

Elves and Orcs: Building Cross-Cultural Relationships (Critical Success)

October 13, 2020



In most fantasy literature since Tolkien, elves and orcs live at constant odds with each other. Among other reasons are their cultural differences and their inability to see each others' viewpoints. Elves typically live for a millennium, whereas orcs have shorter lifespans than humans. Time alive, both how long it's been and how long one expects to have left, changes perspective.

Even on a human level, I see this play out. Teens tend to feel like they have unlimited time, and depending on how their formative years have played out, that can mean unlimited possibilities or a sense of hopelessness. The older I get, I expect to have less years remaining than I've already had, so I feel a sense of urgency to accomplish my dreams, whereas others my age or older have given up.

Either way, we can learn from each other, and that's something I love about my D&D group, which ranges in age from teens to 40's. Unlike many games and sports, D&D and other tabletop role-playing games are cooperative and depend on players working together toward a goal. They have to help each other and use teamwork, and those different perspectives they bring to the

table help to give them success.

But more than just success in the game, they build relationships. Teens benefit drastically from multiple positive relationships with adults besides family, teachers, and clergy, not that I'm discounting those by any means. They need adults who choose to spend time with them out of mutual respect instead of perceived obligation. (Yes, parents, teachers, and clergy are usually in those positions in the first place because they care, but that's not always the teen's perception.) Correctly managed, D&D can foster those multigenerational relationships based on the collaborative work and mutual respect that lead to success in the game.

Promoting those relationships is remarkably simple and boils down to two principles: encouragement and common ground.

When a teen experiences encouragement from adults communicating to them that they're lovable, capable, and worthwhile, it builds their self-worth and helps cement those relationships. Adults can communicate this by asking the teens for help and complimenting them on their accomplishments. They also experience support when they find others experiencing the same feelings, even in different circumstances (common ground). At the same time, this helps adults recognize the unique contributions that teens bring. And all of this comes from sincere care and camaraderie.

While I've specifically focused on adult-teen relationships here, these same principles apply to any number of cross-cultural relationships, whether racial, socio-economic, political, or any other dynamic, even if all participants are the same generation.

[Recent publications of D&D materials](#) have moved toward breaking down in-game racial boundaries, which the Caphora campaign setting did from its inception, and if we're to get stronger in real life, we can follow this example. Maybe elves and orcs can respect each other after all.

Critical Success: Never Split the Party

October 13, 2020



The first rule of D&D is... always talk about D&D. Incessantly. To anyone who will listen, even if they seem like they don't want to. Because it's awesome, and nobody should miss out.

But the second rule is... Never split the party.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that we need each other. In D&D, when a party decides to split up, not only does it bog down gameplay, because the DM can only work with half of the group at a time, it usually goes badly for the party, because they depend on each other and each one's unique skills and ideas.

Christianity has taught this from the beginning. The Bible calls

it the Body of Christ.

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. Indeed, the body is not one part but many.

1 Corinthians 12:14-22, CSB

We are all different, and each person brings something different to the table. This isn't just true of the contents of a character sheet, but the actual people, whether sitting around a table or living our lives. When body parts are joined together, they are greater than the sum of their parts. When body parts are separated from the rest of the body, it's just gross. It's not good. It shouldn't be like that.

Because D&D is a community-centric game, we have the opportunity to strengthen the Body well beyond what happens around the table. This is no less true whether the players are Christians or not. We have the opportunity to connect with each other, build friendships, and be there for each other, whether fighting a beholder or depression. A Critical Success party focuses more on player relationships than character relationships, but the latter serves the former. The more an adventure focuses not only

on the unique capabilities of each *character*, but the unique needs and contributions of each *player*, the more the players appreciate and value each other, the more they'll enjoy the game, and the more interest they will have in each other beyond the game. Of course, players and DM need to get to know each other in order to make this happen, and that takes time, but by focusing on how valuable each person is and listening for cues that hint at their needs, those personal connections will build.

Ultimately, the goal is that everyone involved knows that they are never alone, that we don't need to see those around us to know someone has our back, whether in a dark cavern or a dark night of the soul.

Critical Success: Giving Players Every Advantage

October 13, 2020



One of the bugbears goes down, and another one is hurting pretty badly. A third one looks at the other two and seems to be panicking. She says, "What are we going to do? If we go back empty-handed, we're dead." They look at you and seem to be trying to decide whether to attack or flee.

A short conversation later between the party and the bugbears, and the party now has four bugbears fighting alongside them as the party promised to protect them from the Big Bad that sent them.

As Dungeons & Dragons continues to grow in popularity, well beyond the number of players during its height in the 1980s, people have found that social media and other shallow forms of communication are inferior to gathering around a table and sharing stories, strategies, and jokes with each other. It's easier to cope with day-to-day life in the real world when you can escape with some friends into a fantasy world for a little while, but as shared universes continue to grow in popularity, we realize that these universes draw us in as we see the similarities to our own. This allows us to take the challenges of life and put them into a new context to take a fresh look at them and find new approaches to real-world problems.

Welcome to Caphora: The Divided Continent. Designed to take advantage of the game's ability to bring different people together to accomplish a common goal, whether you use this campaign world, one [published by Wizards of the Coast](#), or one of your own design, you can use these principles as you Dungeon Master a game. As well, this works with any tabletop role-playing game, although my references will specifically refer to [Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition](#).

What It Is:

Critical Success principles run through these methods, so I present to you a combination of principles and strategies that flow from each other. These principles include but are not limited to:

- Every person has inherent value regardless of what they have done or what has been done to them.
- Heroes create hope. Hope is caused by trust that the future is secure.
- Nobody is beyond redemption. Some may reject it, but they are not beyond it.
- The greatest power is love—not a feeling, but commitment to actively caring.

Experiential Learning

We learn best when we see the effects of our actions. In Dungeons & Dragons, we can explore the same situations we encounter in daily life but approach them from a new angle, then take what we have learned back into the real world situation.

Natural Consequences

Because the game world is designed to feel real, suspension of disbelief notwithstanding, actions have consequences. Both players and Dungeon Master learn from each other through various encounters and the results of those encounters.

Dialog inducing

Unique situations require unique approaches. The party must discuss how they will resolve the challenges they face and the possible consequences of their actions. Because the game is open-ended, they can be creative but also need to balance risk and reward. Different ideas will sometimes conflict with each other or build off each other.

How to see the world

I've often described my parenting style as, "I want to teach you

how to think more than *what* to think.” When someone knows *how* to think, that will guide them as they draw conclusions from what they learn. So critical thinking guides the process.

What It Isn't:

Political

We hear politics all day long. It's important, but it's exhausting, and every platform is imperfect, so Critical Success is not about pushing an agenda but rather learning to form your own agenda and act on it.

Preachy

This may sound ironic, given my day job as a preacher, but nobody likes having information shoved down their throats. Critical Success is about presenting options, not laying down the law.

Judgmental

Every action has consequences. Some we can foresee, and some we can't. Nearly every decision is imperfect on some level, so Critical Success embraces imperfection and alternate viewpoints as a means of learning about each other and the world.

What to see in the world

Just as a fantasy world is a place of wonder, this is even more true of the real world, so Critical Success helps players find love, hope, and joy in the real world not by pointing it out, but by offering a different angle from which to look and allowing them to notice the things that are important to them. As I mentioned above, I'm writing this as a [Christian pastor](#), so

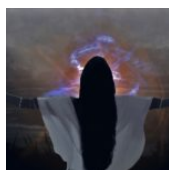
that viewpoint will probably be obvious, but I hope this will be valuable to all kinds of gamers, regardless of their religious background or beliefs. Our tables combine people with many beliefs and worldviews, And we welcome all and strive to use these very principles to make everyone feel welcome.

This article is the first in a [series](#). I invite you to subscribe if you're interested in the rest.

We're changing our character class!



Posted on [May 13, 2021](#) by [Dale Critchley](#) August 2, 2021



It's been a while since we posted new content, but that's not because we've been using downtime to kick back at the inn! Since Tasha's Cauldron of Everything says we can change class & subclass when we level up, we're ... [Continue reading →](#)

You Are More than Your Stat Block (Critical Success)



Posted on [November 23, 2020](#) by [Dale Critchley](#) March 2, 2023



The recent release of Tasha's Cauldron of Everything has generated significant controversy in the D&D community, most notably for the Custom Origin option, which gives players much more flexibility in the character creation process. Some raise concerns that this will ... [Continue reading →](#)

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Posted on [June 4, 2020](#) by [Dale Critchley](#) March 2, 2023



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Posted on [May 19, 2020](#) by [Dale Critchley](#) March 12, 2023



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