

# LEGENDS: THE BEGINNING

Since childhood, I've been enthralled by oral storytelling traditions. I'd go to sleep nightly being read folktales from diverse cultures, and I loved making up similar stories to tell my parents and friends. As an adult, some of my favourite times were telling bedtime stories to my nieces and nephews.

One of the highlights of the oral tradition, I found, is that the stories tended to involve audience participation. Instead of "t'was dark and stormy night..." it was "...and the Elves raised their shields to defend their tree fortress! What do you think happened next?" This became an even stronger tradition when the youngins began inserting themselves into the stories, either as characters or narrators, and our nighttime adventures became fully collaborative.

In my years of gaming and game design, I've always harboured the desire to make a game that took this oral tradition into other mediums. A game that fuses the narrative elements I loved about indie character-driven roleplaying games with the toyetic advantage of board games. Stories about toys, but with richness and depth of theme to satisfy adults. I was just looking for the right idea.

I encountered Trudvang as a game already in design concept stages (with my esteemed co-designers Fel Barros and Guilherme Goulart). An epic storytelling game in a living world (the board), with heroes and monsters (the toys) and stories inspired by the fantastic roleplaying game by Riotminds. Immediately I saw the potential to adapt this oral, mythic storytelling tradition to board game form and joined the team to embark on our most ambitious project to date.

And so was born Trudvang Legends.

The vision for this game was simple, if daunting: to create a storytelling board game experience unlike any others on the market, but still familiar enough to board gamers and fans of CMON big box games to be appealing. A game based on interconnected mythic stories, where player's actions could permanently change the world, and come to life with the amazing plastic hero and monster minis that players expect from us.

Finally, we were driven by the mandate to weave storytelling seamlessly into gameplay. To design a game with learning curve and scope that mirrors the folktales of old; deceptively simple and small at the beginning, only to unveil a rich, multi-threaded tapestry of heroism, impossible feats, and world-changing consequence.

Over two years the project proved so ambitious that we recruited Fabio Tola and Jordy Adan, to complete the biggest design team we've ever had, for the biggest game we've ever made. Over the course of two years we've crafted a storytelling experience that I hope will transport you, as it does me, to the days of traditional folktale wonder.

This is just the beginning. The story continues in a few days, when we dive deeper into the Legends system, and what exactly it means to change the world.



# THE GOOD FIGHT: COMBAT IN TRUDVANG

You can't tell a great mythic story without drama. And some of the most exciting drama comes from combat. Trudvang Legends is no exception.

Because storytelling is the main focus of Trudvang, we knew that combat would not happen quite as often as it does in other adventure games. And with that in mind, we wanted to make each combat in the game impactful and meaningful but not too distracting from everyone's main goals.

And let's face it: combat, especially epic combat in a Norse-inspired setting, should be fun.

## Casting the Runes

Combat in Trudvang is resolved over a series of rounds during which all involved heroes will decide to attack or retreat. After attacks and retreats are resolved, enemies will deal their full damage, which heroes can divide as they choose. This continues until either all enemies are defeated, a single hero is defeated (which ends the story right there), or all heroes have retreated from the fight.

Making an attack is the heart of combat, and where all the fun choices are. The goal of an attack, of course, is to damage, disable and/or defeat as many enemies as you can before they strike back with combat damage or worse. And this is where we focused the game's core bag-building rune casting mechanic.

Your hero has a bag containing a unique mix of elemental runes (wind, water, earth and fire...and some corrupt dark runes). To make the attack, you'll draw runes from your bag, one at a time, assigning those runes either to one of your weapon attacks or skills to "lock in" their damage or effects. Many of the more powerful weapons and skills require multiple assigned runes to lock in their abilities. However, any rune you draw that you cannot assign to an attack or skill is a failure, and must be assigned to your 3-space failure track. Dark runes are always failures.

Three failures, and you cancel all of your locked in attacks, and only resolve your failures. And if that wasn't bad enough, after the first failure, you risk getting nailed by your enemies' "fail triggers."

## Risk and Reward

Making these choices round after round is the key to success or failure in combat. Every enemy has different strengths and weaknesses, and of course so do all heroes. We also loaded the game with a ton of interesting skills, offering combos and synergies, or further risks.

Imagine being locked in battle with a horde of Draugr (undead from the north), having pulled one fire rune from your bag. Do you lock in a single 1 damage with your hammer, assign it to the bigger 3-damage attack (which requires two fire runes), or prepare a block (which saves you or a fellow hero) a lot of incoming damage next turn? That's only scratching the surface; assigning to the block (which accepts any rune) is safer short term, but it also uses up a slot that can take any rune, of which you might only have a few ... which increases chances that future non-fire runes end up becoming failures.

Heroes make all choices in combat simultaneously, so coordinating with other players and spreading risk is a big part of the game. As designers, we really enjoyed the emergent dynamics (both personal and interpersonal) that develop from this fairly simple but deep mechanic.

As fun as attacking is, survivability matters. Sometimes you just need to get out of the fight to live another day. Instead of making an attack, you can attempt a retreat by making a Test of Agility. Drawing five runes from your bag, you'll be looking to match elements with your hero's Agility stat (these are "successes"). The more enemies you try to retreat from, the harder it is. And just like in combat, dark runes are always failure. Each hero decides by themselves whether to retreat, and that's important – you might be a high damage rogue but very low in health, and can't afford to take any targeted damage, so you might have to leave the fight and run to an adjacent region (which also has the subtle potential advantage of getting you free movement! Handy during stories where time pressure is critical.)

## Consequence

Taken on its own, combat in Trudvang is dramatic and tense, with a lot of choices to be made. However, this is primarily a storytelling epic with lasting consequences. This means that even inside a tense combat, you need to be thinking beyond the immediate "can we defeat these enemies and how." You need to consider how each individual combat affects the story in a grander scope.

Remember, any time a single hero is defeated in combat, the story is over (and can often trigger a disastrous ending). So obviously avoiding defeat is paramount. Beyond that, you have to consider how much experience you want to gain this session (in order to spend on Path upgrades to develop your hero). You might also need to protect a valuable area on the map from enemy destruction, making retreat a deeply unsavoury option.

Some combats may also have dire permanent consequences. Imagine dealing such an epic blow to a legendary enemy Bull Troll that you could potentially alter the very stats of all future Bull Trolls you encounter!



# SHAPING THE WORLD: THE LEGENDS SYSTEM

The initial design team (Fel Barros, Guilherme Goulart and myself) spent a lot of time working out just how we wanted to implement the mechanics of a living world for Trudvang Legends. Where the choices made by heroes in one story have lasting effects on future stories, and the combination of stories played and choices made creates a rich unique tapestry that makes each game feel very different.

As the Legends system (our fancy name for the storytelling engine behind the game) took shape, it became clear that our perspective on the living world is from three angles: The Story book, The Boards, and Events.

## The Book of Sagas

When you sit down to play a session of Trudvang Legends, the first thing you do is choose a story from the Storybook. At the beginning, you will only have one story to choose from, but achieving a heroic ending to that story will unlock others ... and each story, depending on the choices you make, has the potential to branch into multiple others.

Once you've chosen which story to play, you open the book to that story's first page and are given your set up instructions and relevant lore text. It's of vital importance to pay attention to the lore, as it is by design loaded with hints and foreshadowing. It's one of my favourite features of the game; reading the story really does help you to navigate through difficult choices. Do note, however, that we did throw in a few red herrings here and there, to keep you on your toes!

We'll go into more detail about the story book and how to use it in a future diary.

## The Boards

Perhaps the key feature that distinguishes this game are the boards and the pockets. They are central in making the game come to life, allowing players to feel the consequences of stories they played in the past, along with the agency to change them when needed.

Trudvang features two modifiable boards: the Map and the Storyboard. The Map is a gorgeous, four-fold representation of the provinces key to our saga, separated into regions. The two-fold Storyboard sits beside the Map, representing the bestiary (stats for the monsters of Trudvang), Stories (spaces for world-spanning events) and the turn sequence of the game itself. Several of the Map regions and every slot on the Storyboard have pockets built into them, each capable of fitting one square card.

During the course of the game, whenever a player takes a world-changing decision (like uncovering an ancient Fountain of Life on the map), or an epic consequence of player's actions (such as a legendary story event, global evolution of monsters in the bestiary, or even a change in the very nature of the game turns) takes place, players will slide an appropriate card into the slot and change the world forever.

The possibilities here are mythic, and endless: You could, for example, win the favour of a famous Dwarven king who gives you favour with his people. Maybe you destroy so many Draugr (fierce undead from the north) in a mythic story battle that a special event changes the stats of all future Draugr to reflect this. You could rebuild a lost mining city in the mountains, giving you the ability to trade in items for experience, but at a future time this city could be invaded and destroyed by rampaging monsters, causing you to lose it forever!

## The Events

Events go hand in hand with the board to create long lasting story effects. During the course of play, you will encounter story-specific points of interest on the map, which correspond to specific cards from the story deck (Trudvang contains well over a hundred of these). These cards are two-sided, and when you interact with them, they trigger a unique event that challenges, rewards or even harms the heroes (use lore-based clues in the book and the cards themselves to navigate!).

Events can often end up slotting into the world board and remain there, changing the very nature of the game for all future stories. A big part of this game's mystery and enjoyment is that while you are playing out a current story, you must constantly deal with the echoes of the past, working to keep the world in a state of harmony and possibly working to undo the catastrophic events from a previous saga.

Trudvang Legends is such an epic game that world-changing events is only of its key features. Join us next week when we go in further depth about your characters, the Heroes.