

Living Legends



Lead Designer

Dan Felder

Designers

Carson Dougan, Alex Wagner, Kat Schell, Alex Kerezman

Special Thanks

The GW 2 Team and the Memory of Gary Gygax

Dear Future Hero,

Hi, this is Dan Felder. Below you'll find what started off as a fun side-project and steadily evolved into an attempt to build a brand new roleplaying system that would hopefully make Gygax proud. We wanted to build a fresh system from scratch to capture the flavor and fun that calls people to adventure; a place where people don't need to choose between a flavorful character and a powerful one. Living Legends emphasizes creativity and cooperation amongst the heroes through a hassle-free system that's built to be fun for both character creation and roleplaying. I sure hope you have as much fun playing in the system as we have.

Your Kind and Merciful Dungeonmaster,

Dan

How To Play Living Legends

However you like. We created Living Legends because we wanted a system where we could build any type of character and run any type of setting. Everything in the game is built to be easily reflavored to whatever fits your game the best. Want to run a Star Wars Campaign? Reflavor magic missiles as blaster bolts and crusade amongst the stars. Want to try a Steampunk setting? Swap mind magic for a silver tongue that can talk anyone into anything. Heck, the first games ever played in this system were about pastel-colored ponies! There's even both a board-based version for tabletop lovers and a non-board version if you'd rather break free of graph paper or want a smooth system to run over voice chat. You're not even restricted to specific classes, you'll be able to mix sword and sorcery however you like. If you can dream it, Living Legends can help bring it to life.

How to Build a Character

Building a character in Living Legends is as easy as knifing a goblin. It requires just six simple steps and almost no complex math. That's not to say there aren't any surprises though, people can and have spent hours going through our combat and ability systems to find the perfect combinations to express their characters. The combat system in particular tends to be tons of fun to play around with.

- 1) Allocate your Attributes
- 2) Choose your Skills and Expertise
- 3) Choose your Abilities (non-combat)
- 4) Choose your Virtue
- 5) Choose your Combat Talents
- 6) Choose your Special Move

After that, you'll also get to go shopping for items and you'll get access to lots of cool weapons, armor and trinkets even at level one. Enjoy!

Attributes

Attributes play a major factor in everything a character does outside of combat (though they play no role at all in combat). Each character has four attributes that govern the basics of how good that character is at certain things. They are...

Brawn: How good you are at rough-and-tumble physical tasks like mountain-climbing.

Precision: How good you are at precise movements, whether sneaking or fiddling a lock.

Knowledge: Basically book-smarts, knowledge about the world and about magical theory.

Sense: How good you are at noticing things and relating to other people.

Having a high number in one of these attributes doesn't say anything about who your character is, just what they can do. For example, a character might be a genius but still not have read much about the world at large – so he or she might have a low Knowledge score. On the other hand, even someone like Jar Jar Binks might have memorized a lot of facts over the years and have a high Knowledge. Similarly, a naturally scrawny character might be so determined when it comes to physical challenges that his or willpower lets him accomplish great things; leading to a high Brawn score.¹ Feel free to make just about any character you like, these attributes impact what your character can do without dictating what kind of person they are. Your options are wide open.

Each attribute starts at 5 and you have 8 attribute points you can allocate between your attributes to raise them higher. However, you can't raise an attribute higher than 10. Sorry folks, you'll have to spread those points around.

For example, one player's attributes might look like, 7 Brawn, 7 Precision, 9 Knowledge, 5 Sense. Another player's might look like 10 Brawn, 8 Precision, 5 Knowledge, 5 Sense. Don't worry, any allocation you put together is probably going to work fine. It just depends what kind of things you'd like your character to be good at.

Skills

¹ If you've seen the movie Rudy, you probably have an idea of what we're talking about.

Each attribute feeds into two or three different skills, which are used for skill checks. If you want to do anything difficult outside of combat, whether it's climbing a rope or sneaking past a guard – your success or failure will be determined by your skill check.

Skill Checks

Just like in D&D, a skill check is handled by a straight d20 roll, to which a modifier is added. If your result equals or exceeds the target number (the DC), you succeed in what you're attempting. If it's less than the DC, you fail. For example, trying to climb a tree might have a DC of 15. If your skill check to attempt to climb the tree equals 15 or higher, you'll succeed. If your skill check result is 14 or lower though, you'll fall down. Again, if you've played D&D - you definitely know how this works. It's way too solid a system for us to abandon.

Need Some Help There?

Sometimes somebody needs a little help. At the DM's discretion, a player can attempt to assist another player in a skill check. Doing this is simple, the player just rolls any check that might help (for example, if assisting with lockpicking the player might roll for Mechanics to help with the picking or History to provide a knowledge of locks). If the assisting player beats the DC, they provide a +2 bonus.²

Each attribute feeds into three skills, except for Brawn - as the Athletics skill is extremely useful in a wide variety of situations.

Brawn

Athletics: Climbing a mountain, leaping onto a passing train, any physically taxing action.

Endurance: Throwing off diseases, enduring hunger or bitter cold, surviving poison etc.

Precision

Stealth: Attempting to undertake just about any action while trying to avoid someone noticing.

Mechanics: Fiddling with locks, traps, mechanisms, wagons, anything with moving parts.

Acrobatics: Tumbling, leaping, balancing - physically taxing acts performed with precision. Can often overlap with Athletics - as both raw athletic ability or precise skill could let one climb a mountain. However, Acrobatics couldn't be used to hold a door shut – that takes raw force.

Knowledge

² By default; some abilities (see further down) can increase this number.

Arcana: Knowledge about magic, like identifying what type of spell is being cast.

History: Knowing recent history, ancient history, cultural practices, legends, lore etc.

Heal: Treating wounds, helping an ally fight off disease etc.

Sense

Perception: Noticing things, whether it's someone sneaking up on you or if someone's lying.

Persuasion: Persuading someone of something, whether through diplomacy, intimidation or lies.

Streetwise: When in Rome, do as Romans do. Being streetwise is all about figuring out how a town works. Having a high streetwise skill might mean knowing who's really in charge in a city and where the best salt is served.

What's My Skill Bonus?

That's easy. Your bonus to any skill is simply your attribute that it relates to. If you have a 7 in Sense, you'll get +7 to Persuasion, Perception and Streetwise attempts. If you only have a 5, you'll only get +5 to Persuasion, Perception and Streetwise attempts.

However, you also get some additional bonuses:

Expert Skills and Trainings

Everyone has something that they're really, really good at. Choose one of your skills as your area of Expertise. This becomes your Expert Skill, giving you a +5 bonus to checks of that skill. In addition to the +5 bonus it provides to that skill, rolling a natural 20 on one of those skill checks results in you achieving a Spectacular Success. A Spectacular Success makes normal Critical Successes look tame by comparison.³

In addition to an Expert Skill, adventurers get Training in two skills for free at character creation. Training provides a +3 bonus to checks of that skill. Training can stack with your Expert Skill (for a total bonus of +8), but not with other Training (so you can't put two Trainings on one skill). So if you have a 7 in Sense and are trained in Persuasion but NOT trained in Perception – you'll get a +10 bonus to your trained Persuasion attempts but only a +7 bonus to your untrained Perception attempts.

Abilities

³ For example, a Critical Success in trying to pick a guard's pocket might nab you his coin purse or even his blade without his notice. A Spectacular Success might let you strip him of his armor without him being any the wiser.

What are Abilities?

Abilities represent the things your character can **do**. They might be things that come naturally to your species – a dragon breathing fire – or things your character learned how to do specifically – like speaking another language or knowing a spell. They could be things you achieve using technology or magic, or things you can do by yourself. However you flavor it, they are the things that make your character unique.

When you create a character, you have 30 ability points to spend on abilities. You may take any number or combination of abilities as long as the total adds up to 30 and you have the appropriate prerequisites. Just make sure you have a flavor reason for having it. For example, if you want to fly as a human you could be using a neat invention for it, or a special magic spell. If you can dream it, you can use it. Abilities that require you to take another ability first will be indented below that ability, and have the name of the ability they require listed as a prerequisite.

As you build your character, you may find that you have a point or two left over that you just can't work into your build. Feel free to save those points for later – you'll get more as you level up, and you can then take something more expensive. More precisely: you'll gain an additional three points at levels 2, 5, and 8.

Abilities cannot be used in combat except in the case of DM discretion. If you're just trying to escape, however, or are otherwise trying to avoid further confrontation without harmful engagement (such as trying to use the Virtue of Compassion to talk someone out of fighting you) – go for it. Just check with your DM if you're uncertain.

[Click here for the full list of Abilities.](#)

Some Rules You'll Need to Know

Magic Points

Adventurers begin each day with one Magic Point.⁴ Some abilities have the word “Magic” next to their name. If that's the case, using that talent costs a Magic Point. All adventurers gain the following ability for free:

Heroic Surge– Magic Interrupt

Trigger – You or an ally you can see makes a skill check.

Effect – Add a +10 bonus to the triggering check.

⁴ Magic Points are reset to 1 at the end of each extended rest, so no point trying to hoard them. Use 'em or lose 'em – it's a lot more fun.

The Diversity Rules

The Diversity Rules are system-wide, so we thought we might as well put them early. They apply to combat as well as non-combat effects.

1) You can't take the same thing (ability/combat talent/trait/item/etc.) more than once (unless it says otherwise).

2) Anything that gives a boost to a roll will only provide the boost once (unless it explicitly says otherwise). Therefore, multiple copies of an ability don't stack with themselves. Here are some examples

Example #1: The Haste ability gives a creature a +5 boost to skill checks made to move quickly for 5 minutes. Once Haste is used to speed up a creature, you have to wait until the 5 minutes are over to use it again. It doesn't matter if it's one creature trying to use it twice, or two creatures trying to use it on the same target at the same time, the target will only get a +5 boost either way. Of course, if you had a *different* ability that also could increase skill checks made to move quickly – you could use both at once. That's the power of diversity.

Example #2: The Grandeur ability provides a +1 bonus to all skill checks your whole party makes. If two players in your party both take Grandeur, the second copy will be wasted, because the bonuses can't stack.

Example #3: Magic Points can be spent on the Magic Ability all player characters get to provide a +10 bonus to a single skill check. Because of the diversity rule, you can only get one +10 boost on a single skill check.⁵

Your Virtue

Heroes gain a virtue that set them above and beyond the common folk. Your virtue can be anything from a major aspect of your character's personality to a hidden part that even your character might not know about. For example, even a pathological liar might have an affinity for the virtue of integrity – the truth might just be a scary thing to her or buried deep down inside. Just about any character can have an affinity for any virtue, and the more surprising combinations are often the most interesting – so feel free to choose whichever virtue you want.⁶

⁵ Of course, you can use other Magic Abilities such as the Element of Generosity or The Stare alongside, because those are different abilities even if they have similar effects.

⁶ That's code for, "No sense arguing over what someone's virtue should be. Exhausting, circular arguments

Your virtue provides you with a special utility talent that can only be activated by spending a Magic Point. The virtues and their effects are listed below.

Honor

You always know when your allies are in combat, even when you aren't in contact with them. You also gain the following ability:

By Your Side – Magic

You instantly teleport to one of your allies, appearing next to them.⁷

Indomitability - Magic

You always know when a mind-altering effect is about to happen to you or one of your allies you can see. You also gain the following ability:

Laugh in the Face of Danger – Magic

You and up to six visible allies immune to all mind-affecting effects for the next 10 minutes (this also ends any such effects currently in place). All affected allies also gain a +2 morale bonus to all skill checks for the duration of this effect.⁸

Charity – Magic Interrupt

Trigger – An ally you can see makes a skill check.

Effect – Add a +15 bonus to the triggering check.

Integrity – Magic

Target helpless or willing creature must answer 3 questions that you ask truthfully without distortion. This effect ends after the three questions are asked, or after thirty minutes (whichever comes first).

Compassion – Magic

Target hostile creature becomes non-hostile for the next 5 minutes or until something happens that would cause it to become hostile again. You also gain a sense of why it was hostile to you in the first place.⁹

like that are what alignment-systems are for. ;)

⁷ Yup, that's any of your allies, at any time – you don't need to be able to see them or anything. They don't have to be in combat either.

⁸ This works for psychic, intimidation, fear, mind-control...anything that affects the minds of the characters.

⁹ For example, you might calm an enraged guard long enough to explain the situation, but attacking him mid-conversation would cause him to be hostile once more. You might learn that he is simply doing his job and thinks you are trespassing, or you may detect that he has some reason for going after you personally.

Versatility – Magic

Choose five abilities worth 3 points or less at character creation. When you activate Versatility, you may pick one of the abilities you chose. You gain access to that ability for the next 15 minutes.

Tenacity – Magic

Fully recharge all uses of up to two of your X/Day utility talents.

How to Fight

The Design Goal

The goal was to create a fast-paced, exciting combat system that would be so slick it could even be run over Skype voice-chatting without confusion, while at the same time offering complete freedom in building a character so everyone can play exactly how they want to.

How Combat Works

The rules are simple. You begin battle with 4 Energy. Every turn you get one Standard Action – which can be used to activate a talent (like the ones below). You also get one Minor Action - which can be used for incidental things like opening a door or activating a specific talent (these will list themselves as Minor Attacks or Minor Utilities instead of a Standard). You often won't use a Minor Action in a given turn and that's absolutely fine. It's just there if you need it.

Before the name of the talent an energy cost is listed in brackets “[X]”. Before using the talent, you must be able to complete the energy cost. Weaker abilities cost [0] or even add energy to your total as you conserve your energy in combat with less taxing attacks. Stronger abilities have a cost that requires you to subtract energy from your total. If you don't have enough energy to subtract, you can't use the ability. If you know how planeswalkers work in Magic the Gathering, you know how this works too.

Roll Initiative!

At the beginning of combat, each player and the DM rolls a d20. The result is your Initiative and the turn-order goes from highest initiative to lowest. There's no initiative modifier, it's just a straight d20 roll.

¹⁰ You can also choose to delay your turn if you like, if you'd rather go after your friend in the initiative order.

Defeated and Dying

Sadly, when you fall to 0 hit points you are knocked unconscious and lose all your energy. However,

¹⁰ For starting level, we like that there's a high level of unpredictability of who goes when in combat – it'll help shake things up. However, there are some traits you can snare once you level up to help you go first.

you don't fall into the 'defeated' state until you reach negative half your starting hit-points. When defeated, you cannot fight for the remainder of the battle. It takes 5 minutes of dedicated care and a few Heal checks to get a defeated character back on his or her feet.

True death doesn't happen until you reach -100% your starting hit-points. Try to avoid that.

There's good news though. If you would gain hp when you are below 0 hp, you regain hp as if you were at 0 hp. So, if you're at -13 hp and your ally lets you gain 8 hp...you'd now be at 8 hp.

Stayin' Alive

All first level characters have a maximum 30 hit-points (HP). Wounds can be treated with an hour rest, restoring the character to maximum hp, unless the DM determines the wounds are too severe to be easily healed.

*Hitpoints are *not* your health. They represent your ability to resist the killing blow.*¹¹

How Do We Hit?

You don't. You'll be rolling a straight damage roll to damage your enemies, just like it says on the power. Missing isn't fun, let's just focus on dealing damage and being awesome. Rolling low damage is a glancing blow, one you mostly block or dodge and rolling high is a heavy hit.

But Then What About Critical Hits?

Fear not, we have a brand new system in place. You'll get to hear all about it in a little bit.

How Do I Deal With Decimals?

Great question. If anything in the system ever asks you to divide or gives you a decimal in some other way (like asking you to take half a die result, which can easily mean dividing an odd number by two) then you always, always round down. No exceptions unless the ability says otherwise.

¹¹ No matter how skilled a fighter, an axe-to-the-neck will decapitate him. When a creature takes damage, they aren't actually losing a chunk of flesh. They're bringing up their shield and blocking the attack – the blow numbing their arm – or they're dodging desperately out of the way and spending energy in the process. It's not till they're finally reduced to 0 hp that the enemy finally gets in that clean blow that can knock them out.

This take on HP makes a lot more sense of abilities like inspiring word. Your motivational speech doesn't knit flesh back together, it just inspires your allies to get back in the game and get those shields up. Heck, 4e creatures aren't even "bloodied" until they've lost half their health!

So, always dealing damage actually can make a lot of sense. In this system, a goblin can't hit Aragorn until Aragorn is absolutely exhausted.

Does that make more sense?

Assembling Your Adventurer

Adventurers are able to adapt to a wide variety of situations and it's a lot of fun to change up what you do from battle to battle. Both a Tabletop Version for the system, for those of you that like to do battle with battlemaps and miniatures, and a system that doesn't require a board at all (making it fantastic for running games long-distance over voice chat as well as being simpler for new players to find their footing in) are at your disposal. Combat Talents will be listed in each of the following links. Enjoy!

[Tabletop Version](#) (Uses a Board)

[Skype Version](#) (Optimized for Running Games Over Voice Chat)

Treasure Time!

Adventurer's like their gear. What's Indiana Jones without his signature hat and whip? What about Batman and his Utility Belt, Green Lantern and his power ring, Aragorn and his blade? Sauron tried to go around without his magic ring and we all know what happened to him (if you don't, please close this handbook and go rent Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. You'll be happier).¹²

Items are still in development, but we've put up a playtest version of combat items for the Tabletop version of the combat system. Lots more are going to be added to it later of course. If you want to get in on the playtest, here's the link below.

[Tabletop Treasure - Combat Items for the Tabletop Version](#)

[Treasured Voices - Combat Items for the Skype Version](#)

Leveling Up

A group's value is measured by what they achieve. To illustrate this, leveling up is based not on how many monsters the heroes kill, but rather how effectively the party achieves its objectives. No more do you have to decide between cleverly tricking the guards into getting drunk before sneaking past them or just fighting them, "so we can get the XP". Experience is awarded only when you achieve your quest objectives, with no worry about how you achieved it. If your goal is to stop a dragon from destroying a town, it doesn't matter if you slay the dragon or trick it into thinking that its lair hosts deadly asbestos

¹² Or even better, get your hands on the books and read them first.

and it needs to leave right away. You'll get the Experience for achieving your objective either way, without being punished for creativity. Everyone can come up with and enact the best possible ways to achieve your goals.

Level Tiers

Level 1: 0 Experience

Level 2: 1000 Experience

Level 3: 2000 Experience

Level 4: 3000 Experience

Level 5: 4000 Experience

And so on.

Taking It To The Next Level

So, you've gained some Experience, worked together and have taken your character farther on his or her journey of personal development? Then it's time to take your game to the next level! Alex K. and I have banded together to create a brand-new leveling system that can take you all the way from being a bright-eyed young adventurer out for the first time to becoming the type of character that everyone should know. Thanks to a bunch of great playtesting and contributions from the forum community, we're now pleased to present the Living Legends Leveling System.

There are 10 Levels in the Core Rules

Characters in Living Legends are fun and quick to make, plus the Living Legends system encourages a lot of different build options. With that in mind, and factoring in that level-ups should come once every three gaming sessions (thus once every three weeks in regular groups) on average - that's about half a year of time developing your character. By that time, your characters should have matured through their story arcs and it'll be time to pick up another batch. Besides, Alex K. and I often jump our D&D groups several levels at a time. We go from level five to level eight to level eleven and so on. It just fits the pace of our campaigns better, especially when we want to try out new characters after four months or so. If we're planning to go through three-level-jumps throughout thirty levels, we might as well just keep the same pace of lots of interesting options one level at a time.

Leveling Up Will Help Customize Your Character

We don't want leveling up to just be a straight increase to your stats. When you level up in Living Legends, you get to add even more unique spin to your character's identity and additional depth to your combat strategies. Here are the elements you can look forward to when you level up.

Additional Abilities

Throughout your adventures, you're bound to pick up new tricks. Every three levels, your character will gain an additional 3 ability points to spend. You can spend them on one or more abilities, or save them up to spend later on an ability that costs more than 3 points.

Combat Traits

Want a new spin on combat? Get ready for combat traits. These traits will open up to give you combat bonuses that add new elements to your combat strategy, whether it's doing additional damage on single target attacks or being able to fight on when you're below zero health.

Boons

Alex K. came up with a great idea called, "Boons" which we've had a ton of fun developing. Gaining Experience tracks your party's progress to your collective goals. Boons are thus a party-wide bonus that everyone chooses together. When a Boon unlocks, the whole party gets to choose *one* large Boon for everyone to use together. Boons might be or something like an excellent ship the party can use to travel the high seas, or a mansion that the party can reside in as a home base, or gaining invaluable contacts in the royal guards that can supply important information to the party. There's a ton of options and our playtest groups have already had a ton of fun digging into them.

Choose Your Destiny

In Living Legends, leveling up doesn't just mean you get stronger - it also tracks your progress to the ultimate destiny of your character's story. At level four, you will select your character's Destiny. Your Destiny will feature your journey to achieve some life goal or a general idea of your character's progression, unlocking powerful abilities for use outside of combat as you progress towards this ultimate goal.

Play Around

I always let players change up their builds between sessions, so long as the character's backstory stays consistent. I'll want to emphasize that if you want to change things up between sessions, you definitely can try out lots of options. It'll be the DM's decision of course, but I'll recommend that they allow lots of mechanical changes so long as the story stays consistent.

The Level Up Table

Alright, here we are at last - the great and powerful level-up table. You all know what you get at

character creation if you've read the rest of the Player's Handbook - now let's go into what you get at levels two through ten. Enjoy!

Level 2: You gain 3 Ability Points and a Combat Trait.

Level 3: You gain a Combat Trait and your party gains a Level 3 Boon.

Level 4: Choose your Destiny.

Level 5: You gain 3 Ability Points and a Combat Trait.

Level 6: You gain a Combat Trait and your party gains a Level 6 Boon.

Level 7: You gain your Level 7 Destiny Feature.

Level 8: You gain 3 Ability Points and a Combat Trait.

Level 9: You gain a Combat Trait and your party gains a Level 9 Boon.

Level 10: You gain Your Level 10 Destiny Feature.

Look Ma, No Hitpoints!

You'll probably notice that there's no passive, +5 HP boosts at these levels or bonuses to skills. We put a lot of thought into this, you can read all about it in the attached comment, and ultimately we decided to try something different. We decided to try to incorporate all our bonuses to combat stats and skills into our Traits, Talents, Destinies and even some Boons. You get your flavor and your mechanical bonuses at the same time, and you don't have to keep track of twice as many smaller numbers.¹³

Choose Your Combat Traits

Combat traits allow you to further customize your character, either by adding features that allow you to pursue new strategies, emphasize your strengths or patch up your weaknesses. Enjoy.

[Tabletop Combat Traits](#)

[Non-Board Combat Traits](#)

¹³ That was a huge decision for us. Almost every RPG system includes some sort of passive, "your numbers all jump up a little" at each level. However, the more we looked at it the less exciting the passive bonuses seemed. After all, if health goes up then damage needs to go up – which works fine for things like Stab but doesn't change how effective powers that just slap a status effect on are. Also, such bonuses would get rid of some of the way combat plays. After all, rolling 1d8 is a big variance in damage at the get-go... But 1d8+50 damage, the result of the die would only really matter if it triggered your special or not.

Skill checks would be easier to add a bonus to, like +1 to all your skills every level, but lots of utility talents already offer a ton of interesting ways to increase your skill checks - same with Destinies and even boons can help with some of them. We definitely didn't need more skill check boosts in the system.

Ultimately, including all these passive bonuses would mean a whole lot of extra re-balancing and unnecessary complexity - when we'd rather spend our time making new talents, new destinies, new traits, new races, new boons and new content. So, we've decided to take the bold move and bet that Boons, Talents, Traits and Destinies can make leveling-up exciting all on their own. So far, it's been working great.

Furthermore, you'll be scaled up to fight more powerful monsters at higher levels. For example, at level one – a Manticore might be a fitting solo monster for an entire group to face. Once the group hits level ten though, the party could easily dispatch such a beast in a single attack (meaning the Manticore would be reduced to being a 1 HP Minion).

Choose your Boons

[--LINK--](#)

Choose your Destiny

[--LINK--](#)

[Rulebooks Folder](#)

That's All Folks!

Well, that's our system. I hope you have as much fun with it as we've been having every week. If you have any questions or comments feel free to contact me at minimallyexceptional@gmail.com. I'd love to hear your thoughts.