

# ONE-SHOT & ADVENTURE

TEMPLATE



WORLD ANVIL

# One-Shot & Adventure Template

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## FOREWORD

Welcome Dungeon Masters, Game Masters, and Storytellers all!

This template will quickly guide you through creating your own one-shot or adventure plot. Once you've filled it in, you'll have a great villain with a nefarious plan, a tantalising hook for your players, and a series of varied encounters leading your party to an epic final scene! Beginner Dungeon Masters will find it easy to understand, and more advanced Storytellers should feel free to experiment and customize to their preferred style.

For more guidance, help and advice, we've created a series of articles that expand on each section. Each of them is linked to the relevant pages below, and you can find the introductory one here: <https://wanvil.com/dHgIf> that guides you through this template.

[Want more one-shot ideas?](#)



## ON THE COVER

"Noble Barbarian" and internal images courtesy of Christopher Dravus. A massive thank you to Christopher and Ironspire Studios for all the support.



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## Step 1: Figure out the Villain

### Create:

1. WHO: A Villain (name, class, level, race)

2. WHAT: The Villain's evil goal

3. WHEN: A deadline

4. HOW: How are they trying to achieve their goal?

5. WHY: Why haven't they already achieved this?

6. MOTIVATION: Why do they want to achieve their goal?

**Pro Tips for Setting the Scene:** <https://wanvil.com/dnd-setting-ideas>

*For example:*  
 The (1) evil necromancer wants to (2) turn the Crown Prince into a zombie-puppet before (3) his coronation next week, but she can't do it using (4) her usual magic because (5) a rival has stolen her spell book. They want (6) ultimate power over the kingdom to legalize necromancy.



What are three effects of the Villain's plot that the players will interact with?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*In the example above you might have:*

1. Ransacked libraries of magic (or houses of magic users)
2. "Practice" zombies in various states of disrepair, or with weird abilities
3. Rumors of spies or break ins in the palace (the villain is gaining access or information)

**Congratulations, you have a plot! Some GMs might be ready to run a session with only this!**



## Step 2: Write your adventure

### 1. Setting up

Where does the adventure start (and why)?

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### 2. The Hook

How does the party hear about the problem? (Often the effects of your Villain's plot)

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What are the motivations to help? (2+ which resonate with your players!)

Financial/Equipment gain

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Moral/Deity gain

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Exploration/Information

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Reputation

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Personal stakes (e.g: family, friend, NPC-revenge etc.):

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Character quests (e.g: avenge parent's death, discover more about your mysterious Warlock patron, self-improvement)

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Getting out of trouble:

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Guide to Irresistible Plot Hooks: <https://wanvil.com/dnd-adventure-hooks>



## Step 3: The adventure begins

The investigation is the core part of the adventure. This is where the party follows up on the effects from Part 1, and gets on the trail of the villain and their evil plot.

**Location:** Where are the events happening? (Opportunity to add flavor and world lore).

**Progression:** This could be a clue or key information to "solve" an investigation/mystery, gathering pieces of a totem, dispatching a key henchman, freeing an NPC who can help them, or some other element that gives the players a sense of progression in the story.

**Obstacle:** whether battle, traps, a hard-slog through difficult terrain, solving a riddle or simply interrogating an NPC, the progression shouldn't come too easily. Obstacles are things your party will need to overcome. Presenting a variety of them gives different party members a chance to shine, and helps keep the story varied.



Location 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Progression 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Obstacle 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Location 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Progression 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Obstacle 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Location 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Progression 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Obstacle 3: \_\_\_\_\_

**In LOCATION, the characters seek PROGRESSION but must overcome OBSTACLE.**

If the party fails, there should always be ANOTHER way to Progression (albeit with resource, time, condition or even curse-style cost). After all, you don't want a locked door to end the adventure!

***Remember: Your party may not visit these in this order!***

For a **one-shot**, 1-3 of these scenes are plenty. Keeping the locations close together to limit travel time and scale is a good idea too. Example: three different rooms in a dungeon.

For an **adventure** designed to take several sessions, this can easily be extended to multiple locations, clues/progressions and obstacles. Each progression point may require a small dungeon or larger encounter. If you're trying to extend the adventure, including travel between locations, with some optional encounters, can help (although it's always a good idea to theme these to your story and setting).

If you're looking for side adventures, Locations can spawn interesting side quests (as well as the villain's henchman, there's also a ghost in this dungeon that wants to be freed, seven pieces of an ancient amulet, and a secret room that reveals an ancient mysterious carving).

A Complete Guide to Encounters: <https://wanvil.com/encounter-ideas-dnd>

**Step 4: The Twist**

Choose a complication! What is the big surprise/reveal/twist before your climax?

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**Examples include:**

- Mistaken identity
- A Supposition or lie is revealed
- The stakes are higher than we thought
- Hostage situation
- A difficult/morally grey choice
- An ambush

How to Plan a Plot Twist: <https://wanvil.com/dnd-plot-twist-ideas>

**Step 5: Climax**

Where does the final encounter with the villain take place?

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How will you add an extra challenge for the party?

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**Examples include:**

- Additional units / reinforcements
- Difficult terrain, levels or cover.
- Conditions: (dead magic bubbles, driving rain, frost, fire balls)
- Additional goals: (e.g. stop the portal opening, prevent escape, extract the truth, keep the villain alive, get close enough to touch them with the magical amulet)

Secrets to an Epic Boss Battle: <https://wanvil.com/dnd-boss-fight-ideas>



## Step 6: Epilogue

If the villain has been defeated, how will the world change?

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Is there an additional reward for the party?

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Which loose ends to the story need resolving?

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Does this set up a subsequent adventure/one-shot?

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**Wrapping Up a One-Shot:** <https://wanyil.com/one-shot-ending>

### **Congratulations! You now have:**

- 1) A great villain with a plan
- 2) A hook to pull the players in
- 3) A clear series of steps players can take, with obstacles and challenges
- 4) A great twist, a satisfying climax battle, and an ending that gives your players the feeling that they've left their mark on the world.

Grab any stat blocks you need for your encounters, and maybe a battlemap and get ready to hit the table - your brand new one-shot is ready to play!

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