



LEVEL UP YOUR LIFE

**HOW TO UNLOCK ADVENTURE AND HAPPINESS
BY BECOMING THE HERO OF YOUR OWN STORY**

STEVE KAMB
FOUNDER OF NERDFITNESS.COM

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INTRODUCTION: THE ORDINARY WORLD

BOND. JAMES BOND.

—SEAN CONNERY, DR. NO

Monte Carlo Casino, Monaco. 2 a.m.: “Hit me.” I sat at a blackjack table in the most famous casino in the world, and my heart started pounding. After splitting my hand three times and doubling down twice, I struggled to stay cool and calm under pressure; after all, although it wasn’t a tremendous amount of money, I had nearly as much riding on that one hand of blackjack as I had spent in the entire previous week. I ordered another cocktail (shaken, not stirred), adjusted the bow tie on my tuxedo, and cracked a corny joke to my new friends from Ireland sitting next to me. The rest of the table played their hands, then the dealer slowly turned over his cards, hit, and busted. The table exploded with applause, and I calmly collected my chips while internally dancing a jig and freaking out.

After partying into the wee hours of the night with new friends, I returned to my hotel on the Mediterranean, literally—the Fairmont Monte Carlo is actually on stilts over the water. I awoke the next morning, enjoyed a breakfast watching billion-dollar yachts pulling into Monaco’s harbor, and proudly crossed a massive item off my gamified bucket list, appropriately named Steve’s “Epic

Quest of Awesome”: Live like James Bond for a weekend.

I doubt anybody who had seen me that night in the casino would have believed who I really was and how my life had changed over the previous year. They probably weren’t aware I had rented my tuxedo from an actual costume shop in the next town over, or that my hotel was paid for with hotel points and cost me nothing. Nor would they know that despite the lavish weekend, I was actually quite frugal and thanks to my run of luck at the tables I had managed to make money on the weekend! Lastly, who would expect that the witty (hopefully) charming gentleman in the tux gambling at the Monte Carlo would return the next day to a cheap hostel in Nice and return to life as a risk-averse, shy nerd?

How I lived out this double-life would surprise anybody, especially considering my starting point. Like many young people growing up in the 1980s, I spent most of my life occupied with my favorite books, video games, and movies for one key reason: escape. Escape from another day at school in which I wasn’t challenged, wasn’t captivated, and didn’t grow. Escape from another day at a job in which I wasn’t engaged, stuck in a position that didn’t line up with my strengths. Escape from another day in life that wasn’t nearly as interesting as the lives lived by the heroic characters in the games I played.

Why bother spending time in the real world, where I had to deal with things that made me miserable, where I was unhealthy, unhappy, uninspired, and where there wasn’t any real excitement? Why bother with any of that when I could simply hop on my computer or game console and live out my fantasies as an epic, all-powerful badass capable of world domination? In real life I was a skinny twenty-something with no savings, no true direction, and mounting social anxiety. In a game world though, I could slay freaking dragons. It wasn’t long before real life became the boring parts between the hours I spent plugging myself into adventures on the screen.

After all, it’s fun to get lost in a book or a movie, or to jump into a video game world where you get to be the hero. I imagined myself as Indiana Jones, Jason Bourne, Neo from *The Matrix*, and

even Link from the classic Nintendo game series, *The Legend of Zelda*. And there's nothing inherently wrong with any of that. I still love those games and movies and enjoy the entertainment they provide. They're a part of who I am as a person. The problem was that they had become a way to avoid the unhappiness in my real life while also allowing me to continue doing nothing about it.

And one day, something changed. Instead of losing myself in games and using them to escape, I put the wheels in motion to start doing all the amazing things I used to dream of. I turned my life into a giant video game, and lived out the fantasies of the characters I adored.

When I was 25, I had never once traveled outside of North America; since then, I've traveled to more than 20 countries, hiked the Great Wall of China, tracked wild animals in South Africa, explored the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and gotten into the best shape of my life. When I'm not on an adventure, I volunteer my time regularly and play music every day. Most important, I'm happy.

And that's just a small part of what I've done. A friend and I hiked in the early morning hours up to a viewpoint overlooking the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu in Peru, which gave me the courage to take another big leap that resulted in a 2-year around-the-world adventure.

I woke up one morning on a bus in New Zealand and overheard the bus driver saying something about a "stunt plane." Less than 24 hours later I was completing barrel rolls and corkscrews in a stunt biplane (with the help of a copilot), living out my childhood fantasy of "keeping up foreign relations" just like Maverick did in the movie *Top Gun*.

A few days after flying an airplane, I jumped out of one. Two days after that? I jumped off Kawarau Bridge, birthplace of the bungee jump, and plunged myself waist-deep into an ice-cold river before shooting out of the water like a rocket into space.

There was that one night when I went scuba diving with sharks on the Great Barrier Reef. We sat on the boat preparing to dive, with rain pouring in sideways and AC/DC blasting over the

boat's PA system, as large sharks circled the boat. I felt like I was living out a scene from a Tom Clancy novel. After surviving that adventure, I spent the next day exploring a vividly colored coral reef that housed a bright pink anemone and an adorable little clownfish. That's right: I found Nemo. Mission: complete!

In addition to my traveling adventures, I've found other ways to level up my life by implementing game mechanics into the rest of my life too. While writing this book, I also managed to pack on 15 pounds of muscle, learned to play the violin, dabbled with swing dance lessons, and volunteered every Thursday at a local children's hospital. It's been a rewarding, challenging, and fulfilling experience and I'm damn proud of it.

I'm not telling you all of this as someone who's been predestined for a life of adventure, or even to boast about how great my life has become. Quite the opposite, actually. Instead, I'm telling you all this as a risk-averse, picky-eating introvert who felt more at home in front of a computer than in public, and who has since become a world traveling adrenaline junkie. How did I do it? By hacking my source code and rewriting the expectations that others had for me (and the expectations I had for myself). By implementing cheat codes and shortcuts wherever possible to achieve results faster. By putting steps in place to move me a little bit closer each and every day from the life I lived to the life I wanted to live. I essentially reverse engineered my life around my Epic Quest of Awesome, systematically eliminating the unimportant and unnecessary so that I could focus on living the game I'd dreamed up while still living a relatively normal life as a writer, nerd, and gamer.

The best part about all of this? I can teach anybody to do it!

In fact, I've taught thousands of people how to do it, and they're currently on adventures as we speak. We call ourselves The Rebellion—inspired by the Rebel Alliance of Star Wars lore—and I want you to join us. Consider this book a strategy guide for your game of life, and the manual for membership in The Rebellion. Not only will I be sharing the exact blueprint you can follow to start living your life like the video game, book, and movie characters you love, but I'll also share dozens of stories from our ragtag community

of Rebels: unexpected heroes, underdogs, and unlikely adventurers who have done the same. I'm going to share with you:

- * How a seventh-grade teacher visited five continents in the past 4 years without taking on a single dollar of debt.
- * How a single dad took his love of anime and gamified his martial arts practice to connect and train with his son.
- * How a Rebel living below the poverty line got his act together, with the goal of competing in his first adventure race on the other side of the country.
- * How a divorced 55-year-old retired firefighter took control of her life and built an app company.
- * How a Filipino college student used a secret powerup to find the best job on campus and overcame a fear of public performance to join a public dance group.
- * How a clinical hematology specialist retooled his life around exploring nature, volunteering at a suicide prevention hotline, and even scoring a major role in a musical.

These Rebels, along with many others, have built their day-to-day lives in varied ways, and I'm so excited to share their stories with you. Throughout this book, you'll find Rebel Spotlights that highlight each person, along with their day job, alter ego, video-game profession, and how they have leveled up their lives. It's been fun to watch people from every possible background level up.

However, if you're reading that list and wondering how the heck you're going to make such drastic changes from the life you're currently not happy with, you're not alone. We've all been there. Going through the motions rather than enjoying each day. Counting down to the weekend, counting down to next year, counting down to some mythical "when things slow down" date in the future (that doesn't actually exist) until we can start to do all of the things we truly want to do. When we're drifting mindlessly through our lives rather than actively participating in them, we often look to escape when real life becomes unfulfilling or too daunting.

It's the equivalent of Bilbo Baggins, the hero in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, quietly living out an existence in his hobbit-hole, avoiding anything that could be dangerous, adventurous, or exciting. We know something is missing in our lives, or we dream of something more, but aren't quite able to identify what that is. And yet it seems like year after year goes by with nothing actually changing, and pretty soon we're looking back and asking ourselves, "What the heck happened?" If any of this is hitting close to home, that life is passing you by, then this is the book for you.

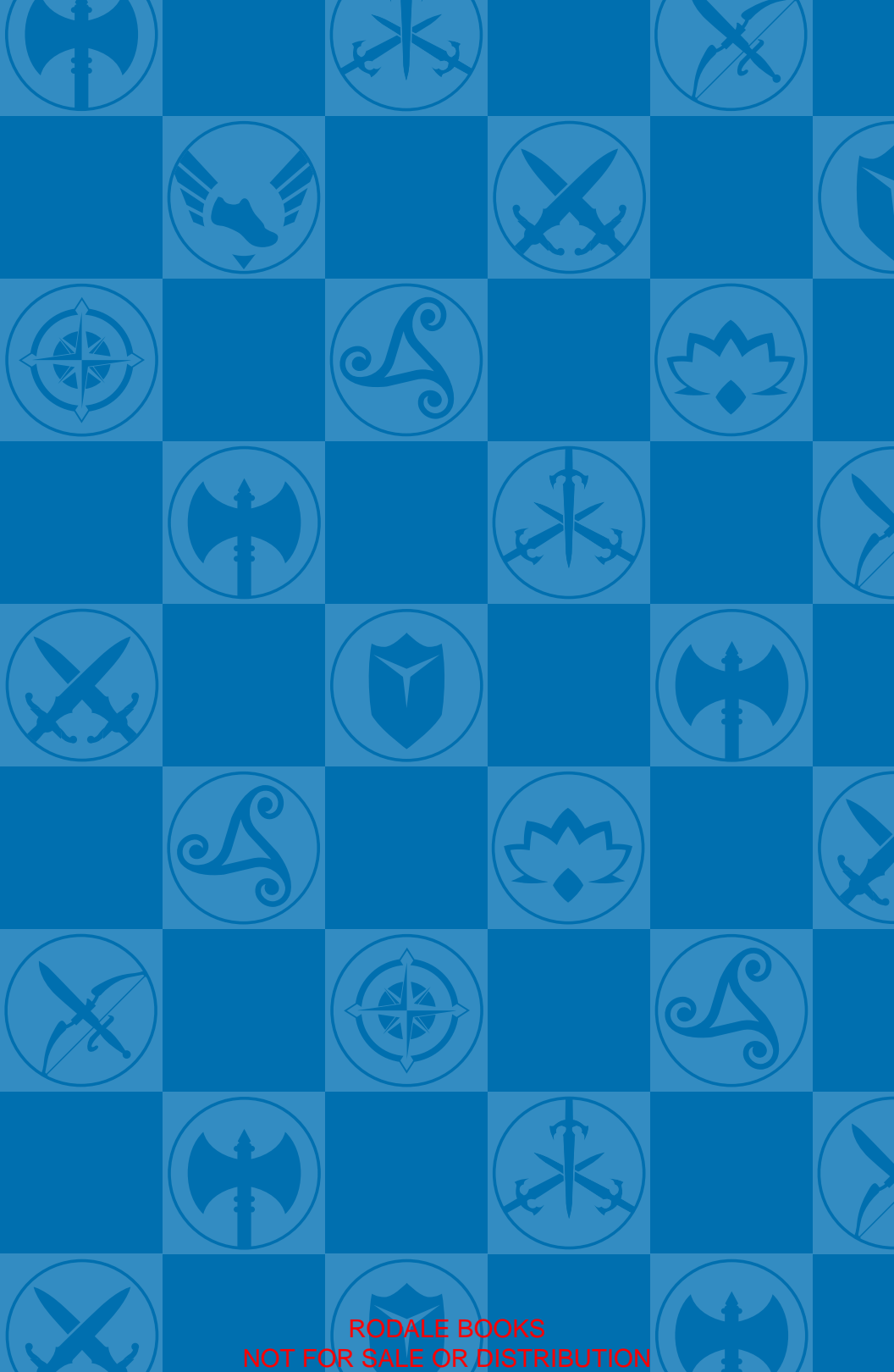
I'm going to show you exactly how to live a life you can be proud of, how to have adventures that will inspire your friends, and how to finally start doing all the things you said you would do eventually but never seem to find the time for. Whether it's traveling more, losing weight, running a marathon, learning a new instrument, starting a website, or anything in between, *The Rebellion* would love to have you.

Now, when you join *The Rebellion*, there's a list of rules we choose to abide by. Our first rule is that we don't care where you come from, only where you're going. Whether you're an 18-year-old high school senior trying to figure out what the heck to do with your life or a 55-year-old divorcée yearning for something more, I'm excited to help.

The next rule? When you join, you join for life. We've got a lot of work to do, but I promise it's going to be a lot of fun. All I ask is that you trust me, and that when I ask you to take a leap of faith, you jump. Our focus is going to be on daily improvement, finding a way to be a bit better, a bit closer to our goal each and every day. But it starts here and now. As Morpheus tells Neo in the movie *The Matrix*:

"This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes."

Shall we take the red pill?



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LIFE IS A GAME. PRESS START!

"I stayed up all night in Qatar reading this! Steve Kamb is not only a real-life James Bond, he's also written a damn good book."

—CHRIS GUILLEBEAU, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Happiness of Pursuit* and *The \$100 Startup*

Jason Bourne. Indiana Jones. Steve Kamb? For the past 5 years, Steve Kamb has transformed himself from wanna-be daydreamer into a real-life superhero. Not only that, but he actually turned his life into a gigantic video game, flying stunt planes in New Zealand, gambling in a tuxedo at the Casino de Monte-Carlo, and even finding Nemo on the Great Barrier Reef. To help him accomplish all of these goals, he built a system that allowed him to complete quests, take on boss battles, earn experience points, and literally level up his life. Best of all, he did all of this without breaking the bank.

If you're somebody who's always dreamed of adventure and growth but can't seem to leave your hobbit-hole, this book is for you. Steve will teach you exactly how to use your favorite video games, books, and movies as inspiration for adventure rather than an escape from the grind of everyday life. Hundreds of thousands of everyday Joes and Jills have joined Steve's Rebellion through his popular website, NerdFitness.com, and leveled up their lives too—losing weight, getting stronger, and living better.

In *Level Up Your Life*, you'll meet more than a dozen of these members of The Rebellion: men and women, young and old, single and married, from all walks of life who have created superhero versions of themselves to live adventurously and happily. Within this guide, you'll follow in their footsteps and learn exactly how to:

- Create your own "Alter Ego" with real-life super powers
- Build in rewards and accountability that will actually motivate you to succeed
- Build your own Epic Quest List, broken into categories and difficulty levels
- Travel the world freely (and cheaply) like Indiana Jones
- Hack your productivity habits to start making progress
- Recruit the right allies to your side and find powerful mentors for guidance
- Train your body for any adventure like Jason Bourne

ADVENTURE IS OUT THERE, AND THE WORLD NEEDS MORE HEROES. WILL YOU HEED THE CALL?

STEVE KAMB is the force behind Nerd Fitness, a worldwide community of nerds and average Joes helping each other level up their lives. He lives in New York City and hopes one day to become Captain America.

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COVER DESIGN BY ERIN TYLER