Killing Kruthiks with Magic Missiles:

An Ethnographic Study of Dungeons & Dragons and its Social Trainings

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Cultural Resource Methods

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Glossary

Player: The actual human who plays the game. Players create characters to play in game.

Character: The persona created by a player in order to serve as an avatar for game play. Characters are created based on a series of numbers and dice rolls in conjunction with a character sheet that outlines basic characteristics.

Ability Score: Scores that are created and calculated with a dice roll and a preset number. Ability scores determine if a character can perform a certain task, and if so, how well. Ability scores can be modified according to a character’s race and class or any other special magical weapons or objects the character may be using.

Tabletop role playing game: a form of gameplay based on role playing and the use of a table as the meeting space. This idea can be adapted and changed. Tabletop role playing games are different from their counterparts, such as live action role playing, which requires people to dress up according to period and character and physically act out battles; and online role playing games that use role playing as their play basis but are hosted online instead of in person. Tabletop role playing games are also sometimes called pen-and-paper games because they often use pen and paper to keep scores and are played in person, generally.

DM/GM: DM (dungeon master) or GM (game master) refers to the individual responsible for running the gaming sessions. The DM or GM is responsible for providing the players with enough information to create characters and know some information about where the game will be played. DMs or GMs are also responsible for upholding rules, making final rule decisions if needed, and playing all the non-player characters and villains in order to create gameplay for the players. Some *Dungeon and Dragons* groups refer to the DM or GM as God because of his or her ability to make all decisions and control the gaming experience.

Dice Roll: Action performed when a player or character must make a decision and requires the use of a random agent. There are six standard polyhedral dice used in *Dungeons and Dragons*: 4-sided die, 6-sided die, 8-sided die, 10-sided die, 12-sided die, and the 20-sided die. Each die has a specific use. Often, the most used is the 20-sided die.

D20/twenty-sided die: Most often used die in the series of polyhedral dice used for *Dungeons and Dragons*. The D20, as it is abbreviated, serves as the decision maker when players are deciding their battle order, whether an attack can be made, and what skills can be used. The D20 is also the most common choice for making random decisions with a die, as it contains the most sides of the standard set used.

Athletics check: A die role made using a D20 and the Athletics score given to a character at the beginning of a game. This number is not static, as it can change as the character gains experience. This check determines whether a character can successfully perform a number of athletic abilities, including spring, jump, climb walls, escape from danger, and swim. For each task, the DM or GM sets a specific number. That number must be exceeded or met with the combination of the role of a D20 and the ascribed athletics score of a character, in order to pass and preform the skill satisfactorily.

Hit points: The number of points a character has to spend until they are dead. Hit points are determined at the beginning of a game with ability score numbers and modifiers. Hit points increase with each level gained.

Race: Race refers to the subgroup of species a character belongs to. According to the edition and setting of game being played, the races available for play changes. Generally, races include Haflings, Elves, Humans, and Dwarves. Race can give bonuses to ability scores, skills, and weapons available to use.

Class: Class refers to the occupation or basic type of character one may play. The base classes used in multiple editions of D&D are: barbarian, bard, cleric, druid, fighter, wizard, monk, paladin, ranger, sorcerer, rogue, warlock. Classes can give bonuses to ability score, skills, and weapons available to use.

D&D

*“With a heavy push and a successful athletic roll, Aidan, the half-orc[[1]](#endnote-1) warden[[2]](#endnote-2)’s heavy shoulder lands squarely on the wooden door, causing it to splinter. Beyond the group, the doorway leads into a dark hallway. Since the party just heard chanting beyond the door that is now broken, it seems logically safe to enter and explore. As the first couple of bodies pass the threshold and set foot in the darkness, Varia, the party’s halfling[[3]](#endnote-3) rogue[[4]](#endnote-4) begins to hear faint clicking, like the movement of cogs and gears in a trap. As she begins to speak, the floor of the hallway begins to tilt back into the darkness. The elven[[5]](#endnote-5) cleric[[6]](#endnote-6) Luthien perceives immediate danger, but before she can warn the others or retreat, the trap has already been set in motion and she finds herself sliding deeper into the unknown darkness after her first failed dice-check for her will.*

*As Luthien continues to slide, others in the group make further dice checks and discover that the trap they are stuck in will eventually cause them to slide into a hole that has opened and is bubbling with liquid magma; this hole leads to the Abyss or Elemental Hell[[7]](#endnote-7). Luthian continues to slide, taking more and more damage. Her body grows weaker every second she spends close to the massive heat source. Party-mate Ninax, the drow[[8]](#endnote-8) ranger[[9]](#endnote-9) cannot let this happen. As the others figure out creative ways to move themselves back towards the doorway and to save Luthian, Ninax turns to the party, smiles, and runs the opposite direction toward the elf cleric. The others gasp in fear, but it is too late. In a short period of just minutes, Luthian is conscious and attached to a rope thrown by the vryloka[[10]](#endnote-10) vampire[[11]](#endnote-11) Stugotts Lenoza. Stugotts pulls the rope in and Ninax, as a last effort to survive the vicious vent to hell, attempts to grab the rope, but fails. The party is safe at the doorway, all except Ninax, who is now sliding closer to the gaping hole. The heat of it is too much; she passes out, her body remains limp on the floor, ever so close to comingling with the magma.*

*Stugotts looks at his party then looks back to Ninax. “She’s one of our own,” he mutters. With a glimmer in his eye, he rushes back down the ramped floor to retrieve his fellow comrade. As he approaches her, dangerously close to the heat, he realizes that she is dead. Stugotts yells back to the party of the news and finds himself in peril as his feet no longer stay in one spot on the floor, rather, they have begun to slide as well. Death comes quick for Stugotts; he began the game with only 13 hit points[[12]](#endnote-12). The magma wiped his life force out quickly. The rest of the party is taken aback with their teammate’s willingness to save each other, so they devise a plan quickly, to successfully retrieve the bodies of the fallen. With heat-scorched clothes and hair, the three remaining party members drag the limp and lifeless bodies of Stugotts and Ninax back to the chapel room they explored just before the hellish trap. Luthian and Varia set up to begin their rituals to bring the fallen two back to life.”*

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Humans are game players. Scholar Johan Huizinga playfully used the term *Homo ludens*, or “man the player,” to describe humans and their attachment and need for games and play (Huizinga 1971: 3-4). Somewhere at our very core, we have always and will always enjoy games of some sort. Sociologist Roger Caillois posits that play is a universal expression of shared human nature, ie. culture, that is expressed uniquely among and between cultures (Caillois 1961). When we are young and being indoctrinated into society, most of our learning processes and socialization comes to us through some game conduit. We build ourselves and our relationships with other humans and our environment through games. Perhaps we learn better when we are playing or maybe a game interface is more comfortable for us. Or could it be that we just like to have fun? Do gaming spaces provide a safe, less-threatening place to express ideas and beliefs? Are games capable of letting their players make decisions differently than they would in real life, or to take risks that would not normally be appropriate or acceptable in the real world? Is it feasible that the fantasy realm or the game scape allow for more deviation from the norms of everyday life?

While games are a crucial part of our culture in the grand scope, games also constitute vital parts of singular cultures. In fact, they can create cultures, as has been the case in the United States, especially since the mid-1970s with the birth of tabletop role-playing games (RPGs), like *Dungeons and Dragons*. The scene and storyline described above is an example of a typical occurrence of a normal *Dungeons and Dragons* game. In the most general sense, a tabletop role-playing game is an imagination-based game where players gather around a literal table and pretend to become the characters they create on table, in order to complete tasks and adventures for handsome pay. Often, the end goal for the game is social involvement and advancing one’s character to higher levels in order to gain use of impressive spells and abilities and to become more powerful. Tabletop role-playing games are so aptly named because of their frequent use of the table. Albeit, games do not always have to incorporate a table, but it is usually the least difficult way to play. While tabletop role-playing games are imagination-based, their structures lie in storytelling and narrative crafting forms used for ages but require a map for combat. When playing the game, it is possible to recognize these conventions in storytelling as they are used. Tabletop role-playing games do have physical objects and components to accompany them. Some players will purchase or craft character props for game play, such as plastic weapons and armor. Some players are apt to actually role-play their character using makeup and clothes, perhaps changing their entire demeanor and way of speaking to fit their character. Some dungeon masters or game masters will create props from the story, to add an extra dimension to gameplay and create a way for the players and characters to interact with physical objects from the game. Most games have a map or grid that details terrain of the game setting or obstacles. Maps also serve to help the players see where they have explored, in a dungeon for example, or how far the cliff’s edge really is from a road they may be traveling.

The groups that surround and are created by tabletop RPGs are also subcultures. When we think of *Dungeons and Dragons*, we often picture a dark and musty basement filled with last season’s clutter. In the middle of the room, under a naked light bulb is an old, needs-to-be-thrown-away table surrounded on all sides by scrawny kids. These kids are usually boys, since girls are not expected to partake in fantasy-genre games. One boy probably wore last Halloween’s superhero cape and another brought along a novelty wand for his wizard character prop. If a girl is in the basement, she usually conforms to social stereotypes; she probably wears glasses, has braces, or has some sort of marked “nerdiness” or “geekiness.” To put it simply, the kids in this basement scenario would probably be considered outcasts and do not fit in other cliques.

This is overly reductive. Not everyone who plays games like *Dungeons and Dragons* is an outcast and has few friends. While these kids are cast out from other groups, they join together to create their own clique, their own community, their own family, their own culture. Consequently, games like *Dungeons and Dragons*, and other tabletop RPGs are important as parts of our culture and how we understand culture.

Games come in many different shapes, forms, and sizes. There is not a ubiquitous board and collection of avatars or markers but a myriad of ways to play. Recently, we have seen the growth of video games and continue to see the creation and adaptation of video-based systems; even now, developers are working to release virtual reality systems of game play that puts you, the player, in the action and feels so real that it often leaves players disoriented afterwards. These types of games trigger responses in the brain, which leave the player questioning which reality is real.

Games can be board-based, video based, or imagination based, and any combination between. Caillois developed a set of four types of game and two types of play (Caillois 1961); games that we play fit somewhere in these categories or between them. Thinking about tabletop RPGs like *Dungeons and Dragons*, it becomes clear that the categories are crossed since chance and role-playing function heavily in *Dungeons and Dragons*. These categories are not static, but quite fluid. Identifying types of games and play is similar to identifying types of cultural expressions. The fluidity between types and categories helps to demonstrate the utilitarian purposes of games for humans and harkens us to think about their use and function in culture and society. Perceptibly, if there are different types of games and play, each must perform a different function in culture. Otherwise, breaking games into a typology as such would not serve a purpose. Perhaps, when games cross over between different types of gaming and play, the game itself is doing something different or more for those playing?

Table 1. Types of Game and Types of Play as defined by Roger Caillois (1961).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Types of Games** | |
| Agon | Competition based |
| Alea | Chance based |
| Mimicry | Role playing |
| Illinx/Vertigo | Perception altering |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Types of Play** | |
| Paidia | Uncontrolled fantasy, free play |
| Ludus | Play that requires skill, time, effort, or patience |

In the most general sense, an RPG (role-playing game) uses role playing as its basis for game play. In an RPG, players are required to temporarily transform their personal character into someone or something else. The degree of role-playing is negotiable, but generally, it is believed that you are not your normal self. This transformation of self allows for a transition that can be considered freeing or altering. It is not every day that we have the chance to become someone new.

This transformation of self can be posited within Bateson’s complex of play and frames. In his article “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” Bateson discusses the use of frames in play and how they affect and effect the psychological aspect of players. He states that in play, activities and discussions are framed between two people, the player and in the case of D&D the character. This in turn, creates two separate psychologies; however, I contend that in a D&D game, these are not two separate psychologies, but rather one that is whole (Bateson 1972). This conjoining of the two as a whole is logical since the characters that are used by a player often have parts of the player’s personality, ideals, beliefs, or they are the direct opposite of the player’s personality and human character traits.

The most widely accepted definition of an RPG requires that it must consist of “quantified interactive storytelling” (Schick 1991:10). In his book outlining RPGs, Schick goes on to break down these three terms, but I find it sufficient not to, since this definition defines itself. Rather, an easier way to work though this is to realize that RPGs do not consist of random acts by players, but rather, moves that are calculated and calculable and have measured outcomes for the characters and the storyline. Players are required, in certain degrees, to play as the role of another character, hence the term *role playing*. At its base, players and their created characters take part in adventures with other player’s characters in order to reach some shared goal. Several types of role-playing games amongst several different platforms exist and are avidly played today. The earliest forms were tabletop-based. Today’s forms vary and can include tabletop, online server-based gaming, online forum-based gaming, physical tabletop boards, and completely imaginary mind-based gaming.

One of the most well-known role-playing games in the United States is *Dungeons and Dragons*. In fact, many posit that before the official birth of *Dungeons and Dragons* in 1974, no actual role-playing games existed (Schick 1991:17). This, of course, is assuming a generalized form of role-playing games like what we think of today. At its core, *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) relies on the decisions of player characters and the controller of the game to advance the storyline. Decisions are not completely unguided by rules. In most cases, to carry out a specific choice or action, a character is required to use a dice roll to simulate randomness in the game. Otherwise, players would also choose to have a successful outcome for their characters.

**Methodology**

Anthropologists and folklorists, as well as cultural heritage professionals, make use of ethnographic research methods as well as the construction of actual ethnographies when discovering and exploring cultures. There are several ways to conduct ethnographic research to receive, in the end, pieces and evidences of a culture that can be used to construct an ethnography. For this ethnographic project, I used two overarching forms of research: research based in textual artifacts of D&D, including scholarship and the text created from semi-structured interviews with a D&D players and Dungeon Master (DM), and secondly actual participant-observation of D&D games.

To create this ethnographic study, I have analyzed my fieldwork resources and conducted textual and bibliographic research on the subjects of tabletop RPGs and Dungeons & Dragons, specifically. The interviews I conducted with Drew, when transcribed, transformed into a text that has proven to be rich with details concerning game play and aesthetics of game play. Along similar lines, field notes of game settings and reflections of the project and findings in the field notes have also been transformed into a secondary text. This text, while not as direct, details my own ideas and understandings of the game, as well as personal insights and revelations. I have been able to code my field notes, pulling out important terms and ideas that require more in-depth study or analysis. This secondary text is also a way for me, as an active participant-observer of the culture, to reflect and be reflexive.

It is crucial to note that the D&D group that I observed and functioned as a participant-observer in is my own group. The most important reason to support the use of fieldwork for cultures like that of D&D is that being a participant-observer allows for a level of insider knowledge that is not attainable any other way. This, in process, allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation of both the game and the community it belongs to and the communities that belong to it. Fieldwork creates an etic lens through which to view an emic world. I am a somewhat new recruit to the game; my adventures in Dungeons & Dragons began in the fall of 2014, around October. Before the first game opening, we had a group meeting to make characters, learn to play, and chose a DM. The group that I belong to generally consists of six players, sometimes fluctuating to seven or eight, depending on the circumstances and who could attend a specific game. Regardless, the core six players were a constant.

Original fieldwork for this project consisted of recording and analyzing a D&D game, active participant-observation of games, semi-structured interviews conducted with a pre-written interview guide, and recordation of field notes and field reflections. In the two interview sessions conducted with Drew McNutt, fellow D&D player and DM, questions ranged across the spectrum and included process questions on game play and creation of characters, questions which requested known history of the game, personal aesthetic ideals of the game and gameplay, and recounts of personal experience narratives about gameplay. Drew was not given the interview guide, and no answers were rehearsed in any sense.

The recorded D&D game took place on 29 May 2015 at my own house. This is the setting we have played all games, except one special game near Christmas held at another group member’s home. My house is located in Jonesboro, Arkansas. We always play the game around a large, dark wooden dining table in the center of the dining room. It comfortably accommodates all six to eight players after we gather chairs from other rooms. As in the D&D basement scenario described earlier, we use one light over the table that concentrates the light into the center and radiates outward. Perhaps there is something integral to D&D about having a singular light illuminate the table’s center.

We generally try to schedule games on Sundays since this is the day that nearly all group members have free. Games are also usually scheduled in the afternoon and into night hours. A typical game can last anywhere between a couple of hours, to upwards of eight and nine hours. The game session recorded is just 2.5 hours of a nearly nine-hour game. Gameplay is not a continuous stream; players take short breaks, consume food and drink, and socialize all while the game is in play.

Games that I observed and participated in have taken place in four different campaign settings. A campaign setting is the world, environment, or location that the story takes place in (Wyatt 2008). Campaign settings are similar to worlds and cultures that are created in books; when you read the book you transport yourself to that world, town, forest, etc. The same occurs for D&D. When you play in a specific world, town, universe, etc., you are expected to mentally transport your character to that world. If, for example, you are playing in a campaign setting that is a world of forests, the gameplay and adventures would incorporate lots of trees and forest creatures. Perhaps there is a jungle fever that you can catch or your character gets caught in a rainstorm. If you play in a campaign where the world is only a desert, you should expect sandstorm and relentless heat.

There is a plethora of settings that have been created professionally by TSR and Wizards of the Coast as well as settings that have been created by fans and players. Regardless, a party or group has the chance to go to any sort of setting. The first campaign setting was in the Eberron world and mediated between a number of cities and towns, including Sharn Cog, a well-known hub of industry and commerce in the D&D universe. A race of half-machine/robots exists and manufacture is king (Wyatt and Baker 2009). The second D&D campaign setting was in a universe system known as Dark Sun and was centered on the planet Athas. This planet was a barren desert wasteland that had been defiled by magic in the past. Here, all metals were precious and characters depended upon stone and bone to create weapons and armor (Baker, Schwalb, and Thompson 2010). The third campaign setting was created by another fan player and adapted by DM, where the two previously mentioned settings were part of modules and adventuring sets sold by Wizards of the Coast. This created setting picked up where the Eberron setting ended, but it was focused in a sleepy coastal town called Ashenport. Here, the rain never stopped and there was some sort of magical disturbance and sea creature attacking slowly (Marmell 2008). The final D&D campaign setting, Tomb of Horrors, was never described in detail. The setting was simple; the characters arrive at a swamp filled with dangerous creatures in search of an entrance to the tomb of the lich[[13]](#endnote-13) Acererak. The mission here is to make it through the dungeon without dying in order to kill the evil Acererak (Marmell and Gray 2010).

Games tend to take on a somewhat ritualized form that is rich with traditions, superstitions, and observations. Central to the D&D tradition is food. Like many other cultural gatherings, food lubricates the social excursion, providing a way for members to provide for others and to reify social and cultural positions of the group members. When we began playing regular D&D games every weekend, group members would alternate bringing the main entrée for the night. This system casually disintegrated in the last three to four games played where all members contributed to the food situation for the night. On one special occasion, to celebrate Thanksgiving, group members created their own Thanksgiving meal in which we ate in character and gave traditional Thanksgiving foods new and creative names that reflect Dungeons & Dragons. As an example, the Thanksgiving turkey was renamed the Great Flying Beast that was donated by the Raven Queen[[14]](#endnote-14) and the traditional dressing was renamed Sehanine[[15]](#endnote-15) Stuffing.

Along with bringing and sharing food, some players have their own sets of traditions and superstitions. Dylan, who has served as a DM and has played as a character in several games, has a stringent superstition for his dice. He always brings a large, red velveteen satchel full of polyhedral dice for any players to use; however, he will not let a player use the set of dice that he has pulled from the bag for his own use. Others will only use a specific color of dice, either one uniform color or a miss-match of all completely different colors. I have noticed that I bought three sets of dice, one set for each specific character that I play. The dice that I bought reflect aspects of their characteristics that are inherent, ie. their favorite color.

Hannah, a group player and myself have a specific set of traditions that only we share. Our dyad has its own culture and folklore. The first is that at the beginning of each game, we use matching drinking cups. Hannah purchased these two identical cups as gifts to me and herself. They have no inherent meaning to D&D specifically. These two cups are clear and translucent pink with pictures of the children’s television characters from the program, My Little Pony emblazed on them. In a girly and fun font, the words “Best Friends Forever” are scrolled around the top. Hannah and I both maintain that we have not and will not use our cups unless we are in the presence of the other. The second small dyadic tradition shared between Hannah and me, is our post-game hug. Other players leave and wave goodbye, but the tradition between Hannah and me have always been to hug. If the tradition is not carried out, the situation feels different, wrong, and incomplete. For us, the tradition is the final cap to a good night gaming and a good night spent with friends.

Our group of six may sometimes include two additional players. All players are current or recently-graduated students of Arkansas State University. Drew McNutt is the focus of my interview-based fieldwork. He has played D&D for years. He plays the character Thrunik, a dragonborn[[16]](#endnote-16) paladin[[17]](#endnote-17) and serves as the DM for the Athas campaign and the Tomb of Horrors Campaign. The other members requested that I use only their first names. Dylan served as the DM for the Eberron campaign and plays the characters Savious, a half-orc/ half ranger/ half rogue in the Ashenport setting and Aidan, a half-orc warden. Hannah plays as a character in all campaigns: Persephone the elf cleric in the Eberron and Ashenport settings, Xena the goliath[[18]](#endnote-18) barbarian[[19]](#endnote-19) in the Athas setting, and Luthian the elf cleric in the Tomb of Horrors setting. Rachel plays a character in all campaigns: Arya the Halfling rogue in the Eberron and Ashenport settings, Mogli the eladrin[[20]](#endnote-20) druid[[21]](#endnote-21) in the Athas setting, and Varia the halfling rogue in the Tomb of Horrors setting. Jacob serves as the DM for the Ashenport setting and plays Dockrune the tiefling[[22]](#endnote-22) warlord[[23]](#endnote-23) in the Eberron setting, Bulwye the mul[[24]](#endnote-24) warden in the Athas setting, and Stugotts the vryloka vampire and Khan the shade[[25]](#endnote-25) assassin[[26]](#endnote-26) in the Tomb of Horrors setting. To finish the core six players, I play Cro the eladrin wizard[[27]](#endnote-27) in the Eberron and Ashenport settings, Melierax the elf seeker[[28]](#endnote-28) in the Athas setting, and Ninax the drow ranger in the Tomb of Horrors setting. Woodrow is an extra player that we added in about halfway through the first Eberron setting. In it, he plays Vian the human ranger. He plays this same character for the Ashenport setting as well. He plays T’kttz the thri’kreen[[29]](#endnote-29) psion[[30]](#endnote-30) in the Athas campaign setting.

Table 2. Players and Characters for the Campaign Settings Played and Observed as Fieldwork.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Eberron** | **Ashenport** | **Athas** | **Tomb of Horrors** |
| **Drew** | Thrunik | Thrunik | DM | DM |
| **Dylan** | DM | Savious | --- | Aidan |
| **Hannah** | Persephone | Persephone | Xena | Luthian |
| **Rachel** | Arya | Arya | Mogli | Varia |
| **Jacob** | Dockrune | DM | Bulwye | Stugotts/Khan |
| **Renee** | Cro | Cro | Melierax | Ninax |
| **Woodrow** | Vian | Vian | T’kktz | --- |

A crucial series of texts for this project is the series of Dungeons & Dragons player’s handbooks and manuals. Wizards of the Coast, the company in charge of the brand and publishing, have released at least 20 handbooks and manuals for players to use during game play and to create new games. These books are packed with data for the game and serve as the official places to find rules and combat suggestions. These books serve as the backbone for the game; it is nearly impossible to play a D&D session without at least a digital form of these tomes.

**Dungeons & Dragons**

*History of the Game*

When Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published the first edition of Dungeons & Dragons, after two years of play testing in the Gygax’s basement, the world of tabletop role-playing games came alive. The first edition of D&D was based on a series of rules created by Gygax for his 1971 war game *Chainmail* and Arneson’s war/castle game *Blackmoor*. While Gygax’s game incorporated combat and character role-playing, Arneson’s game incorporated explorations and dungeons. From here the duo teamed up to write the first edition of D&D rules. This game was different from war games in that players would have control over one character, instead of massive armies. In this game, all players would be their own heroes who would work with others in a group for a cooperative gaming experience. It was finished, in rough-draft form, in 1972. In Gygax’s basement, the game was play tested and improved upon more. After the name “The Fantasy Game” did not fare too well for excitement and explanation, the game was officially named “Dungeons and Dragons.” The final version of the first edition of D&D was published in January of 1974 (Appelcline 2013). TSR Inc. (Tactical Studies Rules), the company created by Gygax and investors, printed 1000 copies of the rulebooks and sold the cardboard box covered in wood-grain paper via mail order. The game had a slow start, but in 1977 after the rules were re-written to be more user friendly and players began to share the game with others, the fantasy tabletop role-playing game spread like wildfire.

The creators, illustrators, and writers constantly updated and revised the rules and game play. This, of course, led to numerous re-releases of up-to-date editions and changes in central rules. While the history of the game is positive, there were some negative setbacks over the years. At several points, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Arneson left TSR Inc. and began to create his own products. This led to some turmoil between Arneson and Gygax and several lawsuits. In the 1980s, cultural shifts began to take place related to D&D. Parents were learning that their children were gathering for long hours in dark basements to kill monsters, talk to demons, and steal treasure and loot. Afraid for their children and the moral messages of the game, what is now being called “Satanic Panic” by some scholars took over the nation (Fine and Victor 1994, Ewalt 2013). In many cases, role-playing games like D&D were being blamed for missing teens, suicides, and murders. Some claimed that D&D was an addiction, and a bad one at that, possibly fueling pagan and satanic belief systems in teenagers, giving them an outlet to challenge authority, and even making them go insane.

Added to this cultural problem were problems in the company itself. In 1998, TSR (Tactical Studies Rules), the company responsible for the game, filed for bankruptcy at which point, game giant Wizards of the Coast (WofC) purchased the company. Even with this setback, however, D&D prospered. More updated editions were released: 1989, the second edition of Advanced D&D; 2000, the third edition of D&D; 2008, the fourth edition of D&D; 2014, the fifth edition of D&D (Appelcline 2013; Ewalt 2013, Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008, Peterson 2012, Schick 1991, Tresca 2011).

*Playing the Game*

Generally, the game consists of character-to-character situational role-playing, puzzle solving, adventuring/exploring, and battle/combat with enemies. D&D games are not all one-size-fits-all cookie cutter games. While playing and observing games, I recognized at least three types of games depending upon the primary action. This was verified by Drew later in his interviews with me. Games can be classic dungeon crawls that incorporate little hand-to-hand combat and a lot of dungeon and room-to-room exploration, role-playing based games which involve a high amount of character-to-character role-playing to get through action, mixed with some combat, and “hack-and-slash” games that feature combat as central and focus little on actual exploration or role-playing. In the earliest game modules created by Gygax and Arneson, dungeon crawls were the most popular types of games played. Most games generally tend to mediate between the three types; however, a DM can create his or her own game to feature one type over another. For some players, the type of game played is more of an aesthetic choice and can determine what makes a good player, a good DM, or a good game.

Playing D&D is simple after you crunch the numbers and create a character. At first, the character sheets are daunting. There are rows and rows of empty slots for numbers and abbreviations to learn. From experience, the character sheet is the scariest part of learning the D&D gameplay system. There are so many missing pieces to fill in and ways to incorrectly compute the numbers or incorrectly write some crucial aspect of your character. After learning the system, however, the character sheet becomes the key to an engaging and fun gaming experience. As a complete outsider to the culture of D&D, it is extremely difficult to understand character sheets. The language is specialized and jargon is heavy. Added to this is the difficulty of reading column headings like “Magic Items” or “Encounter Powers” without chuckling at the concept. With time and experience, you realize that you have become an insider once you begin to help others create or correct character sheets.

Players will generally start by taking a standard array of numbers (16, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10) for their ability scores. Players can customize scores to create extremely specialized or strong characters, but beginners rarely use this option. These ability scores serve as the base for all other number scores on the character sheet and are adapted and modified according to what race a character is, what its class is, and any armor, magic items, or weapons used. These said number scores can determine how good or bad a character can do a specific action. For example, if a character has an athletics score of 7 out of 20, if they decide to take part in a sprint, they will probably fail. On the other hand, if a character has an athletics skill of 18 out of 20, and they decide to join the same sprint race, they have a much higher chance of winning. During gameplay, these scores become crucial as they represent a character’s ability to perform actions. These abilities are calculated with the assigned score from the standard array, the addition of any modifiers (for example, if a character uses a long bow and has proficiency because he or she is an elf, there is an added +2 to the ability score), and the result of a dice role on a 20-sided die.

Once characters are created and a Dungeon Master or Game Master (DM or GM) has been chosen, the game can start. It is the DM’s responsibility to either use a pre-made adventure module or create his or her own world for the characters to explore and play in. The DM or GM’s task is to 1. Run the game according to the rules in the handbook or their own house rules; 2. Serve as the final judgement for decision or choices that require a higher decision or that cannot be solved in party; 3. Provide enough information about the universe, world, city, town, etc. that the game is taking place in. For most adventures, the setting is discernable from the title although, there are cases where this is not true. Many different universes and worlds exists in the game modules. Each is unique and has its own characteristics that set it apart from the others. It is crucial to know where the game is taking place, as some settings have characteristics that others do not. For example, the Dark Sun setting does not have water, magic, or metals, where the Ebberon setting has water, magic, and metals as well as machines and industrialization.

According to the *Player’s Handbook*, and some players, the next crucial step to creating characters is to create a backstory and work on aspects of role-playing. For myself and the players that I have worked with and observed, this is usually done in game. However, for the first game I played, the backstory was a fundamental part of my character, and I did end up creating an elaborate backstory before the game began. Two other players did the same. For them the same principal was at play. Their characters would be better understood in game if others had read their backstories before-hand. In the end, this worked out in our favors since our backstories were incorporated into the primary story arc and we ended up being gifted some fun magical items.

The games almost always start in a similar fashion. The convention is to have characters meet in a tavern. This was also how the first game that I played and the first game that I observed started. The characters just happened to all be at the tavern of Ninter Inn in some quaint village/town, Fallcrest in our case. One character will overhear another non-player character talking about treasure or someone or something being in danger. In the case of the game that I observed, an old man was huddled in a corner and needed help finding the great wizard Malereft’s lair. He had had a vision and saw some sort of battle plans and notes about Farlax in the lair and needed to find a group of brave adventurers to protect the town. He had found his group.

After Cro performed a history check, she remembered that she had heard about Farlax long ago. He was a large white brute dragon, dangerous but not magical. The lively band of adventurers then had one last flagon of ale and set off for the lair. The road was, of course, not an easy one. On the way, characters were attacked by rabid wolves and kobolds, a minion class of monsters who work together in groups. In the game, characters use their skills and defenses as well as their powers given to them according to class to defeat enemies. These powers include melee or ranged-attack with a plethora of weapons, all stats provided in the back of the player’s handbooks or powers that are based on either arcane[[31]](#endnote-31), psionic[[32]](#endnote-32), or primal[[33]](#endnote-33) magic. These small attacks were foreshadowing of the larger battle that awaited the group.

**Themes Found in Dungeons & Dragons:**

**Identity, Community, and Aesthetics**

*Dungeons & Dragons* is rich with themes related to both individuals and the larger group or community. These themes become apparent in game play as well as individual interviews and conversations with players. As a participant-observer and member of this cultural group, I also am able to reflect on my own ideas of the game and themes that I have found clear. For the basis of this ethnographic study, three themes that I have wrangled out of fieldwork are identity, community, and aesthetics. The final theme of aesthetics can be further broken down into two subthemes, adaptability and equality.

Overarching these themes, however, are three general reasons for playing the game that I found evident in all conversations with players in and out of gameplay, interviews, and my own gaming experience. Having fun is the key reason to play. When I talked with players, on and off the record, having fun was nearly always the first reason they cited for playing D&D. In this case, having fun means being someone else for a period of time. Players noted that they enjoyed being able to slip out of reality and fall into a realm where anything is possible, enemies are killable, and treasure and loot are real. What is interesting about the quality of “having fun,” is that few players could actually put to words what this meant; rather, it was a feeling produced with being with friends and playing a game. This is very similar to trying to explain why people like games in general. Yes, they are fun and exciting, but the quality of “fun” is difficult to describe further.

Second to this is socialization. D&D offers a space for people to gather and share stories and experiences all while playing a game. It seems as if at the table for D&D, other players are less likely to judge or stereotype another. The ability to suspend realism and reality, in order to play a game based in the imagination of its players, also lends to a more trusting and accepting group of people. If a group is willing to travel with you, to a far off realm in order to defeat an evil wizard king with a horde of dragons, they are certainly less likely to make fun of each other for being different or imaginative. There is a sort of group bond or socialization bond that is created by the game amongst its players and in some cases, this happens to be a more viable route for socialization for some players.

A more latent, but obvious reason for playing stated by players either explicitly or in coded language is the ability to grow, both personally and as a community, through experiences in the game. The game in some way changes players. I experienced this myself as my character was going through dungeons with the other characters. This concept is integral to the theme of community.

*Identity*

Within the world of D&D there is a dichotomy between player and character. I assume that in a large portion of cases of D&D players, players create characters that they like instead of playing a character that they despise. Since characters are such an integral fragment of the game, players would not create a character that they do not like. This would not make sense in the end since characters demand the players’ attention, and they are the persona one takes during gameplay. Here, players create characters and create identities. In the case of players who wrote extended backstories for their characters, identity is crucial. Rachel made clear in conversation that Arya, the character she plays, is the embodiment of what she wishes she would let herself be. While the two share many similarities, what Rachel loves so much about Arya are those few traits that Rachel specifically selected because they are so opposite of herself. Jacob shared a similar idea in conversation. He noted that Dockrune, the character he plays, is the manifestation of what he would like his true self to become: a rebel, a leader, a whimsical person who does what he thinks is best regardless of other’s input. In my own experience, my character Cro also is a manifestation of characteristics that I wish I encompassed in everyday life. She represents my own weaknesses of shyness, quietness, and arrogance. When I play Cro, when Rachel plays Arya, and Jacob plays Dockrune there is a sort of identity connection between player and character, similar to shifts in frames of mind and experience. The game allows players to create an identity that fulfills what they are missing in their own identity therefore creating a more or more complete whole vision of who they are. They are able to recognize who they are and then recognize places they would like to change or work on. This form of self-actualization is crucial to growth and change. I would argue that this form of self-actualization has helped me grow as a person and recognize where I am weak and where I am strong. Bateson’s frames in play and fantasy further flesh this idea out. According to Bateson, play exists within frames. Without these frames of reference, we would not and possibly could not understand the shifts in personal psychology that occur at play. Having frames allows us to understand that we are playing a game and with that, we are playing a character, not having some identity crisis or psychological problem (Bateson 1972).

*Community*

Since *Dungeons and Dragons* is a collective and collaborative game instead of competitive, the concept of community or group is crucial to a successful and entertaining gaming experience. From the very beginning of a D&D game, being part of a group is central. You are not asked to complete missions or go on adventures alone, rather, you create a group or you join up with a group that works to accomplish the task together. In my interview with Drew, the concept of community was brought up. Drew notes that D&D is made up of many little communities. Each group is its own community, but these are linked back to the larger community of D&D players in general and then the even larger group of role-playing gamers. These communities exist in levels or even concentric circles.

Community also comes into play with D&D players in that they are required to work within the community using their own skills and abilities. With this, the house D&D community (the group that one plays with in your adventure modules) requires, or thrives, on the co-creation of the game-scape between players out of game and between players in game. This community is reinforced both in game and out of game. There is never a moment in game, where players forget that they are part of the larger group and because of this, the notion of “togetherness” is always reinforced in actions and ideas. Even if a character decides that they want to adventure alone, there is still a group aspect to that decision and a discussion. In the game and at the table, no one is truly alone. This sense of groupness or community continues and extends past the character sheets and gaming table. In the real world, those bonds that are created amongst the group remain. Games create real-world social connections through which we grow and learn. The game is still a point in time in the past, that is real for the players. It is easy to pinpoint a specific place in that frame of time and play for reference.

Dorothy Noyes asserts that the concept of community is crucial, maybe even more so than the concept of group. She notes that group does not exist, rather it is an imaginary concept of social realities. What does exist is the concept of community. This concept exists in the collective performance which creates and maintains the idea of what community really is (Noyes 1995). This idea of shared and collective performance as being the community creator is key in D&D. While I posit that it is not the inherent and literal group of people who gather that make the community, it is what groups go through together that creates the community and forms the bonds. In accordance with Noyes, the group comes first and is the literal gathering of people and the imaginary concept that then provides a space for the actual community to form and grow with time and experience. This idea and sense of community and group is highly significant for D&D players.

*Aesthetics*

The quality of what is good and what is not good is fundamental to D&D. What makes a good game and player is reinforced during gameplay and aspects or characteristics that make a bad game or player are pushed aside. Having a good game or a good player is not just one quality, but rather it is a conglomeration of qualities that come together. In his interview, Drew gave examples of what makes a good game or player and what makes these bad. There were also several examples of aesthetic ideas in gameplay and characters between players in and out of game. During this ethnographic project, I was a participant-observer in four games. After several of these games, it became clear from other players what aspects of aesthetics appealed to and pushed players away. Two such qualities are adaptability and equality.

Drew posited that adaptability is crucial when it comes to both player-characters and the dungeon or game master. In his discussion, Drew specifically noted that adaptability is key for a DM since the game will not always go according to his or her plan. He shared several stories of D&D games that he had played in where the DM ended up “railroading,” or directing the game in the way that they felt it should go rather than where the characters were moving it towards. Using this concept, Drew and I were able to reflect upon the games that we had played together and evaluate those games for aesthetic qualities.

Characters and players are also required to be adaptable in game play since the D&D is a cooperative game built on a story that is created by many voices. This aspect of adaptability cropped up in game play often where characters had to learn to adapt to the creative processes of others and to adapt to group dynamics in order to keep the game flowing. A player’s ability to adapt is also a measure of aesthetics. A “good” player will know their class and race well and play it well during game play. No player likes a game that is clunky and has long breaks of down time for players who do not know their character well enough to check all the handbooks and read their abilities and powers.

Where adaptability is crucial for D&D game play, equality is also vital for a smooth game that operates within the parameters of a role-playing and community/cooperative game. In general, equality is crucial in real-life too. But in the D&D world, equality is what fuels fun and successful game play.

Battles and combat are not one-sided. They require the work and sometimes specific powers and abilities of certain characters’ classes. Gameplay requires that all players be allowed their fair share of combat access. To facilitate this process, combat during an adventure is arranged so that it progresses in rounds, with each character taking their turn. From firsthand experience, if this progression is problematized or mixed up and players do not receive their combat turn, the equality of the game is thrown off and tempers will flare.

To help simulate randomness but also enable equality, D&D uses a set of polyhedral dice as tools for gameplay. Players roll specific dice to determine whether they successfully attack an enemy, whether they pass or fail a skill check, or to determine their combat order. In a world that is fantasy based and largely created in the imagination, players need tools of randomness to create equality. If such tools were not required, players would probably choose favorable outcomes for their characters, battles would be over in seconds, and no real gameplay would occur. Chance and the unknown are vital aspects of D&D that players and characters are constantly working against and sometimes with. As in life, we seek ways to order the random and tame the chaotic. Playing D&D is but a small way to hone in on our abilities to adapt to the random and chaotic, and in the end do more than provide an entertaining gaming experience.

On a similar note, players voiced that equality is also demanded in the game when dealing with DMs and obstacles. No player wants a dungeon packed with unsolvable puzzles or riddles that are too difficult to crack. In this case, it is the DM’s responsibility to make the game equally challenging for the players and character’s skills, abilities, and knowledge. A game that is not equal or solvable will often lead very quickly to angry players and confused characters. This has also happened in games where I was a participant-observer. When these problems arise, the DM must work quickly and efficiently to diffuse any negative feelings and allow the players and the game to regain equality.

**Conclusion**

When dealing with games that are backed by communities like *Dungeons and Dragons*, scholarly research can only answer certain questions. These spaces, that are so heavy with latent themes and ideas, require a more in-depth dive in order to tease out fundamental elements. Ethnographic based fieldwork allows for a participant-observer status. This status opens up new worlds of study and comprehensions to communities that would otherwise be closed. When you are in the participant-observer seat, game play becomes transparent. The participant-observer is able to step back and see more of what is going on in the much grander picture of the game and outside of that, the community and culture. Scholarship only allows for a superficial view of apparent crucial aspects; playing the game allows you to “get your head in the game,” literally.

Being a participant-observer also provides a way to be both subjective and objective at the same time. When your head is in the game, you are able to think like a player. Moments later, you can come back to your objective stance and make notes. In my case, I would participate in game play for periods of time and then leave that space to take field notes in my notebook. I was able to be reflexive and reflective in my jottings, creating objective notes for the subjective experiences that were taking place.

To those who say that *Dungeons and Dragons* is just a game, I shake my head. I was a part of this group. I would walk by groups of people, huddled around a table with a map and tiny figurines, rolling dice and talking about magic missile spells. I could not understand how a game based in a fantasy world could be so popular and engaging as those tables of people had made it look.

D&D is not just a game; it is a way of life and a way of seeing and understanding the world. Being a player of D&D changes the way you look at the world. Instead of just obstacles, you see puzzles. Instead of just looking for quick fixes, you will begin to think of your own personal attributes and skills to work the problem, maybe even beginning to think about cooperation as being central to problem solving. Networking and socialization take center stage, as do personal goal setting and growth. There have been many times where I have thought about myself and my fortitude in terms of “hit points,” or thinking about my skill of wisdom over someone else’s charisma skill. D&D has social purposes that are not covered in any handbook or rule manual. Playing the game makes us more socially open and adaptable as humans. Games, in general, teach us many lessons. D&D teaches a set of lessons and values. As gamers in a fantasy realm, we learn how to empathize with others and understand human complexities. In D&D we are forced to look at issues like racism and sexism in ways that are somewhat easier to understand because we are in a different world. We see how other races are stereotyped and stigmatized. We notice how female characters are treated. During gameplay, many seek to change those issues and create a fair and equal game. We learn very quickly the appeal and reward of working in groups and cooperating rather than competing against one another. Teamwork and being a group player get us better rewards in the end. D&D also teaches us self-worth. Being part of a team allows us to open ourselves up for creativity within the safety net of the group. Cro becomes a better wizard when she knows that she can work on her skills at her pace since her team will protect her in danger, and she does the same for them. We realize that what is written on our character sheets are extensions of ourselves, but this is not all that our persons are. Rather, we are complex and complicated beings who have lives, wants, and abilities that can all be used for the betterment of the group.

D&D teaches us about our morality and mortality. We can play chaotic-evil characters and do things that the real world does not allow. In the fantasy world, we are able to work out our personal beliefs and moral systems in order to develop one that fits us better in the real world and reflects who we really are. Along the same lines, the real world does not allow us to fully realize our own mortality. On Earth, we have one life and it ends. In the fantasy world of D&D you are allowed to take chances, be a hero, and die. We get to feel the sense of loss when a character dies and the sense of elation when the “raise from the dead” spell works.

To sum up the lesson of tabletop role-playing games like D&D, and other role-playing games in the grander scale, is simple. The lesson is to learn to adapt. We use a D&D game to simulate life and all of its sharp turns, ups, and downs. D&D forces us to face both negativity and positivity in the game-scape and conquer both. We then translate our experiences, failures, and successes into the real world and understand that we are not limited, but teeming with ability if you think about your actions and throw some creativity into the mix.

The D&D group/party/company serves as a “familial” network for people to join together. Literally, people who play D&D together usually share some sort of bond, are friends, or become friends. In the game-scape, players do the same. You all meet at a tavern as strangers but leave as comrades who have fought battles together, saved lost treasure together, and probably gotten into some trouble together.

*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**

*The streets of Ashenport were cold. The unrelenting rain mixed with the salty winds*

*producing a sensation similar to being pricked with hundreds of tiny glass shards. Within the wind you could hear the crash of the waves, but all else was silent.*

*The buckles were getting stronger. The party had learned about these strange rips in space and time where one plane of existence seeped into the next. In Ashenport, these buckles were responsible for the influx of strange monsters and aquatic creatures killing the townspeople and wreaking havoc on the small port town. The party stumbles down the street, weary from travel and the harsh weather. No lights are on in the town, except for the Windy Brine tavern a couple of blocks down the main thoroughfare.*

*“We must keep searching the town for someone else to talk to! I know Dockrune is here somewhere” asserted Thrunik, the dragonborn paladin. Thrunik and Dockrune had been through several series of combat together against the great Demise and a deadly green dragon; they had become friends. Dockrune, after their last night in Sharn, had gone missing. People were saying that they had last seen him running the streets of Ashenport.*

*The party spotted a general store just a few feet down the street. It was dark inside, except for a light upstairs. Someone was still awake. With a sudden burst of hope, the party quickened their pace and pounded on the door once they arrived. There was no immediate answer but they could hear stumbling inside. Just as Savious began a second series of heavy knocks, an elderly lady threw open the door. She wore a look of disgust. Her hair was disheveled and she was missing shoes.*

*“What?! Don’t you all know it’s 2 in the morning. Get out of here!”*

*“We need to ask you a few questions” calmly asked Persephone, the cleric. The lady grumbled but didn’t move from the door. “We are missing a friend, he was last seen here, have you seen a tiefling about 6-foot-tall…he doesn’t have a tail, but he does have horns.”*

*“No. I haven’t seen anyone. Now leave.” The party was beginning to turn, but in that moment, Cro the wizard detected something magical. Her years of meticulous training allowed her to detect magic anytime it was near.*

*“So…what sort of magic do you have here?” Cro stood on the tiny porch, crossed her arms, and waited for an answer. The lady began to stammer.*

*“I don’t have…magic, here. No magic. Why?”*

*Cro did not answer the lady but kept her hard demeanor going. At this point, Arya the rogue was noticing that Cro had some sort of lead. Not knowing what this was, was dangerous, but she trusted the wizard.*

*“So lady, it’s late, how about we come in and talk. You look like a smart gal. We need help and have money to buy things. Look, if that won’t work for you, tell us when you do open and we will just come back then.” Arya had a way with words and a charisma score higher than anyone else in the party. The lady smiled at the tiny halfling rogue; Arya noticed a feisty spark in the lady’s eyes.*

*“I open at 6 am. But you all seem alright. Come in and make it quick.” The party moved inside the small shop space. The walls were lined with old books on fishing and metal crafting, a few magic spheres, and a plethora of sundry items. There were several things that the party needed to actually purchase. As Vian eyed some metal-tipped arrows and Thrunik looked through tomes of ancient dragon lore, Cro began to detect magic even stronger inside. She began to wander towards the stairs leading upstairs but stopped when she heard the lady yell at her.*

*“DO NOT GO UP THERE. Get out! Get out all of you, now!” The party didn’t budge, rather, Arya the stealthy rogue began to make her way towards the stairs. Her nimble fingers quickly tied a rope around her waist and tied the other end to the staircase handrail. As Thrunik and Vian enticed the lady with their money and interest in her goods, Arya slowly began to ascend the stairs. As she climbed upon the fourth step, the air began to shimmer and vibrate. As Arya looked down at her hands, she disappeared.*

*Cro cried out to the others of what had just happened. At that point, the lady had realized it was already too late and just stood back, admiring the 20 gold pieces Thrunik had just given her for a moldy book. Glancing back and forth at each other, Cro and Persephone could not figure out what had happened to their friend. The rope she had tied around her waist was still taut, so she had to still be attached they assumed.*

*“Let’s see where she went. We can’t just leave. We all should just go.” Cro tried to convince the group, but lawfully good Thrunik advised against the unknown. Not having any of the nonsense and not leaving one of the group behind, Cro ran up the stairs and disappeared into the same shimmering, magical air. Persephone looked at the others, said nothing, and did the same.*

*Cro’s feet landed in a soft blanket of grass. A slight breeze was stirring the unruly blades and swirling the scent of pine and wildflowers in the air. A chorus of crickets created a blanket of background music with the occasional call of a bird. The sun was warm; this was unlike Ashenport where the rain never stopped. Up ahead, she could make the outline of Arya and a voice she had recognized from long ago. The grass had been folded from a previous walker’s travels, she followed this small path in the green until she came upon Arya sitting next to and Old man on a fallen log. He was wrapped in a white robe, dusty with time and age. In his left hand he held a great staff carved from wood of the sacred Ash tree from Galadris.*

*“It’s been some time, Cro.” The old man spoke with such care, each syllable deliberate and clear.*

*“Hello Ospris. It has been some time.” Cro moved closer to her old teacher, the father who had taken her in after her parents abandoned her. Ospris, the Great, they called him. Fearless and strong wizard of the eladrin city of Galadris.*

*As Cro moved closer, she heard the rest of the party behind her. They gathered around, stunned by the sheer beauty and penetrating greenness of the Feywild. Cro turned to look at Persephone who was reduced to tears. Her people, the elves, had come from the Feywild a long time before her days. She had never seen her ancestral home, and the sight of it now made her heart cry to return. Cro took her hand.*

*“Cro, I’m glad you found me. This world is in trouble. I’ve been watching it and I’ve been watching you. It needs your help. I have seen you grow into a strong wizard and I am proud of you. Your job is there, and leaving the Feywild was what you had to do. I have a gift for you, to help you in your task.” Ospris reached behind the fallen log and retrieved a large green staff. “This is the legendary Staff of Feyswarm. Use it and help the world.”*

*Cro moved forward and took the staff in hand. It was heavy and she could feel it buzz with arcane magic. On it, her name magically appeared in elven script and glowed.*

*“Now you must go back, all of you. This world needs you.” Ospris lifted his weary body from the log and motioned back towards the path the had followed in. Vian and Thrunik waved goodbye to the wise old wizard and filed out, followed by Arya. Ospris looked back at Persephone whose hand was still tucked into Cro’s.*

*“One day, you will come back here young one. The feytouched always come back.”*

*Persephone released Cro’s hand and turned to go back to the Ashenport. As if asking permission silently, she looked back at Ospris who then nodded slowly. With a smile, Persephone bounded to the nearest tree and climbed its trunk until she reached the top. For miles and miles, sitting high above the Feywild she could only see the color green in all the shades and tints possible. With a strong heart she waved goodbye to the home she knew would be waiting for her in the end.*

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Notes

1. Half-orcs are big, strong, and fast characters who descend from humans and orcs. They are usually fierce warriors in combat (Crawford, Mearls, and Wyatt 2009: 14-15). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Wardens rely on the primal power of nature in their attacks in combat. Their priority in any setting is to defend the natural world from those who seek to steal from it or destroy it (Crawford, Mearls, and Wyatt 2009: 152). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Halflings are a small race or nomadic folk that are known for their quick wit and resourcefulness (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 44). They are similar to Tolkien’s hobbits. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Rogues are a class of daring and cunning adversaries who use shadows for cover and are rarely seen (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 116). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Elves are tall, sinewy creatures who are considered to be wild and free and protect the forested lands they call home. They are known to use nature as their cover in their attacks (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 40). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. “Clerics are battle leaders who are invested with divine power.” They are generally responsible for healing other party members, hence their nick-name, ‘healers’ (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 60). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The Abyss and Elemental Hell are just what they sound like. They are the furthest below the living world that a player can go and is often the home of demons (Wyatt 2008: 160). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The drow is a race of dark elves who live in advanced underground systems and cities. They are almost always evil and exists in a matriarchal society (Heinsoo, Bonner, and Schwalb 2008: 8). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ranger is a class of watchful warriors who maintain a deep connection and appreciation of the untamed wilderness. They are known for being excellent sword wielders or as having acute bow skills (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 103). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The vryloka is a race of ancient humans who, with the blood-bonding ritual performed by the Red Witch, experience immortality like a vampire, but are not undead. The vryloka are living vampires (Mearls, Pozas, and Schwalb 2011: 126). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Vampires in D&D are fated monsters who have been infected by a curse usually caused by a monstrous attack. They are cast aside in society, cold, and emotionless vessels (Mearls, Pozas, and Schwald 2011:49). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Hit points are a set of points given to each character depending on their race and class. Hit points determine how strong a character is or is not; how much damage they can take before they die. Damage is subtracted from a character’s hit points. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. “A lich is an undead spellcaster created by means of an ancient ritual” (Mearls, Schubert, and Wyatt 2008: 176). Magic users can become a lich to escape death, but existing in a state between dead and undead causes them to go insane. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The Raven Queen is the goddess of death, the patron of winter, and the spinner of fate (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 22). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Sehanine is the goddess of the moon and autumn, the patron of trickery and illusions, and the goddess of love (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 22). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The dragonborn are a race of fighters, soldiers, mercenaries, and adventurers. They resemble humanoid dragons complete with scales, are large, and breath fire (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 34-35). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Paladins are the law-holders and abiders in D&D. They are faithful warriors who have pledged themselves to something greater and never go back on that promise. Like clerics, the are gifted with divine powers and use this to deal damage to enemies (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 89). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Goliaths are large and tall nomads who live in the highest mountains and revere the power of nature. They are humanoid creatures with rough features and weathered skin (Crawford, Mearls, and Wyatt. 2009: 12). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Savage warriors who deal out a lot of damage, barbarians tend to use heavy weapons and call upon the primal nature spirits to assist their attacks (Crawford, Mearls, and Wyatt 2009: 48). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Eladrin are a race introduced in the 4th edition as a separate category of elf, commonly equated to the high-elf. They are tall, slender, and ethereal creatures that are of the Feywild, a parallel world that is heavily forested and that still maintains is magical feel (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 38). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Druids tend to live secluded in the wilderness and are highly connected with wildlife and nature, which they use in their attacks (Crawford, Mearls, and Wyatt 2009: 83). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Tieflings are the heirs to a lineage and heritage of human relationships and bargaining with demons. They are often not evil, like their demon ancestors but still bear the physical attributes such as tails and horns (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 48). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Warlords are highly successful battle warriors. Their job is to stand on the front lines and give commands to their team to ensure success in combat (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 143). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. The mul are a race of half-dwarf, half-human. They have the best of both races, the agility and mental capacity of humans and the resilience and endurance of dwarves (Baker, Schwalb, and Thompson 2010: 20). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Shades are humans who have been tainted with the allure of darkness; they have traded part of their soul for the power of the dark (Mearls, Pozas, and Schwalb 2011: 121-122). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Assassins represent a complex grouping of classes. Generally, these characters keep their jobs secret, are outcasts, and have traded part of their own souls for the power of death (Mearls, Pozas, and Schwalb 2011: 15). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Wizards are the scholars and scions of arcane magic, or magic that is studied and gained through books and spells. They use no physical weapons, only their spells which manipulate matter and the elements to ensure damage (Heinsoo, Collins, and Wyatt 2008: 156). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Seekers are at home in the wilderness and harness the primal power of nature to aid in their attacks. They are similar to rangers. (Mearls, Cordell, and Schwalb 2010: 116). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. The thri-kreen are a race of alien-like beings who resemble insects, specifically the mantis. They are found only in Athas, are adapted to the harsh climate, and hunt in packs to which they are loyal (Baker, Schwalb, and Thompson 2010:22). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Psions are equivalent to wizards and sorcerers, however they do not use arcane magic but psionic power, which exists in every conscious mind (Mearls, Cordell, and Schwalb 2010:80). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Magic that is either natural such as what a sorcerer would use or magic that is learned through years of study and mastery, such as what a wizard would use. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. “Magic” that uses control of the mind such as what the psionic class would use. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Nature-based magic that uses the power of elements and natural forces such as what wardens, seekers, and druids would use.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-33)