

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.

Arcane Tradition: Biomancer (5e)

October 13, 2020



Like a little mad science in your fantasy? What if Dr. Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau could manipulate the Weave? Where do the hybrid creatures and characters come from in your game? Introducing: the Biomancer.

[Download from DriveThruRPG](#)

Biomancers have learned to use the Weave to manipulate life itself, accessing a form of magic unavailable to most wizards. While other wizards can use Biomancy spells, they lose their proficiency bonus due to the strangeness of the magic.

This supplement includes **4 subclasses**, **11 new spells**, and **3 new backgrounds**.

Some consider biomancy unnatural, but it's the biomancers of Tanmaa who are responsible for many of the hybrid and augmented creatures who fill the Western Division of Caphora, and while biomancers have been blamed for some of the plagues that have struck the continent, they're the first to be called when plague strikes to control it.

Most biomancers are found in the labs of Tanmaa, but some nobles hire them as extremely expensive personal physicians. Some biomancers are the products of their own labs who have learned, through observation and sometimes deliberate training, to use the very magic that created them.

Biomancers specialize in one of four forms of the craft: **Somaturgy**, **Neuroturgy**, **Amalgamism**, and **Miasmism**. They can use other biomancy spells but prefer their own tradition.

Other Campaign Worlds

While the Biomancer was developed specifically for the Caphora campaign setting, which you can download **free** from our website, it will work with most existing campaign worlds, especially those with a slight "mad science" or steampunk element, gnomes who like to tinker, or campaign worlds with hybrid creatures or characters.

Arcane Tradition: Nullimancy

(5e)

October 13, 2020



[Download now at DriveThruRPG](#)

Nullimancers have learned the secret art of tapping into and manipulating the all-consuming energy of Oblivion. They can generate it and transform it to a variety of effects, all of which destroy matter or energy in some way. This results in new spells and features, and several existing spells have Nullimancy versions that use Oblivion instead of the Weave.

The Nullimancer is a Wizard Arcane Tradition using an entirely new form of magic from the Caphora campaign world, but it can also be used in other settings.

This product contains the **full subclass, 14 new spells**, and a **new magic item**, all based on nullimancy magic.

All play content is also available in the D&D Beyond Homebrew section so you can easily add it to your campaign in [Subclasses](#), [Spells](#), and [Magic Items](#).

Critical Success: Never Split the Party

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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.

Random Fantasy City Magical Feature Generator

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Wanting to add magical elements to the cities to my high fantasy Dungeons & Dragons campaign, since it's difficult to just think of elements out of the blue, I came up with this list as an idea generator. Here's how it works:

1. Choose how many features to include. This will be determined by the level of magic in your world. For my high fantasy world, you can use the Number of Features formula below.
2. Roll D100 on the Feature Type table. That will tell you which table of features to roll on.
3. Roll on the corresponding Feature table (Natural, Man-made, or Supernatural)
4. Then, roll D100 on the Phenomenon table to determine the type of phenomenon.

5. If it tells you to roll again, combining, roll on the same table unless otherwise instructed, and figure out how to combine the two items.
6. Use your imagination to combine feature & phenomenon to determine what fits best in your campaign world. Don't forget the history of the feature and how it has affected the city and its residents.

Number of Features

For every 1000 people in a city, roll 1D6. Every 6 indicates one magical feature. (This can also be used for rural regions, but I suggest 1D6 for every 3000-5000, but note that the feature may be hidden and unknown to the populace, and the party could travel through the region and never know it's there.)

Feature Type (D100)

01-35 Natural

36-80 Man-Made

81-95 Supernatural

96-00 Roll twice, combining

Feature

Natural (2D20)

2. Stream
3. Hill
4. Falls
5. Valley
6. Tree

7. Grove
8. Sky
9. Large stone / Obelisk
10. Grass
11. Weed/wildflower
12. Dirt
13. Cave
14. Pond
15. Mud/lava/geyser/tar
16. Weather
17. Vines
18. Pit/chasm
19. Footprint(s)
20. Nest/Den
21. Rock formation
22. Dam
23. Crater
24. Ridge
25. Orchard
26. Dry bed (river/lake)
27. Local flora
28. Local fauna
29. Spring
30. Chain of ponds/lakes
31. Underground tunnel network
32. Local fungus
33. Fossils
34. Woods
35. Dead Flora
36. Dead Fauna
37. A formerly prevalent local creature
38. A plot of land
39. Roll again, combining
40. Roll again, 1 Man-Made & Roll again on Feature Type Table

Man-Made Feature (2D20)

2. Shop Cart
3. One building
4. Wall
5. Arboretum
6. Garden
7. Hanging garden
8. Well
9. District
10. Road
11. Sewer
12. Monument
13. Cemetery
14. Field
15. Dock
16. Farm
17. Mine
18. Quarry
19. Fountain
20. Entire City
21. Military/guard
22. Dump/Junkyard
23. Bridge
24. Altar/shrine
25. Aqueduct
26. Zoo
27. Statue/sculpture
28. Museum
29. Crossing
30. Dam
31. Path/trail
32. Park
33. A city block

34. Tent
35. Gazebo
36. Every one of a certain kind of building in town
37. The marketplace
38. Dungeon
39. Roll again, combining
40. Roll again, 1 Man-Made & Roll again on Feature Type Table

Supernatural Feature (2D8)

2. Meteor
3. Portal
4. Magical technology
5. Undead
6. Light
7. Darkness
8. A paired location (2 places magically connected)
9. Magical inscription / circle
10. Spatial / Dimensional anomaly
11. Laboratory
12. Ancient magical site
13. Crash site
14. Magical juncture
15. Site of magical event with residual effects
16. Supernatural Being

Phenomenon (D100)

1. Has layers
2. Glows
3. Defies physics

4. Wards off something
5. Is higher than expected
6. Is lower than expected
7. Is in an odd part of town
8. Is a source of conflict
9. Is carnivorous
10. The city depends on it
11. Oppresses someone
12. Associated with a curse
13. Houses a special species
14. Houses a celebrity
15. Is ruins
16. Burns
17. Is wetter than expected
18. Offers a unique resource
19. Is built in the shape of something
20. Roll twice
21. Floats
22. Is a location of a sport or game
23. Is bigger on the inside
24. Is the location of a tragedy
25. Is a hive-like network
26. Is a center of criminal activity
27. Is not what it seems
28. Is an unexpected color
29. Has an unexpected odor
30. Has an unexpected sound / music
31. Is believed to be haunted
32. Is shrouded in fog
33. Splits the city
34. Is an unexpected shape
35. Is associated with a specific creature
36. Is unexpectedly lacking/missing
37. Is a source of transportation

38. Is much larger than expected
39. Is much smaller than expected
40. Is a canopy
41. Is an unexpected temperature
42. Is difficult to access
43. Is domed
44. Is much more numerous than expected
45. Disappears
46. Is a source of knowledge
47. Is alive/animate
48. Explodes
49. Has unique walls
50. Is unexpectedly indoors/outdoors
51. Transforms something
52. Is made from a carcass/skeleton/shell/Carapace
53. Inhibits some magic
54. Augments some magic
55. Is a holy site
56. Used to be something else
57. Is carved out of something
58. Is guarded
59. Is an impossible shape
60. Has different gravity
61. Is made of an unexpected material
62. Is slowly being destroyed
63. Is sideways or upside-down
64. Has smaller parts coming from it
65. Is crystalline
66. Changes into something else
67. Is longer than expected
68. Is impassable
69. Is unexpectedly flat
70. Is burned
71. Previously housed something else (hive, web, etc.)

72. Is toxic
73. Is held up by something
74. Is associated with another plane (outer or inner)
75. Is full of something
76. Is frozen or petrified
77. Is in something unexpected
78. Is under something
79. Is aware
80. Is clockwork
81. Is hollow
82. Wild magic
83. Unexpectedly controlled / uncontrolled
84. Associated with a unique magical material
85. Moves
86. Corrosive
87. Controls minds/emotions
88. Mimics a spell
89. Drains something
90. Is invisible
91. Changes size
92. Something will come/hatch/spawn from it
93. Affects one or more senses
94. Causes disappearances
95. Is unexpectedly tough
96. Is unexpectedly vulnerable
97. Is a location of a valuable resource
98. Most people don't know it's there
99. Is a treasured landmark
100. Roll twice, combining

Critical Success: Giving Players Every Advantage

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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.

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