



The Goblin Laws of Gaming
Version -1.0

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Overview

Design Philosophy

1. Compatibility with old modules. Simple enough to perform conversions on the fly.
2. Low Power Level. Each level gives you diminishing returns. The power curve flattens out drastically after 4th level. No supermen.
3. Accessible for new players. They should be able to make a character in 10 minutes, then learn the rules as they play.
4. Simple. Consolidate ruthlessly. Turn two rolls into one, turn one roll into none. Turn tables into formulas, turn formulas into static numbers.
5. Fast to play. Prioritize flexibility over comprehensiveness, rulings over rules, simplicity over realism.
6. Hackable. No dependencies, no power expectations. If a player requests it, a DM should be able to design a custom class in 5 minutes. Player characters are just a few templates bolted onto a common chassis.

Base Mechanics

Nearly everything uses a d20 rolled against a target number. If you roll equal or less, you succeed. For example, if you have a Strength of 9, you have a 45% chance to succeed on a Strength check. Bonuses and penalties are usually +/- 2 or 4.

Contested checks are likewise resolved with a single roll. The player makes their check with a bonus or penalty proportionate to how far the opponent's stat is from 10. Examples:

Shoving: The PC has Str 11, the orc has Str 14. The PC needs to roll a 7 or less to succeed, since $11 - 4 = 7$.

Attacking: The PC has Attack 12, the orc has Defense 16 (plate). The PC needs to roll a 6 or less to succeed, since $12 - 6 = 6$. If they were attacking an ooze with Defense 8, they would need to roll a 14 or less to succeed.

Level

A measure of your character's power. It goes up as you gain experience. Characters do not roll their HP, but their HP is based off their Constitution (which was rolled randomly), because I think it's fun to sometimes start with 1 HP.

For this reason, characters don't really have hit dice (HD), but since some spells affect HD, treat their HD as equal to their level, up to a maximum of HD 4.

At level 4 a character has access to all of their abilities, and is considered "fully grown". Any other abilities you gain beyond this point are the result of questing, not merely leveling up. If you want *fireball*, you'll have to quest for it. And adventures should hand out quest abilities pretty often. Did you survive the ice fairy's transformation plague? Well now you have the permanent ability to transform into a rabbit.

Experience Points

You gain 1 XP for every copper (c) you obtain through adventurous means.

- 1 gold gildrek = 10 silver smoldreks
- 1 silver smoldrek = 10 copper cupreks.

The Base Adventurer

You can think of the base adventurer as Indiana Jones minus the Archeologist. They're still a capable person, they're just not specialized.

This is what your character looks like without any class templates.

Level	HP	Templates	Max Skill	Attack	Save	XP
1	Con - 4	1	1	11	6	1
2	Con - 2	2	2	12	7	2000
3	Con	3	3	-	8	4000
4	Con + 2	4	4	13	9	7000
5	Con + 4	-	5	-	10	10000
6	Con + 6	-	6	14	11	14000
7	Con + 7	-	-	-	12	18000
8	Con + 8	-	-	15	13	22000
9	Con + 9	-	-	-	14	26000
10	Con + 10	-	-	-	15	30000
+1	+1	-	-	-	-	+5000

Leveling Up

Whenever you level up, you gain a new template (up to a max of 4) and all of the perks listed in the base adventurer table above. You can also test a stat of your choice to see if it improves.

To test a stat, roll 3d6. If it is equal-or-higher than the stat you are trying to improve, that stat improves by 1.

Class Templates

Classes (and race) are just templates applied on top of a base adventurer.

There are four templates for each class, labeled A through D. You gain these in the listed order: you cannot gain Fighter B unless you have Fighter A. If you want to multiclass, just take a template from a different class.

You get one template per level. You cannot have more than 4 templates.

The Character Sheet

Ability Scores

Ability scores are generated by rolling 4d4, in order. After rolling, you have the option to either reroll one ability score, or switch two ability scores.

Ability don't matter much. This is intentional.

Ability Bonus = (Ability Score / 3) - 3, rounding down.

So an ability score of 12-14 gives a bonus of +1, for example.

Strength: The number of things you can carry (your Inventory Slots) is equal to your Strength. Your Strength bonus also modifies the damage you deal with melee weapons.

Dexterity: Your Dexterity bonus modifies the damage you deal with ranged weapons. It also modifies your Defense, your Stealth, and your Movement.

Constitution: Your Hit Points are based on your Constitution, modified by level. You'll make Constitution checks to resist diseases and poisons.

Intelligence: You have a number of Skill Slots equal to half of your Intelligence. A high Intelligence also helps you raise Skills more reliably.

Wisdom: This is a measure of your perception, common sense, attention, and how fast you can think. Your Initiative is equal to your Wisdom. You'll roll Initiative every round of combat to see if you act before or after your opponents.

Charisma: This is a measure of your personality, willpower, and destiny. Your Charisma bonus modifies your Save. You'll also make Charisma checks when trying to appeal to NPCs.

Conviction

If players are only playing with the goals of “survive”, “level up”, and “amass wealth”, you end up with the oft-maligned style of play known as murderhoboism, where characters are often immoral, unattached, and extremely pragmatic.

Deviating from murderhoboism usually has a cost. If the paladin uses a heal on a dying peasant, that heal won't be available for the party later on, when they might need it. And so the murderhobo-paladin will not heal the peasant, because the cost is too great.

The purpose of Conviction is to offset that cost.

A Conviction is your character's answer to one of these questions:

- Why did I start adventuring?
- What am I willing to risk my life for?
- What principles do I use to guide my actions?

Not everyone has Convictions, but adventurers always do. Adventuring is desperate, deadly work and no one engages in it without a good reason.

There are two blank spots on your character sheet for your Convictions. You can fill these in whenever you want. If you already have a clear image of your character during character creation, fill them in then. Or play your character, get to know them, and then fill them in when their Convictions become apparent.

A Conviction might be “Seek knowledge.” Or “Help the innocent.” Or “Money is power.” Or “Protect the healer.” Or even “Hello, ladies.” These are morals, instincts, bonds.

You gain a point of Conviction whenever you follow one of your Convictions. You cannot have more than 1 point of Conviction at a time.

You only gain a point of Conviction when following your conviction gets you into trouble. Or at least, whenever it is not an optimal strategy and you pursue it anyway. If you “seek knowledge” and read the blasphemous tome even though you know it's dangerous and not really necessary, you can charge that Conviction. You're following your heart, not the munchkin.

You spend your Conviction to get a bonus on a d20 roll.

- If the roll is related to a Conviction: +8
- If the roll is not related to a Conviction: +4

You can only spend your “Seek knowledge” Conviction when succeeding on that roll will bring you closer to gaining new knowledge. It wouldn't work if you were trying to kill a random alligator in a swamp, because you don't usually learn things by killing random alligators in swamps. Likewise, you can only use your “Protect the innocent” Conviction when you need this roll to be successful in order to protect an innocent.

A lot of this is up to the DM, and players should talk to their DM about this before they write down their Convictions. If your conviction is “Survive at all costs”, does that mean that they can spend it in any combat where they risk dying (and that's probably most combats). I'd say no, you can only use it in combats where it looks like you're losing, but in your game, it's up to your DM.

Hit Points

Hit Points are better thought of as “Don't Get Hit” Points. They represent your ability to survive blows that are potentially lethal through luck, skill, or toughness. When your HP runs out, you are unable to defend yourself properly, and any blow is a potentially lethal one.

So there are no mechanical effects for being reduced to 0 HP. However, any damage in excess of this is Lethal Damage, which incurs a roll on the Death and Dismemberment Table.

Recovering Hit Points

You can recover hit points in 3 ways.

- A good night's rest restores all HP, as long as you have a campfire and a blanket. Lacking those things, it only restores 1d6+level HP.
- A good long lunch restores 1d6+level HP, as long as you have food and water. This takes an hour.
- Magical healing is also a thing.

Injuries, Insanity, Trauma, and Doubt

Injuries are one of the consequences of rolling on the Death and Dismemberment Table. They have a fixed duration. For example, “Sprained Ankle, 4 days” means that you will be moving at half speed for the next 4 days.

Whenever you receive magical healing, you heal HP, but you also heal an injury, shortening it's duration by an equal amount of days. Magical healing cannot reduce an injury's remaining duration to less than 1 day, because there's no substitute for a good night's sleep.

Trauma is an optional subsystem detailed in the Death and Dismemberment section. Basically, seeing/doing traumatic things incurs Trauma Points, and gaining enough of those risks temporary and permanent insanity.

Doubt reflects your character's resolve to continue, and is another optional subsystem. Some creatures, like angels, attack your resolve instead of your hit points. Basically, you have a hidden HP pool called Resolve, calculated the same way HP is, except substituting Cha for Con. When it runs out, you either become an unfriendly NPC, or you replace one of your Convictions.

Attack

You roll Attack whenever you try to hit something. A first-level Adventurer has an Attack of 11. Your target's Defense is applied as a penalty to this roll.

Defense

You roll Defense whenever an opponent tries to hit you, with a penalty derived from your opponent's Attack. It is modified by Dexterity.

- Leather (light armor) grants Defense 12.
- Chain (medium) grants Defense 14.
- Plate (heavy) grants Defense 16.

Stealth

Your Stealth is equal to $5 + \text{Dex bonus} - \text{Encumbrance}$. You roll Stealth whenever you try to sneak up on someone, or past someone. Stealth only applies when success is ambiguous. Anyone can hide under a bed, and no one can walk in front of an alert guard without being seen.

A party attempting to be Stealthy uses the Stealth score of the least Stealthy member.

Move

Your Movement is equal to $12 + \text{Dex bonus} - \text{Encumbrance}$. This is the same as Movement speed in previous editions. You roll it when climbing, jumping, balancing, and running. It is also used for chases.

A party moves at the speed of its slowest character.

Initiative

Your Initiative is equal to your Wisdom. You roll it at the beginning of each combat round. If you succeed, you act before the enemies. If you fail, you act after them.

Save

Your Save is equal to $5 + \text{level} + \text{Cha bonus}$ (because Charisma describes willpower and destiny) up to a max of $15 + \text{Cha bonus}$. You roll it to test your fate: which basically boils down to resisting magic and getting lucky.

Inventory Slots and Encumbrance

You have a number of Inventory Slots equal to your Strength + 2 (from your backpack). Most items take up one Inventory Slot. Two-handed weapons take up two inventory slots. Armor takes up a number of slots equal to its Defense bonus. Negligible items (small enough to put inside your closed mouth) take up none. Coins and gems never take up any Inventory Slots.

You gain 1 point of Encumbrance for every Inventory Slot in excess of your capacity.

In addition to getting Encumbered from carrying too much, you can also gain Encumbrance from wearing armor. Each point of an armor's Defense bonus in excess of +3 incurs a point of Encumbrance.

Encumbrance is applied as a penalty to your Movement, Stealth, and Dex checks. (It doesn't actually decrease your Dex, it just makes any Dex checks more difficult.)

Melee Weapons

Light weapons like daggers take up a single inventory slot and deal 1d6 damage. They can be thrown (-1 Attack for every 10' beyond the first) and suffer no penalties when fighting in a confined space.

Medium weapons like swords take up a single Inventory Slot and deal 1d6+Str damage, or 1d8+Str damage if wielded with two hands.

Heavy weapons like greatswords take up two Inventory Slots and deal 1d10+Str damage, and must be wielded with two hands.

If you attack while dual-wielding, you get +1 to hit. Only one weapon actually does damage.

Ranged Weapons

Slings deal 1d6+Str damage. They get -1 Attack for every 20' beyond the first. A sling can share an Inventory Slot with up to 3 stones. Stones can always be gathered with a few minutes of searching.

Bows deal 1d8+Str damage and get -1 Attack for every 30' beyond the first.

Crossbows deal 1d12 damage and get -1 Attack for every 40' beyond the first. It requires a standard action to reload a crossbow.

Both bows and crossbows shoot arrows. You can fit 20 arrows in an Inventory Slot. If you recover spent arrows after combat, 50% of them will be usable.

Possession of a crossbow is usually a crime. They are knight-killing weapons.

Armor

Armor is interchangeable, and everyone is proficient with all types of armor. Every armor gives a Defense bonus equal to the number of Inventory Slots it occupies. Armor can be standardized (leather = +2 Defense, chain = +4 Defense, plate = +6 Defense) or it can be piecemeal, with each Armor Piece occupying a single inventory slot and giving a +1 Defense bonus. However, piecemeal armor cannot give more than +5 Defense.

- You can swim in Light Armor (+1 or +2 Defense) without penalty.
- You can swim in Medium Armor (+3 or +4 Defense) by succeeding on a Strength check.
- You cannot swim in Heavy Armor (+5 or +6 Defense).

Each point of Defense bonus above +3 gives you a point of Encumbrance (see below).

Breakage

Whenever you make an Attack or Defense roll and get a natural 19 (almost a critical failure/miss), you risk breaking your weapon (if you were attacking) or your armor (if you were defending). The chance of your weapon/armor breaking on a 19 depends on its quality.

- Fragile weapons always break.
- Standard weapons have a 50% chance of breaking.
- Masterwork weapons have a 1-in-6 chance of breaking.

When a weapon gets its first break, it gets -1 to Attack. When it gets its second break, it snaps in half.

When an armor gets a break, it gets -1 to Defense. It doesn't snap in half until the penalty equals the bonus (or 4 breaks on chainmail). If you are using piecemeal armor, a single armor piece snaps in half whenever you get a break.

Abilities

These come from your class templates, and they are what distinguishes most you from the base adventurer (and the other PCs). They give you unique abilities and options.

They are designed to be active (as opposed to passive), and each template will hopefully yield an ability that a player would be excited to gain access to. And most importantly, they are designed to be incomparable. No +1 bonuses to other parts of the character sheet.

Abilities should give you a new ability, not just improve an existing one. Things like trapmaking and clairvoyance cannot be compared, because each is preferable in a certain situation (unlike +1 Attack and +2 Attack).

Comparable abilities are boring, and they lead to min-maxing, system mastery, and other shit I want to avoid.

Skills

Skills have Ranks from 0 to 6. You begin with three skills at Rank 1. A skill's Rank cannot exceed your level.

There are no social skills, no perception skills, and no stealth skills. There's also no healing skill. Here are how some actions are translated into skill checks:

- Climb, jump, run → Roll Movement.
- Stabilizing a dying ally → Roll Int/2.
- Notice the deadly spider lurking on the ceiling → You might roll Wis, or you might not notice it unless you tell the DM you are looking carefully at the ceiling.
- Disarm a trap → Use common sense.
- Sneak up to a guard and slit his throat → Everyone has a Stealth score. Some templates offer a bonus.
- Persuading an NPC → Roleplay the interaction. Your DM will decide on an X-in-6 probability of success based on your approach. It may be automatic. If you are just trying to get someone to like you, a Charisma check is appropriate.

In fact, there are no skills that are directly useful in combat. This is intentional. Since no skills give a clear tactical advantage, players will have to be creative if they want to use their skills to gain an advantage. Since skill usages are left undefined, players have more freedom to pick skills that fit their character concept.

Skill checks are determined by rolling 2d12, and then subtracting the smaller number from the larger number. If the result is equal-or-less than the Skill Rank, the succeeds. If both dice show the same number, and that number is equal to

the Skill Rank or less, it is a critical success. If you have the perfect tool for the job, you get a +1 bonus to your Skill Rank.

Whenever you use a skill in a non-trivial situation, put a check mark next to it. Once you have three check marks beside a skill, you can test it to see if it improves.

Whenever you rest in town for at least a week (downtime), you may erase the check marks from beside the skills that have at least 3 check marks. For each of those skills, make an Intelligence check. If you succeed, the Rank of the skill improves by 1, up to a maximum equal to the character's level.

Some probabilities:

• Rank 0	8%	0% crit
• Rank 1	24%	1% crit
• Rank 2	38%	1% crit
• Rank 3	50%	2% crit
• Rank 4	61%	3% crit
• Rank 5	71%	3% crit
• Rank 6	79%	4% crit

Roleplaying

You don't have to talk in a funny voice, but you *do* have to tell the DM what you are saying to the NPC, and how.

It's not a division between player skill and character skill. If you don't understand that bootless goblins are susceptible to intimidation, and proud dwarven kings are not, you are bad at this game.

Common sense negotiations are one of the skills that this game tests.

Gameplay

Starting Equipment

Blanket (1 slot)
Waterskin (1 slot)
Rations x3 (1 slot)
Flint and Tinder (0 slots)
2 copper coins
. . . and one random item.

Starting Skills

A fresh level 1 character begins with three skills at Rank 1. One comes from their class template, while two are rolled randomly.

Combat Maneuvers

Shove, trip, disarm, grapple, that sort of thing. There are two halves to performing a Maneuver:

- First, make an Attack roll with the target's Attack as a penalty (instead of its Defense).
 - If you fail this, the target hits you with its basic melee attack.
 - Hit or miss, you go on to the next step.
- Second, make an opposed ability score check. If you succeed, the maneuver occurs.
 - You roll Str for shoving and grappling.
 - You roll Dex for everything else.
 - Your target rolls either Str or Dex, whichever is better.

Hirelings

Hirelings are NPC allies. Most work for a fee, such as a half-share of any treasure discovered. They start with a random personality, random goals, and a Morale of 10. They get a half-share of XP.

Pets

Pets are trained animals. They don't expect any treasure and they don't get a share of XP. They must be commanded to do things. Even wardogs

will not enter combat until you command them to. Commanding a pet is a standard action. Unless they were raised and trained together, you can expect your pets to fight and even kill each other.

Poison

A poison always has a damage listed after it in parentheses, such as "adder venom (1d6)". When you are exposed to poison, you take the poison damage at the end of your next round. The round after that, you must make a Con check. If you succeed, you take no further damage. If you fail, you take the listed damage again, and again the following turn.

Basically you take the damage 1x on a successful Con check, and 3x on a failed Con check, you just delay the Con check as much as possible.

Slower poisons have their intervals listed after the damage, such as "strychnine (1d8, minutes)". The default is rounds.

Poisoned weapons only discharge their poison once, on a successful hit, and then the poison must be reapplied. Most creatures are immune to their own poison.

Drunkenness

Each point of drunkenness expands your critical fail/miss range by 1. So a character with 3 points of drunkenness would critically miss on a roll of 17-20. This lasts until the next morning.

Shields

A held shield provides +1 Defense. Additionally, you can choose to sunder your shield to reduce incoming physical damage by 1d12 points.