

Reading

This morning, we have a reading from the author Anne Lamott:

“You are lucky to be one of those people who wishes to build sand castles with words, who is willing to create a place where your imagination can wander. We build this place with the sand of memories; these castles are our memories and inventiveness made tangible. So part of us believes that when the tide starts coming in, we won't really have lost anything, because actually only a symbol of it was there in the sand. Another part of us thinks we'll figure out a way to divert the ocean. This is what separates artists from ordinary people: the belief, deep in our hearts, that if we build our castles well enough, somehow the ocean won't wash them away. I think this is a wonderful kind of person to be.”

Sermon

You sit down at a table, nervous. You've never played Dungeons and Dragons before, but you're excited to give it a chance. The table is covered in a variety of items, including maps, pens, little figurines, and even dice. The dice are unusual to you. Sure, they have the normal 6-sided dice you use in Monopoly, but they also have other shapes, including a pyramid-like one with 4 sides, and some with 8, 10, 12, and even 20 sides. They come in a variety of colors, some even made of metal! There's a paper in front of you that might as well be written in Greek. It talks about health points, armor class, initiative, and has spaces to fill out your strength, charisma, and other attributes.

“Welcome to the game,” you hear a voice say, “is this your first time playing?”

You respond that it is, and ask if that's ok.

“Absolutely, I'm the DM, or dungeon master, and I love teaching people the ropes! The first thing we want to do is create your character.”

“Character?” You say, a little confused.

“Yeah, the character you're going to play in the game. It can be a little daunting, but I'll walk you through it. You have lots of options, you can be a human, like you are now, or a dwarf, or even a dragonborn, a humanoid that's kind of a mix between a dragon and a human”

“Oh, that seems easy enough. Is that all?”

The person chuckles, “No, there's a bit more to take care of. Next we'll choose your class or your job. You can heal people as a cleric, cast spells as a wizard, or do a little of both as a paladin. There are other options, too, and we can get into those if you'd like. Once you pick that out, we roll a few dice,” they hand you some six-sided dice, “and use the rolls to determine your starting attributes, how smart, athletic, or charming you are.”

After lots of small decisions and even more writing, you have your character, a dragonborn paladin from a small city in Faerun.

The DM takes their place at the head of the table and starts their tale, "As you gather around the grand table in the royal hall, the local king looks upon you with a solemn expression. "Brave adventurers," he begins, "a grave threat has befallen our lands. An ancient red dragon, its scales aflame, has been terrorizing our towns and laying waste to our villages. I beseech you to undertake a quest of utmost importance – to seek out the dragon's lair and put an end to its reign of terror. The safety of our kingdom rests in your hands."

With resolute determination, you accept the king's quest and set forth on your perilous journey. The path to the dragon's lair takes you through dense forests, treacherous mountains, and vast plains. The journey is arduous, but you press on, driven by the knowledge that countless lives depend on your success.

Finally, after days of travel, you arrive at the entrance of the dragon's lair. The cavernous opening yawns before you, its darkness hiding untold dangers. The air is thick with tension, but your courage remains steadfast.

As you venture deeper into the lair, the scent of sulfur fills your nostrils, and the sound of echoing drips permeates the darkness. Illuminating the path with torches, you come across a breathtaking sight. The ancient dragon's lair is vast, and its floor is covered in a shimmering sea of gold and jewels. The hoard glistens under the dim light, and the weight of its wealth fills the air.

The dragon itself, a behemoth of crimson scales and fierce eyes, rests atop the hoard, its serpentine tail wrapped protectively around its treasure. Its presence is awe-inspiring and terrifying in equal measure. You know that this will be the defining moment of your quest.

Suddenly, the earth trembles beneath your feet, and the dragon's eyes snap open. It senses your intrusion and lets loose a bone-chilling roar that reverberates through the lair. "Roll for initiative," the Dungeon Master declares, as the battle for the fate of the kingdom begins.

In the game of Dungeons and Dragons, we are thrust into a world of daring exploits and thrilling adventures. As brave adventurers, we embark on a noble quest to vanquish the menacing red dragon, facing formidable challenges and unknown dangers. But beyond the realm of fantasy, our own lives are filled with quests that call us to summon the same courage and determination.

Life's quests are not about collecting gold and treasures but about seeking purpose, growth, and fulfillment. Each of us has a unique journey to traverse, with twists and turns, obstacles to overcome, and victories to celebrate. It might be a quest for self-discovery, to find our true passions and talents, or a quest for connection, to build meaningful relationships with others.

Just like in the game, life's quests often demand us to make choices that shape our destinies. We are faced with critical moments, where we must decide to venture into the unknown or remain in the safety of the familiar. It is in these moments that we must "roll for initiative" in our own lives – to take that first bold step, seize opportunities, and confront challenges head-on.

The journey may be filled with uncertainty, but it is in this uncertainty that we discover the full potential of our strength, resilience, and creativity.

In the realm of Dungeons and Dragons, imagination reigns supreme. Players become creators, fashioning vibrant characters, worlds, and stories. As we explore this captivating game, we discover the power of our minds to create tales beyond the ordinary. Just like the adventurers who shape their destinies in the game, we too possess the ability to weave the fabric of our lives with creativity and boundless imagination. Through the magic of D&D, we learn that our thoughts and ideas hold tremendous potential, and it is within our grasp to transform the mundane into the extraordinary.

At first glance, Dungeons and Dragons is a game of fantasy and imagination, where we traverse the winding paths of mystical lands and battle mythical creatures. But at its core, D&D, like life, is about choices. The character we create, the actions we take, the quests we accept - all of these are decisions that define our character and shape our destiny. The game offers a safe space to test the waters, make choices without fear of real-world consequences, and explore the full spectrum of potential outcomes that our decisions could yield. It encourages us to face our fears, embrace uncertainty, and take risks.

The process of creating a character in D&D can be seen as a metaphor for our own journey of self-discovery. As we choose our character's race, class, and background, we delve into aspects of their identity, just as we explore our own in real life. D&D invites us to walk in another's shoes, nurturing empathy and encouraging personal growth. It pushes us to ask: Who are we? What values do we uphold? What challenges do we face? In a sense, our characters become mirrors of ourselves, reflecting our strengths, vulnerabilities, and aspirations.

Moreover, D&D is a game that fosters community. At the heart of every game lies a group of adventurers, each with their unique abilities, working together to overcome the challenges before them. This sense of camaraderie and cooperation that the game instills is a beautiful reflection of the real-world communities we are a part of. Just as our D&D characters need their fellow adventurers, we too need the support, communication, and collaboration of those around us to navigate the winding paths of life.

The role of the Dungeon Master, too, is not unlike that of a community leader. The DM crafts the world and guides the story, but their role extends beyond that. They create an engaging and inclusive space for all players, fostering collaboration and mutual respect. It is this spirit of shared storytelling, cooperation, and leadership that we carry from the gaming table into our everyday interactions.

And from this shared storytelling, we learn vital life lessons. D&D introduces us to the elements of chance and risk through dice rolls. The unpredictability of these rolls mirrors the uncertainty of life - the understanding that despite our best efforts, things may not always go as planned. The game teaches us to embrace this uncertainty, to understand that life, like a dice roll, comes with its own set of unexpected twists and turns.

Beyond that, D&D often puts us in situations where we must make moral and ethical decisions. We encounter dilemmas that challenge our values and principles, forcing us to consider the impact of our actions. Through these encounters, we learn to navigate life's complexities, growing in empathy, wisdom, and understanding.

Lastly, the game teaches us about resilience. In D&D, even when our characters fall, they can rise again. It reminds us that our failures and setbacks are not the end of our story but stepping stones on our path to growth and success.

So, as we wrap up this sermon, I invite you to think about your own life as an adventure - a grand quest filled with epic stories, thrilling challenges, and opportunities for growth. Remember the lessons from Dungeons and Dragons, and embrace the spirit of exploration, the importance of community, and the value of resilience. And remember, much like D&D, life is not just about the destination. It's about the journey, the stories we create, and the experiences we share along the way. In the words of a famous Dungeon Master, Matt Mercer, "Take chances, make mistakes - that's how you grow." May your journey be filled with courage, creativity, and boundless adventure.