

WHISPERS FROM THE PIT

LIFE BEGINS AT LEGENDARY: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

We've seen several topics on the forums along the lines of "What do I do now my characters are Legendary?" Well, Legendary isn't the end of the journey, it's just a different road. Let's take a little look at Legendary characters.

Am I a God?

In some games, reaching the top step of the ladder pretty much marks the end of a character. He may have hundreds of "hit points," stats through the roof, and enough powers to destroy a small army on his own. Not so in *Savage Worlds*.

For a start, a character who has just reached Legendary has had just 16 advancements. Sounds a lot, but he's had to advance his attributes, skills, and Edges with those. Chances are he's lacking something somewhere, and as a GM, that's something you should exploit (in a good way).

Let's look at several key areas of a typical campaign to see why the Legendary character isn't a god.

Combat

A standard hack and slash fighter reaching Legendary is very likely to have d12 Fighting and Improved Block. It's not being a munchkin, it's what the archetype needs. This gives him a Parry of 10, which is pretty high. Arm him with the right weapons/shield, and that goes even higher. So, is the hero invincible? Far from it.

First, missile weapons need a base 4 to hit, or 6 if the hero has Improved Dodge. Rolling a 6 is much easier than rolling a 10+, so the character is still susceptible to missile weapons.

Second, the maximum amount of stat increases a character can get during his climb to Legendary is 5 (Novice through the first advancement at Legendary). A fighter type needs Agility (unless he's paid for his combat skills the slow way), Strength, and Vigor as his primaries. Chances are he's had to skip on Smarts and, to a lesser degree, on Spirit. Sure, he might have raised his Spirit, but Combat Reflexes is a cheap way of avoiding being Shaken for too long.

Even at Legendary, a tough hero is susceptible to Tricks and Tests of Will. It won't kill him obviously, but it can give attackers a bonus to hit or even leave the guy Shaken.

Third, monsters don't have to be stupid. A top-end character in another game might be able to slay 50 goblins without much thought, but in *Savage Worlds*, the goblins can Gang Up or use Tricks to get advantages. Goblins may only have a d6 Fighting, but when there are a lot of them, the Gang Up bonus can bring a Parry of 10 down to 6. Yes, the goblins still need a 6 to hit, but it's much easier to get than a 10. Goblins also have a d8

Shooting, so they'd sensibly start with a missile volley before launching into melee.

Remember as well, that Wild Cards are the great equalizer in *Savage Worlds*. A goblin may die pitifully quickly, but a Goblin Chieftain can easily be a match for a hero. Every tribe is likely to have its elite warriors, who could also be Wild Cards.

So the Legendary character has been hit, but can he survive every blow? Let's go back to our uber-tough fighter. He's got a d12 Vigor and +3 plate armor, giving him a Toughness of 14. Wow, that's pretty high, but Called Shot can ignore Armor (back to Toughness 8) and dice Ace remember. I've seen 22 rolled on a d4 at my own table, and I've heard of sessions where damage of 30+ has been rolled. No, it isn't common, but neither should Legendary characters drop like flies. They're not gods, but they are *heroes*.

Speaking of damage, what's the best damage our uber-hero can deliver? Strength d12 and a great sword (+4) gives him d12+4, maybe +6 with magic. High, but not high enough to trouble the average dragon or giant without an Ace. Even a troll has Toughness 10, so it's not guaranteed to die in one hit, even as an Extra.

It's also very important to remember that these high numbers are for a dedicated fighter *reaching his peak*. Mages and thief types probably won't have high Parry or Toughness (at least not at these levels).

What about Edges? A hero with Improved Sweep can kill a lot of foes in a single blow, but only if they're close enough to attack him. A few monsters with Reach weapons can quickly make that Edge useless. Compared to some other fantasy games, a Legendary hero doesn't get a huge number of attacks either. At most he'll get three if he has two weapons (with or without Ambidextrous and Two Fisted) and Frenzy. Even a common lion gets two.

Some high level characters *may* be able to take on a dragon in single combat, but that's not something to avoid—that's the stuff legends are made of. Would Beowulf have been as dramatic if the dragon was killed by Beowulf and his equally tough allies? Of course it wouldn't. The average Legendary character, and even our fighter, will probably think twice about going toe-to-claw with a dragon, and in that respect he's no different to a Novice character.

Notes on Other Genres

All these high numbers for Parry and Toughness are usually only found in fantasy games. A *Tour of Darkness* Legendary character isn't going to have much Armor, and a 2d8 bullet against Toughness 8 makes him almost as easy to kill as the

Novice next to him. Who cares if he has a Parry of 10, it won't stop that bullet or grenade.

Sci-fi games may have Power Armor with Armor ratings of +10 or higher, but most weapons probably have an AP rating as well.

Who cares if your horror hero has Parry of 10? When he fails that Guts roll at -4 he's no better off than a Novice. And if a dark god materializes, well, the hero gets to stay alive for a few more rounds.

Naturally some genres work well at Legendary status. Pulp heroes reaching this level are now equal to Indiana Jones or Doc Savage. Sure, bullets still kill them, but now they can tackle hoards of Nazi or hostile tribesmen and get away with it. Superhero settings can work well at this level as well, especially for small groups. A high Toughness here means the heroes can get smacked into next week, fly across a street and through a building, and still get up to carry on, just like the comics.

Magic

So we've taken a look at combat. Let's examine the arcane arts.

At the core of all magic lie Power Points. A mage or cleric starts with 10 and can gain another 25, if he takes Power Points as his first Legendary Edge. Thirty-five Power Points may sound a lot, but that can quickly get chipped away in a few brief combats. Launch a dozen or more goblins en masse, and the mage might drop a 6 point *blast*, instantly removing almost one-sixth of his Power Points. A few castings of *armor*, *smite*, and *healing* eats away his pool even quicker. Yes, he can recharge them, but even at 1 PP per 15 minutes, it still takes a finite time. The monsters aren't likely to give him that luxury.

As for powers, there are 31 listed in the core rules alone—a setting may add another half dozen to that list. A mage starts with just 3 powers, and with 16 advancements to reach Legendary, he probably won't pick up more than a dozen at the very most, not if he wants to increase his attributes, skills, and other Edges as well.

Don't forget that even a spellcaster with a d12 arcane skill can be stymied by Arcane Resistance and Improved Arcane Resistance.

Magic also works against the heroes, of course. For 6 Power Points, a lowly goblin shaman can probably fire at least two volleys of three 3d6 *bolts*. That's gonna hurt, whatever Rank you are. If the shaman needs a better chance of hitting, he can use *boost spellcasting* to get a +1, maybe +2, bonus. Don't forget, this guy is just a lowly Extra as well. Make him a Wild Card and he gets more dangerous as he has his Wild Die to help him (and probably more Power Points and maybe even the Wizard Edge).

Puppet can reduce a Legendary fighter to a statue or, if he fails a second roll, an enemy. Now let's see how the players like

the combat monsters they've created. *Smite* combined with *boost strength* or *boost fighting* can make even a basic orc deadly. An *invisible* orc could deliver several blows (more with *quickness*) before he is Noticed, and may even get the Drop on his first attack.

Responsibility

With great power comes great responsibility, or so they say. Legendary characters shouldn't be swords for hire or wanderlust adventurers looking for dungeons to cleanse, they should be movers and shakers. A fighter may run a mercenary company or command a castle, a cleric may be head of the church in his region, a wizard run a college, and a thief may run the city guild.

Sometimes these lofty titles are handed out to the characters (such as a cleric working his way up the ranks) and sometimes they "buy" them with Edges. What, there's no Legendary Edge for running a faith or commanding a castle? Of course there is, you just haven't invented it yet. The sample Legendary Edges are just that. Want the character to run an interstellar mercantile firm, command an entire faith, own a castle, or be appointed general of the army? Create a Legendary Edge.

Maybe the hero has to buy Followers to represent his core supporters, but he may also get some minions for free. Let's say our uber fighter gets hold of a castle. Does he need to buy Followers for his 10 knights and 50 men-at-arms? If he did, he'd have to take 12 Follower Edges. Instead, maybe Followers gets him 5 knights (all loyal men) and taking the Edge to own the castle nets him 50 poor quality men-at-arms. Now if Joe Knight wants to gain better troops, he can buy Followers to upgrade his men-at-arms to sergeants, or even knights. Heck, maybe he can spend some of that hard earned cash buying new troops.

And let's take a quick look at money. Many fantasy games have a lot of cash floating round. What does a Legendary character do with it? He builds a castle, a monastery, a cathedral, he pays to maintain said structure, to feed the mouths who follow him, and such like. Don't think of it as a waste of money—think of it as an investment in the campaign you're playing in. Maybe when you do retire, your new Novice can be a knight serving your old character or a cleric serving under someone else's high priest.

Not every player likes political games, but at Legendary status they can't really avoid them (unless you really do want nothing more than a weekly dungeon bash). A knight with a castle may be involved in courtly politics. Perhaps the current king is weak and the kingdom is collapsing, so courtiers seek supporters for a coup (or to stop one). Maybe the knight's rival wants him removed and begins a campaign against him at court. Our hero now has to travel to court and defend himself with Persuasion rolls...better hope not every level-up was spent on Combat Edges. Rival guilds, faiths, businesses, or colleges may try to muscle in on the character's action, forcing him to

confront them or lose everything he has worked for.

Legendary status characters with responsibility are also walking campaigns. If Joe Knight wants to launch a crusade against the orcs in the hills, you've got a complete campaign arc ready to work with. If he doesn't, then maybe the orcs make the first move and invade his lands. Now Joe Knight has to raise his army, mobilize the peasants (which could be a pain if he failed to get his Persuasion above a d4), and lead them in war (time to dust off the Leadership Edges). What does our hero do when his merchant ships begin vanishing? Can he afford to simply replace them, or does he get off his butt and go solve the problem?

Remember, having a good Fighting skill doesn't make you powerful. True power comes from social status and the people who follow you. A lone swordsman may be remembered as a mighty hero, but the deeds of a leader usually live longer.

If the players don't want this responsibility, or you don't want to give them this true power, then it probably is time to hang up the characters, but they and you are missing out on the real fun of roleplaying. The heroes have earned the right to shape the world with their actions, or even their words, and this is the time to sit back and let them shape your campaign.

Things to Do

So what does a Legendary character do to amuse himself? Pretty much the same as he did at lower Ranks, but on a grander scale. Legendary characters don't wipe out a dungeon full of orcs, they act to eradicate entire tribes. They don't kill the undead in the local graveyard, they head straight for the lich's tower.

Final Advice

If you plan on sticking with a setting for sometime, whether homebrew or published, think about Legendary status when the game begins. Don't worry about what Edges you'll take later in life, that's just a game mechanic. Think about where you want your character to be at that time in terms of world power and tell your GM. If he's any good, and your idea is cool, he'll shape his campaign to make that happen. You'll have to work at it (don't expect a free ride), but the goal should be attainable.

And finally, a lone goblin with a lucky die roll can kill the most powerful min-maxed Legendary hero in an instant, and for me, that's part of the beauty of *Savage Worlds*.

Wiggy

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