie, leading to the Innocent Child being able to kill using Earthquakes, throwing up walls of earth, causing landslides and so on. This was definitely unsatisfactory. Players felt these effects detracted from the spirit of the game.
- **Cult Ties:** Using Cult ties rather than Runes gets around some of the issues, but we found that any calculation took into account associate or Friendly Cults and led to an artificially high Cult Tie, so we abandoned that.
- **Hero Points:** We tried using Hero Points to spend on abilities gained thorough HeroQuesting, to cast spells temporarily and so on. However, many disputes arose over costs of abilities and spell effects, whether spells were similar to Rune Spell effects, if so, which ones and so on. The problem also arose as to whether Hero Points were cult-specific, HeroQuest-specific or independent. Thus, could Hero Points gained on a pure Orlanth HeroQuest be used to gain a Storm Bull ability on a later HeroQuest? Could you combine Storm Bull and Humakt Hero Points to gain a Hunter ability? These issues meant Hero Points were reluctantly abandoned. However, Hero Points are a natural part of the QuestWorlds system, so do fit into HeroQuests.

We now had to go back to basics. After much thought, we decided a HeroQuest rules system had to do the following:

- To allow current RuneQuest powers and abilities play some part in the HeroQuest system. Too often, mundane Rune Magic or special abilities counted for naught in the HeroQuest systems.

- It had to be compatible with RuneQuest. What was the point of learning a new game system just to play HeroQuests? As we are huge fans of RuneQuest, the HeroQuest system had to be either compatible with or an extension of RuneQuest.
- It had to be simple. Too many rules are overly complex, trying to solve problems introduced by the rules.
- Emphasis on HeroQuesting. More emphasis had to be placed on the HeroQuest side of the rules, rather than on the mechanics of casting magic on the God Plane.
- Global Rules. The same rules had to be usable on the Mundane Plane, Otherworld and God Plane.
- Free Will. The Rules had to take into account some idea of Free Will, or lack of it.
- All Levels. The Rules had to be able to be used as easily by Initiates as Heroes, since both could HeroQuest.

After we devised this general framework, we had to develop a rules system encompassing these principles.

Author's Comment

The system we came up is far from complete and is not ideal even now. There are many things which could be changed, but it works better for us than the systems we looked at before. Over the years, I have modified it, made it simpler and added extra bits, but it is the same core system that I have used for many years.

The HeroQuesting system was based around the use of HeroQuests. These were similar to spells which could be invoked to produce certain effects around the invoking character, or produced a framework or setting for a heroic journey or HeroQuest.

When on a HeroQuest, magic was cast heroically, using the Character's own essences, so was internalized. The effects of the HeroQuest would make it easier or more difficult to cast such magic.

After some tuning, the system became quite quick to use, although a lot of work had to be put in by the Games Master and players in order to set the HeroQuests and their effects in the first place.



CATEGORIES

HeroQuests generally fall into one or more categories—Explorations, Raids, Re-Enactments, Magic Roads, Riddling/Wagering Contests and GodQuests. They also can be done in a Short Form or a Long Form. Of course, there will be HeroQuests which cover multiple categories (called Umbrella Quests, see below) and some that will fall into none of these categories, but those are rare.

RITUALIZED HEROQUESTS

Ritualized HeroQuests have all the elements of normal HeroQuests but are staged in a ritualized form. These are normally performed at sacred places and are structured so that it reduces the risk to all the participants. These are like HeroQuests with training wheels, as the locations are fixed, the participants are known, combats are staged and the results are pre-determined. A Ritualized HeroQuest will most likely be an Adventurer's first encounter with the magic of HeroQuesting

Short Form HeroQuests, Riddling Contests and Wagering Contests are all forms of Ritualized HeroQuests.

SHORT FORM

A Short Form HeroQuest is usually performed at a temple or holy place of the cult concerned and involves moving between certain rooms or areas and performing tasks.

Participants are often cultists from other cults or members of the HeroQuestors' cult, dressed up to act as opponents. Opponents may also be captured prisoners, slaves, or associate cultists and would generally be expected to lose.

However, in some cases, the HeroQuest brings real opponents who gatecrash, in the same way Hon-Eel did in the Tarsh Earth Rites or as the Lunars did in Starbrow's **Lightbringers'** HeroQuest. If this happens, then the HeroQuestor could be defeated and damaged by the experience. After all, if you are expecting to fight a captive Broo and the immortal Chaos spirit Granny Keeneye decides to try and eat you, then you are in trouble.

Temple Rites are often portrayed as Short Form HeroQuests. Kallyr performed a Short Form **Lightbringers'** Quest, as described in *King of Sartar*. Biturian Varosh took part as an adversary in a Short Form HeroQuest, the **Three Blows of Anger**, as described in *Cults of Prax*.

RIDDLING CONTEST

Some HeroQuests can be run as riddling contests, ritualized formal encounters where the opponents meet and ask each other riddles based on the HeroQuest.

Each Station on the HeroQuest is enacted as a contest of riddles. The loser of any round or Station must give the winner a magic item, teach them a spell or offer them a service.

This is a purely ritualized HeroQuest with no real danger except the losing of magical items and is considered the least important type of HeroQuest. Many cultists use this as a practice method to become familiar with the myth.

Although, on the face of it, there seems no reason why the loser of a Riddle should honor the fact that they lost by giving something up, the format of the HeroQuest means that such renegeing on the deal means that the Cult Spirits of Reprisal will come calling. On a purely mundane note, any participant not living up to their side of the deal can be attacked by the other participant. Where one participant does not trust the other, they might insist on the swearing of an Oath, but this would be seen as being an insult that doubts the integrity of the participants.

The riddles may be abstracted as an INT roll, Cult Lore, Riddling Skill, Luck roll, Skill roll (as Nysalor Riddles) or however the Games Master and Players want to do it.

Author's Comment

I would advise against the Games Master actually asking the players riddles, as this victimizes players who do not know riddles or are not good at them. Role-playing is all about the abilities of the character being played, not about the player's ability to answer riddles.

WAGERING CONTEST

A HeroQuest run as a wagering contest has a similar setup to a Riddling Contest HeroQuest. Each participant wagers an ability, skill, spell or magic item against the other participant. The winner keeps his own wager and gains whatever the loser bets.

This allows certain abilities, even those gained on HeroQuests, to be transferred to other people, although to deliberately set out to lose Stations on a HeroQuest in order to pass abilities onto others is considered contrary to cult doctrine and is grounds for Excommunication or a visit from the Spirit of Retribution of the cult.

The result of each wager can be best determined by a dice roll based on a skill relating to the wager, the better roll (Fumble, failure, normal success, special success, critical success etc.) wins.

LONG FORM

The Long Form of a HeroQuest is what people normally think of when HeroQuesting. It could be a journey, or take place at a sacred site or other place.

Unlike a Short Form HeroQuest, Long Form HeroQuests take place out of the temple and range across various places. They also involve more detailed exchanges between HeroQuestors and form more of a Scenario.

Since the HeroQuest is performed at well-known locations, there are often standard participants. For example, the Count of Sun County usually plays the part of Yelm when HeroQuestors perform HeroQuests in or around Sun County.

RE-ENACTMENT HEROQUESTS

A Re-Enactment HeroQuest is one where the HeroQuestors mimic the deeds of their deity. Performing this type of HeroQuest is essentially an act of worship and such deeds are full of mysticism.

As with a Long Form HeroQuest, Re-Enactments are the most common form of HeroQuests and are what we normally think of when talking about HeroQuests.

Those involved in a Re-Enactment should follow the ways of their deity in the myth, remaining faithful to the actions and steps their deity took. Such HeroQuests are the most rigidly defined, since any deviation could badly affect the eventual outcome of the HeroQuest.

Successful Re-Enactment HeroQuests give the rewards of being much closer to one's deity, and perhaps the gaining of spells or abilities commensurate with the HeroQuest in question. Penalties for failure may involve loss of power, death, curses or just bad luck, depending on the HeroQuest performed.

HeroQuest Examples

Most HeroQuests are Re-Enactment HeroQuests. All the Myths of GodTime can be used as Re-Enactment HeroQuests. Examples are **Waha's Beast Quest**, **Orlanth's Courtship of Ernalda**, **Orlanth and Aroka**, and **Vadrus and the Blue Woman**.

Innovative HeroQuestors can turn a Re-Enactment HeroQuest into an Exploration HeroQuest by deviating from the HeroQuest at certain critical moments, thus turning a well-established route into an unexplored one, or producing a new effect from an old HeroQuest. So an example might be, "Go until you hit **Yelorna Drops Death**, then turn toward Darkness and jump to **Flamal Gets Axed**."

Arkat Kingtroll was a master at these types of mythic manipulations, able to engage in one HeroQuest until reaching an intersection between that HeroQuest and another with which he was familiar, then transferring to the second HeroQuest, something he could do as a past member of many cults. However, there are dangers in manipulating HeroQuests in this way. For example, Arkat received a poisoned wound that would not heal and even encountered himself on a HeroQuest.

MAGICAL WEAPON HEROQUESTS

Some cults have spells or abilities obtained through the use of magical weapons and are available through HeroQuests or through SubCults. These abilities can often be gained by the HeroQuestor by gaining the weapon through a Magical Weapon Re-Enactment HeroQuest.



Humakt and Eurmial Forging Death

The main cult with magical weapon SubCults is Orlanth with his **Lightning Spear**, **Shield of Arran**, **Scarf of Mist** and **Sandals of Darkness** SubCults. Other cults also have specialist SubCults, including Yelm (Sagittus), Wachaza (Robber), Yelorna (Labrys and Meteor Bow) and Lodril (Invisible Spear). There are other SubCults not mentioned here.

Most magical weapon SubCults have entry restrictions and not all cultists may join them, so only Wind Lords have access to Orlanth's magical weapons spells, although HeroQuesting Initiates may join as well. Magic Weapon HeroQuests allow others to access the magic granted by the SubCults by directly accessing the source of the magic—the weapons themselves. Sometimes these HeroQuests are simple and straightforward, other times they are complex and dangerous. All have similarities in that obstacles must be overcome and a magic weapon gained, but each HeroQuest is individual and different from the others.

Some magical weapons may only be gained through HeroQuesting. These include **Thunder Arrows** (Orlanth), **Fire Maul** (Zorak Zoran), **Lead Fist** (Zorak Zoran) and **Miss Not** (Foundchild). Humakt has a **Styx Shore** HeroQuest that allows for the creation of a magical sword, imbued with the power of Death. The myths attached to these weapon quests are closely held cult secrets.

Adventurers who use these weapons gain abilities few others have. This makes them dangerous and infamous. Many cults have magical weapons unknown outside a particular locality or clan. These usually have HeroQuests associated with them and intrepid HeroQuestors may be able to perform these HeroQuests and gain the exotic powers and abilities.

Magic Weapons HeroQuests are often used as Stations within other HeroQuests. When used in this way they allow the HeroQuestor to gain the Magic Weapon but in a lesser form. So, someone performing the **Wooing of Ernalda** HeroQuest can gain the **Sandals of Darkness** as a single Station and can use the Dark Walk spell while on the HeroQuest but may not sacrifice for the spell afterwards or join the Sandals of Darkness SubCult, whereas someone performing the full **Sandals of Darkness** HeroQuest will be able to join the Sandals of Darkness SubCult and continue to sacrifice for the Dark Walk spell after the HeroQuest has finished.

These HeroQuests are often used to gain spells not normally available, so an Initiate of any of the forms of Orlanth may gain the magic weapon spells and join the magic weapon SubCults normally only open to Wind Lords. This makes them particularly powerful and impressive to their peers.

Author's Comment

Are these all about weapons? What about other magic items, are they treated the same? Well, of course, yes, they are just as important, but people usually focus on the weapons. Yelm has his Harp of Harmony, Kyger Litor has the Sandals of Darkness and Caladra & Aurelion have magical harps that allow them to communicate at a distance. While not weapons, these all have SubCults that can be joined to give a Runespell, Spirit Magic spell or skill and an associated HeroQuest.



Harp of Harmony

MAGIC ROADS

A Magic Road HeroQuest enables fast travel between distant places by magical means. Of all the types of HeroQuests, Magic Roads are the most unusual.

Like any other HeroQuest, Magic Roads are dangerous. HeroQuestors can become lost on a Magic Road and unable to return. They may be defeated by guardians and barred from re-entering the Mundane Plane. HeroQuestors can even be captured and trapped in other lands. The HeroQuestor might then have to perform another HeroQuest in order to escape or wait for help from other HeroQuestors.



Magic Roads are often seen as the last refuge of the desperate, but this could be said for any HeroQuest. Powerful HeroQuestors use them to move around the world quickly.

Movement Rune cultists have been known to perform Magic Road HeroQuests out of religious fervor!

Typically, Magic Roads consist of four stages: Beginning, Crossing the Planes, Encounter Stations, and Return.

- **Beginning:** This starts the HeroQuest and prepares the HeroQuestors. Normally it involves facing and passing a guardian of some kind, often but not always involving combat.
- **Crossing the Planes:** This unusual stage allows HeroQuestors to travel via the magical or mythical planes and transports them to the planes. It is at the Games Master's discretion as to whether this is the God Plane, Otherworld, some mixture of the two, a Short World or some other plane. Once again, this often involves passing a guardian of some kind.
- **Encounter Stations:** The HeroQuestor must travel to various locations, each of which has an encounter, task or being, or group of beings, to be appeased or defeated before the journey can continue.
- **Return:** The HeroQuestors must pass a final guardian and return to the normal plane at the desired location.

SHORT WORLDS

More fully described elsewhere, a Short World is a section of reality that is essentially a small piece of GodTime that has been cut off from GodTime in some way. Many Magic Roads utilize their own Short Worlds, allowing HeroQuestors to travel through that Short World.

So, Storm Cultists cross the Cloud Paths or Wind Paths; Solar Cultists traverse the Golden Sky or Rainbow Bridge; Earth Cultists trod the Bare Earth or Green Fields; Water Cultists swim through the Primal River or Primal Sea; Darkness Cultists cross the Dark Hells, Obsidian Path or sometimes the Web Path.

TYPES OF MAGIC ROAD

There are generally three types of Magic Roads: Closed, Partially-Open and Open.

CLOSED ROADS

These types of Magic Roads are where the entrance and exit points are fixed. Quite often the intermediate Stations are also fixed and correspond to physical places. The guardians of these places are normally the deities of the locations traveled through.

Many magical road HeroQuests are of this type, allowing travel between two fixed places. For example, the Gorangi Vak Magic Road goes from Cliffhome to Stormwalk Mountain and allows HeroQuestors to try to tame a Sky Bull as part of the HeroQuest. The Jumps of Orlanth's Ram are also Closed Roads, but several can be chained together to allow for more flexibility.



Orlanth's Ram

Author's Comment

Dragonwyt Roads are a good example of Closed Roads. HeroQuestors with knowledge of the Dragonwyt Road ritual can start at a Dragonwyt Plinth, perform a ritual that moves them onto the Dragonwyt Road, and then they can quickly travel to another Dragonwyt Plinth and perform the ritual to leave the Dragonwyt Road. The very act of performing the Dragonwyt Road ritual attracts physical or spiritual Dragonwytts and other draconic creatures who will try and prevent the HeroQuestors from completing their journey. These often take the form of Stations where the HeroQuestors must overcome each draconic entity before continuing. Of course, traveling with a Dragonwyt or other Draconic creature or mystic will result in fewer obstacles, but might result in more complications.

PARTIALLY-OPEN ROADS

These are similar to closed roads, but instead of having both entrance and exit at fixed locations, a partially-open road has only one fixed end. Either the entrance or exit of a partially-open road is fixed and always occurs at the same location while the other is more open.