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ENGL – 3130 – 940

2 December 2020

**Medieval Merriment: A Guide for Creating Your First
Character and Playing Your First Game of 5th Edition
Dungeons and Dragons as Quickly as Possible**

By William Hudson

This guide will help bridge the starting gap for beginners and show everything you need to know and everything you will need as a player to get involved in the community and game. This will allow you to jump headlong into your first ever play session of Fifth Edition Dungeons and Dragons as quickly and painlessly as possible using the helpful tool of DnD Beyond, a free software program available online at dndbeyond.com.

Have you ever seen a clip from television or a movie of people hurling magic missiles around at a pack of hulking ogres and bouncing around in excitement when the final one fell? Did you enjoy *The Lord of the Rings* movies or read the books and want to be a part of a world like it? Have you ever created your own medieval fantasy alter ego and wondered with bated breath what they would do in dire circumstances? Or perhaps you wanted to play a game with your friends and to look around the game table as an explosion of joy and cheers burst out as the giant dragon plaguing you and your companions in arms for a long time takes his final breath? If you answered yes to any of those questions, then Dungeons and Dragons will bring an unforgettable experience.



A group setting up to play Dungeons & Dragons. (Obtained from www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/fantasy-resurgence-dungeons-dragons-1.5218245)

In recent years, Dungeons and Dragons has become a pop culture phenomenon. The table-top board game was released in the 1970s, but there was a lot of push back from religious organizations calling the game wicked and sinful. However, the game was still popular with the stereotypically nerdy individuals. Everything changed in the middle of the 2010's, however, when, due to a variety of factors, nerd culture became cool again in society. With that shift in what is deemed cool came the advent of popular Dungeons and Dragons live streaming shows on the internet, such as Critical Role.

Critical Role is a D&D game involving eight extremely talented voice actors from video games, cartoons, animated movies, etc. In their game, they show how entertaining the game can be. They follow the stories of their characters and show just how in-depth people can get with character motives and philosophy when creating their own characters. This helped to spur a renaissance for the Dungeons and Dragons community, because the cast of Critical Role made the game look cool, and exposed the game to many people who dealt with the nerdy, anti-religious stigma around the game, who may not have seen it be played otherwise. The cast



The cast of Critical Role. (From Left to Right) Ashley Johnson, Travis Willingham, Sam Riegel, Matthew Mercer, Marisha Ray, Liam O'Brien, Taliesin Jaffe, and Laura Bailey.

(Thanks for the great group shot Wikipedia!)

streams on Twitch TV, a popular live-streaming platform, every Thursday night. This makes the show feel like an actual television program and shows how Dungeons and Dragons can be more of an experience rather than just another game.

The evil, dorky stigma surrounding the game has changed dramatically now. For most people, Dungeons and Dragons is not a game for freaks, but is rather for people who like to explore character growth and slay some monsters in the process. It is still nerdy, but that is a good thing. Being nerdy is not only okay, but it is considered kind of cool now!

Dungeons and Dragons is a lot like a movie or TV show, except you are in control of the characters actions. Many people around the world play the game to have fun with their friends, or at least to see what all the hype is about. In my junior year of high school in 2015, I played my first ever game and it has now bled over into a recurring game of choice for me and my friends.

Typically, my friends and I will play once a week on Saturdays. Another great thing about Dungeons and Dragons is that you can do a video call online and get the same effect as sitting around a table. So, if for instance, a virus were plaguing the world, like COVID-19, you could continue the game online. The current campaign I am in started in January of 2020, and when COVID hit we were able to make a swift transition to online play, allowing the much-needed stress relief to continue.

For the last five years I have either been a player, dungeon master, or helping other dungeon masters and players with rules questions, general brainstorming, and providing the materials for games. Even if I am not doing that, I can be found watching Critical Role and other similar shows. In total, I easily have over 1000 hours of game knowledge and experience.

My favorite character I ever created was my holy warrior, Avgan, the goliath paladin. He was a strong, hulking figure, set up to become the leader of his tribe. However, he was soft on the inside and hated fighting. He instead preferred the arts and painting and frequently used them as an escape. This conflict of violence and passion followed him through every aspect of his journey. He explored the concept of what it means to be a man in the world, and if it was okay for goliaths, a particularly violent race, to feel and express emotions. Along his journey, his warmongering uncle murdered his mother, who showed him the beauty of the arts, and framed him for the crime. The uncle even made Avgan feel as though he had done it by his own hands. This created his overarching conflict as a holy warrior. It was the most interesting experience I had playing.

Each experience is one I will never forget, but I know from my starting days that taking the first step can be a daunting task. Our quest is to create your very first character and get you in that seat rolling dice.

Gathering Your Party

Sometimes the biggest hurdle is finding a group to play with. Often, I hear, “That sounds amazing, but I would never get enough of my friends interested in playing.” However, with the overwhelming popularity of the game, finding a table to sit at has never been easier. Ask some friends if D&D is something they have ever been interested in and try to get at least three or four people to agree. If you are lucky, one of them will have already played before or have been a dungeon master, allowing you to skip the hardest part of getting a group together.

A group generally consists of one dungeon master, and as many players as you can fit around the table, but the sweet spot would be five or six players. With five or six players, the combat will be very well balanced, and it helps break up stale stretches of role play by allowing your character to interact with a more varied cast of adventures.

If you are struggling to get a dungeon master or players, there is a thing called The Adventure League, which is a group of seasoned players looking to get new people interested in the game. They have many locations all around the world, and frequently pop up at local gaming stores. You can also go to the official Dungeons and Dragons website and it will show you if any Adventure League locations are in your area. If you are ever in doubt, feel free to travel to one of those stores and ask if they have any Dungeons and Dragons gaming programs.

Due to COVID-19, the games may not be taking place physically, but if you are itching to play, I know that some games are taking place online, like how my friends and I transitioned with our game. I have contacted people from the Adventure League before to ask general questions about what they do, what a normal game looks like, and many other questions, and

they are some of the friendliest people around. The D&D community is one of the most inviting, safe places I have ever been a part of and will always make you feel welcome.

Buying the Necessities

Now that we have a group of intrepid adventures, we need to buy some materials. The only things you would need to have are dice and the *5th Edition Player's Handbook*. There is a special set of dice that include a variety of different sides. They come in a variety of different colors and make, so just pick the set, or sets, that speak to you the most.



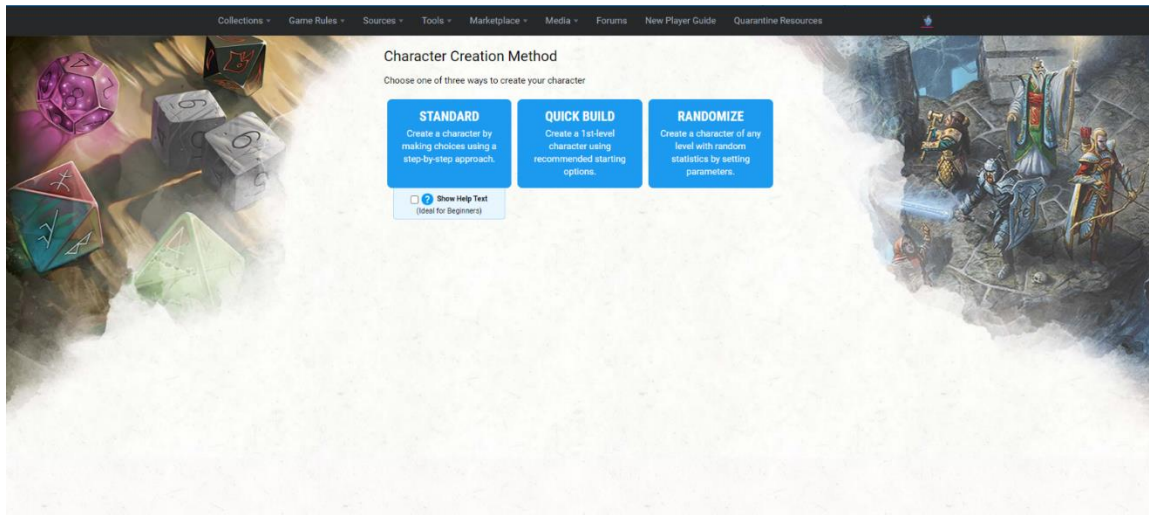
This is an example of a D&D dice set. Included are a d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20, and d100, referring to the number of sides the die has. The d100 is two d10s rolled together, one being the 10s place and the other being the 1s place. (Obtained from www.pinterest.com/pin/330803535132446154/?nic_v2=1a109E2JQ)

Secondly, The Player's Handbook is an asset to any adventurer. The handbook has gone through many iterations in the past; six to be exact! The game is on 5th edition, but there was a popular 3.5 Edition of the Player's handbook that makes the total six! The 5th Edition Handbook is just the most recently released version of the overall rulebook for D&D, which was released in 2014. It includes a variety of different races and classes you can pick from, and even has the list of spells at the back of the book in case you get lost.

Now that we have our dice and book, it is time to start creating.

Preliminary Steps in Creating Your Character and DnD Beyond

This is the step where the creativity flows. The character created will have an impact and say on anything and everything in the world the dungeon master creates. The most important thing to keep in mind when making your character is to have fun. If you make a character that you have fun playing, everyone around the table will feed off that energy and help boost your gameplay to the next level. There is an extremely handy program for this online known as DnD Beyond. The program is completely free and will also help guide you step by step through character creation. You can find the program here: <https://www.dndbeyond.com/>. You will have to make an account on the website, but after that we can transition into making the character! Once you begin your character creation on the program, you will see three options: standard, quick build, and randomize.

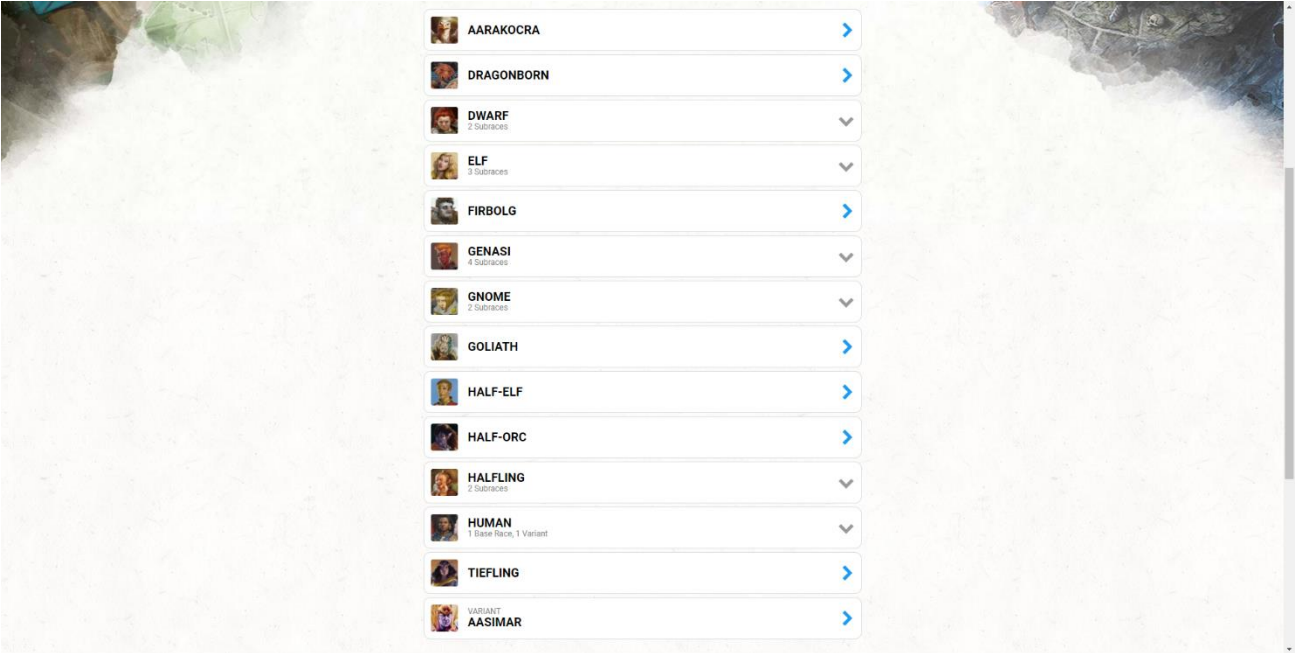


All the options serve similar purposes, but to different degrees. For the ultimate control over your character, simply select standard with help text enabled. This will prompt you with questions and show you what might be best for your character regarding your stats. Randomize is

generally for seasoned players looking to spice up their gameplay, so I would recommend avoiding that. For the fastest possible option to get you sitting at the table, quick build is the way to go. For quick build, all that must be entered is your desired race, class, and the name of your character.

Picking Your Race

Most people choose human as their starter race because they have well rounded stats and it allows for them to see what an “Average Joe” would experience walking through a world of gods, demons, dragons, and more. However, choosing human is not a requirement. There is a plethora of many different races that are incredibly interesting to play, such as the Tieflings, a race of people descending from the demons of Hell itself, or the Half-Orcs, who come from a variety of different sources with the common denominator being the traditionally evil and violent Orcs that plague the landscape. Every race has their own unique flavor, stats, and traditional background that help make every character different from one another. Feel free to look around at the different options. The sky is the only limit.



Deciding Your Class

Just as with the races, there are twelve different class varieties playable in base level fifth edition and different subclasses within those to help spice up the classes. Using the quick build will give you the easiest of the subclasses to learn and play until you become more comfortable with the game. A popular choice for first time players is fighter. They are easy to understand, well-stated, and do not have the semi-complicated feature of magic. For fighters, a weapon and sheer determination are their bread and butter. However, there is also the honor bound paladin, fighting to cure the injustices of the world, or the mischievous warlock who made a deal with some other worldly being and now has power beyond imagination, but at the price of being in servitude to that entity. Just like

with races, the sky is the limit on what you can choose. Perhaps you feel like sticking to the shadows, embracing the darkness, and slaying your adversaries before they even knew you were there. If so, then rogue is the class for you. Whatever seems interesting to you on the list, pick it. Understanding the rules of magic has never been easier with DnD Beyond's helpful system, so do not let that worry



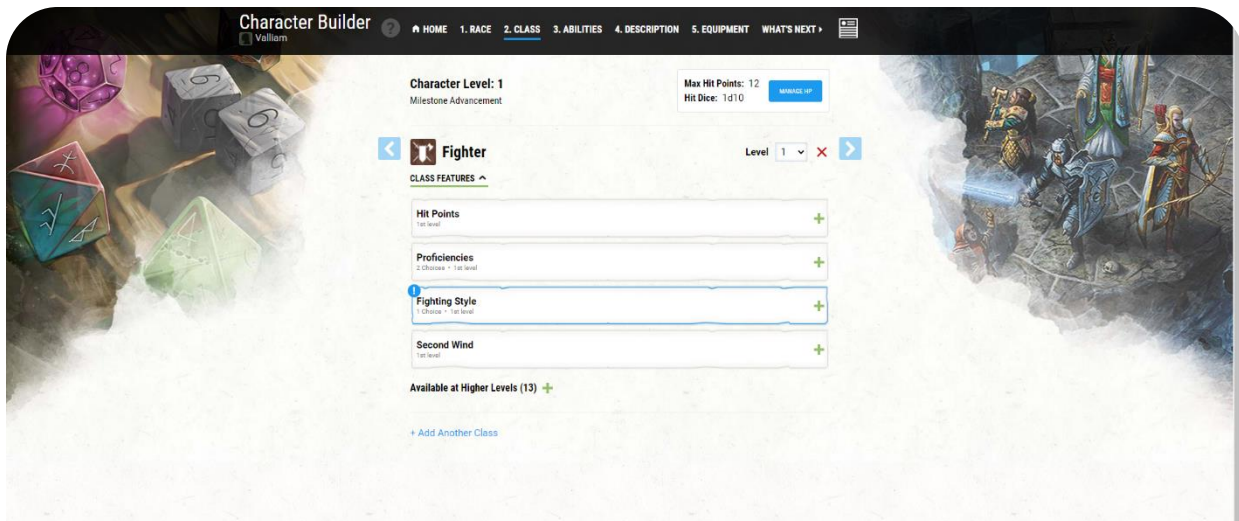
stop whatever you find the most entertaining.

Finally, all you need is a name to go to the next step. Sometimes it is difficult to come up with a thematic name, but do not let that give you writer's block. If you are stuck and want to brainstorm some ideas, there is a simple, intuitive website called Fantasy Name Generator. They have all the Dungeons and Dragons races and many more. Simply click on whichever race you want and get generating. Feel free to shop around for the perfect name or use those ideas to fuel your own creativity and make your own. There are no wrong options, so have fun with it.

Flushing Out Your Character and Adding the Pizazz

Now that you have the race, class, and name, you are almost done. In the Character Builder menu, DnD Beyond will break the different options into categories: home, race, class, abilities, description, and equipment. The dungeon master is the only one who will need to change anything in the home menu. In race, simply look for any blue exclamation points. That means, there is an option for you to pick from.

There will be handy descriptions under each one after you make your selection, so feel free to look through them all and see what is most interesting. Then repeat the same process for class. Ignore abilities for now, as the program has already calculated what your ability scores are, and your dungeon master will say if anything needs to be different.



Above is an example character I created. He is a human fighter. At the top, you can see the list of “Race”, “Class”, etc. Currently, class is selected. Fighting Style is highlighted blue and there is a blue exclamation mark to the left. This indicates that my character has an extra feature that I must choose from so that it appears on the character sheet.

Next up is description. This will be the page where all the information of the character is filled in. There is background, which is already chosen due to quick build, and any proficiencies. Do not worry about any of that stuff. The primary concern is flushing out who the character is, what they want to accomplish, if they have any defining character traits, etc. Feel free to browse the suggested characteristics if you are having trouble coming up with some. Below the suggested are four different panels: character details, physical characteristics, personal characteristics, and notes. Most of these are self-explanatory. How old is the character? Are they tall or short? Are they religious? Flush out any of these ideas and leave the others blank. There are many different options to choose from and each one will help both you and your dungeon master understand who the character is.

The most important tab in the section is under notes and it is labeled backstory. This tells the story of your character and how they got to the point in their life they are at when the story begins. Where did they grow up? Is there something or someone from their past that haunts

them? Let that creativity flow and channel that into the backstory. Last is the equipment your character has. Normally, you would have to go through a menu to pick what gear you want.

Luckily, quick build has already given you everything you need to start out your session. Simply click the what's next tab and click view character sheet.

With that, congratulations! You have successfully created your first ever Dungeons and Dragons character. All your health, bonuses, stats, abilities, and spells, if you have them, can be viewed from this screen. Just make sure you click on the equipment tab on the right side of the screen and click on the boxes next to the gear you must put it on. Any questions you have beyond this point can be answered by your dungeon master.

The image shows a character sheet for Valliam, a Human Fighter 1. The sheet is divided into several sections:

- Stats:** Strength +3 (16), Dexterity +2 (14), Constitution +2 (15), Intelligence +0 (11), Wisdom +1 (13), Charisma -1 (9).
- Skills:** Athletics +5, Perception +3, Animal Handling +1, Arcana +0, Deception -1, History +0, Insight +1, Intimidation +1, Investigation +0, Medicine +1, Nature +0, Performance -1, Persuasion -1, Religion +0, Sleight of Hand +2, Stealth +2, Survival +3.
- Equipment:** A list of items including Bedroll, Chain Mail, Handaxe, Longsword, Mess Kit, Rations (1 day), Rope, Hempen (50 feet), Shield, Tinderbox, and Torch.

Red boxes highlight the following areas:

- The top row of stats.
- The Skills section.
- The Equipment section.
- The Senses section (Passive Perception, Investigation, Insight).
- The Saving Throws section.
- The Proficiency section.
- The Initiative section.
- The Defenses section.
- The Conditions section.

In the bottom right of the image, a text box explains that these boxes are where you click to equip items like chainmail and hand axes.

The game of Dungeons and Dragons is incredibly varied, and with some many different variations of the game, it can be challenging to know what rules your dungeon master wants to play by. When in doubt, make sure to run things by the dungeon master and they will clear up any confusion or concerns. Always remember that at the end of the day, it is just a game, and to have fun and be proud of the creation you made. Now get out there, start rolling some dice, and slaying some dragons.

Advanced Creation and Customization

Wait, you are still here after that explanation? That must mean you are well versed in the game and DnD Beyond now and the Quick Build Customization just is not cutting for you. Well, I have some tips and tricks that might help you spice up that character of yours.

If you are not in that category of people, I would recommend trying out a character first before committing to the optional tips that we are going to delve into. It would be a shame to put all that time and effort in just to discover that the game is not for you. So, go play and come back when you have some more experience and desire that extra pizzazz.

1. Pick a background that best fits your character's backstory

The background is automatically selected in Quick Build, but that does not mean that is the only background your character can have. Having a different background than the default one helps make your character feel like a real person in this world. As you well know by now, each background provides a different passive benefit to your character, and those passives end up making a big difference on a story level, as well as a mechanical one.

For example, I once made a character with a Pirate Background. The benefit provided from being a pirate is that your past deeds give you a bit of a reputation. If you are in a bar and you smash a glass or break down a door, no one is going to call for help once they see you. Naturally, at the start of my session I wanted to try out this little feature. I refused to pay for a meal I was given. The bar owner said nothing as I walked out of the building, but the bill would come due in another way.

My dungeon master kept track of every time I used the feature and was lying in wait for his time to strike so to speak. Eventually, I learned that for each infraction the people who were

hunting my character were getting closer to my location. The people in the town would talk amongst themselves about the events even if law enforcement was not involved, and those sightings inched all interested parties closer to me. The people hunting my character, victims of my past piracy who wanted revenge, and higher up law enforcement that wanted to torture my character for information on the rest of my crewmates were all getting closer and closer to my character despite me never knowing that. As my party and I ventured through surrounding towns, we would hear murmured whispers about my character and the transgressions he had made. It was an amazing experience, and it was all thanks to that one background choice.

But there is more than just pirate! There is a plethora of great backgrounds. If you can think of it, it probably exists. The only downside is that in order to import the different backgrounds into DnD Beyond, you must purchase them. Each of the backgrounds is \$1.99 USD on DnD Beyond. Look at *The Player's Handbook* and the *Sword Coast Adventure's Guide* in the store on the website and see if any stick out to you! Alternatively, you could make your own background! Just make sure you run whatever you decide to use by your Dungeon Master.

2. Branch Out with the Subclasses

This one is probably self-explanatory, but each of the subclasses for the class you choose will play differently. The best example I can think of is Warlock. There are so many different customization options with Warlock that it is almost crazy. You can be ranged, melee, a caster, a tank, and that is even before going into the different subclasses. Want to hurl your enemies through the deepest pits of Hell? You can. Want to have an enchanted weapon capable of speech that will be the source of your otherworldly power? You got it. Warlock may exemplify the diversity of the game, but every class has at least one subclass that feels completely different to play. I encourage you to give whichever one looks the coolest to you a try.

3. Roleplay, Roleplay, Roleplay

While you do not have to roleplay in order to play the game, I highly recommend you give it a try. Roleplaying allows you to really get lost in the world that has been created. If your character feels more like a vessel from you to roll dice than an actual character, try engaging in more conversations with your fellow adventures and with the characters around the world. If you are anything like me, it is going to feel uncomfortable at first. However, once you overcome that first level of awkwardness, the game will be so much more interesting. No one is going to judge you if you want to use an accent for your character. Most people will follow along and make accents for their characters as well! I always take a few minutes before the start of session to just talk in my character's voice and "warm up". This helps me overcome that initial burst of awkward and get right into the roleplay!

4. Play into Your Character's Faults

Many people who play the game are only interested in winning, which is completely fine! However, it also takes away a bit of the realism of your character. For instance, if you have a character that has an alcohol problem, have your character constantly drinking, especially towards the start of the campaign. Maybe even go into some battles drunk. Your dungeon master will have a different system in place for your character to fight will under the influence. This will also make your combats more interesting! Let us expand on this idea though. If your character does have an alcohol problem, why? What is it that happened in your character's life that led them to finding alcohol to be the only solution? This information will come out naturally in the roleplay between your fellow adventures and will create an interesting character development. Perhaps that reason your character drinks is because they have never truly had friends, and now they do. Then maybe your character starts drinking less and less as the session continues. This

will create a fun bonding experience for the party as well! On a different topic, if your character has low intelligence, you can be a bit of an idiot. Some of the funniest moments of my previous campaign came from my low intelligence character just not getting the memo about a lot of stuff. It also created a lot of fun memes for my friend group that we still use to this day.

5. Separate You, the Player, from You, the Character

This is a big one. Sometimes it is beneficial to take a step back and realize what your character wants is often different from what you want. Going back to the pirate character from before, a royal of the city we were in made some rude comments about my character. Now, I the player, knew that if I started a commotion it would make our quest in the city much more difficult and wanted to avoid a fight. However, my character wanted to teach this royal some respect. You can probably guess which option I chose. This altercation led to an amazing prison break scene and some excellent roleplay moments that helped my character grow and develop. Learning to separate being a character and a player is tricky, and probably the most difficult thing on the list. But, making that distinction will really help your character feel more organic. As you go about your journey, just ask yourself, is this what my character wants right now? Simply asking that question will have a big affect on the realism of your character.

6. Your Alignment is not Your Ruleset

This is something I see constantly online and at the table. Always remember, *your alignment does not mean you have to play a certain way*. As an example, if you are a Lawful Good player, you are generally considered to be the beacon of virtue and the embodiment of good. But if something happens where you want to steal and maybe give whatever you stole to the poor citizens in the area, that is completely okay. This is generally considered a Chaotic

Good alignment, but that does not mean you can not do it. Another example, if you are an eviler character by nature, that does not mean you have to always be evil. You can give some change to a beggar if that is what makes sense for your character.

Your alignment should not define your roleplay, but rather should be reflective of your roleplay. It should accurately represent your character's general philosophy at that time.

Philosophies can change on a dime and Dungeons and Dragons really shows that. Do not feel locked into a particular action because of your alignment. First and foremost, do what your character wants to do and what you want to do.

If you can incorporate all these tips into your game, it will make your character feel more realistic and will greatly improve your enjoyment of the game. This list is not comprehensive but all of them will help push you the next echelon of Dungeons and Dragons gameplay.

My Recommended Classes

Here are some of the classes I feel are some of the best balanced and most fun to play.

- **Warlock** (Excellent roleplay potential due to generally high Charisma stat and the most variable of all the classes with its unique subclasses, patrons, and pacts. Generally long range but allows for up close fighting as well, albeit with less HP and lighter armor.)
- **Paladin** (High Charisma stat generally that leads to good roleplay. Not as variable as Warlock but still fairly varied with different oaths. Fun combat that incorporates up close fighting and spell flinging with high HP and heavy armor.)

- **Sorcerer** (Sheer and utter pandemonium with one of its subclasses that makes every spell have a unique effect. Sometimes you turn the enemy into a frog, sometimes you accidentally throw a fireball at your entire party. Nevertheless, incredibly entertaining.)
- **Bard** (Incredibly entertaining class and the source of a lot of jokes in the Dungeons and Dragons community. What it lacks in raw power it makes up for in engaging roleplay and fantastic spells.)
- **Cleric** (The normal healer of any Dungeons and Dragons group. This class incorporates healing your allies while smashing opponents with hard hitting attacks. Be prepared for you Dungeon Master to constantly be attacking you though.)
- **Barbarian** (ARGHHHHHHH – *Translation* – Run into fights headlong and show the enemies the meaning of fear. Hit hard and be able to take a lot of damage, all the while showing off those impressive muscles.)