Andreas Marek Wlosek

Characterization, Culture, and Canon

Fantasy Fiction and the Rulebooks
of Dungeons & Dragons

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Yuri Allen Cowan
May 2023

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Andreas Marek Wlosek

Characterization, Culture, and Canon

Fantasy Fiction and the Rulebooks
of Dungeons & Dragons

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract

This thesis examines the rules and rulebooks of original *Dungeons & Dragons*, and *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition to look at how the game uses characterization during the character creation process. The first chapter examines the origins of D&D by looking closer at rules in the pamphlets written by Gary Gygax and some of the games' supplements like published through *The Dragon* magazine. The characterization rules used in original D&D can be recognized as characterization by *role*, a term used by Uri Margolin in his theory of character. This type of characterization can be seen in literature inspired by the game, as seen in *Quag Keep* by Andre Norton. The author uses many of the rules provided by the game, and further builds on the problematic aspects of the game like misogyny and racist systems. The second chapter examines the overarching narrative in the core rulebooks of *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition. I argue that this narrative has connections to stereotypes, clichés, and tropes found in the genre of sword and sorcery, and that this narrative is forced onto the players as the main world of D&D. This limits the narrative freedom of the players, and authors who decide to write novels in the general world of D&D as seen in the novels *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* by Marieke Nijkamp, and *Legends & Lattes* by Travis Baldree I argue that the limitations of narrative freedom spill over to culture around by embracing some of the general tropes of D&D as well as concepts racial hierarchy.

Acknowledgments

Every adventurer needs a helping hand, and this was also the case for this thesis.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Yuri Cowan, who has been an enormous help in this process. The questions you have asked, and the feedback you have given, helped tremendously. Also, your fun facts were always on point.

I would also like to thank my family who were always available for a chat. I know my parents understand my love for the game of D&D, but I am still not sure they fully understand the game itself. Thank you for bringing me to laughter by asking whether "I have played any dragons lately?"

This thesis would never be written if I did not have a group to play D&D with. A huge thanks to the best D&D party out there, Ida, Celine, Olav, and Simon, your problem solving is astounding, and your characters are always entertaining.

The last member of this party is my dear girlfriend, Emilie. Thank you for everything. Every single coffee cup you have brought me. Every single conversation we had. Every single intriguing thought you have shared with me. It all helped. It was all seen. It was all appreciated.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The game of *Dungeons & Dragons* did not appear out of nowhere. In 1973, Gary Gygax together with Dave Arneson gathered enough funds to form the company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), and in 1974 they released the game *Dungeons & Dragons* in form of three booklets, the main one titled *Men & Magic*. The title hints at the main player base being men and foreshadows a lot of its impact on culture around the game in its early days. A total of 1000 box sets containing the three booklets with systems needed to play a game of *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) was printed and shipped out to shops around America. It was the first iteration of the tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) and was built on a wargame called *Chainmail* which was necessary to play the game (Gygax and Arneson, 2). The publication of the first D&D created a plethora of other systems being created in a rapid fashion during that time, and only three years later TSR published both the "Basic Set" and "Advanced D&D", which expanded on the worlds created by Gygax. Nowadays, the game is more popular than ever, and is owned by Wizards of the Coast (WotC). It is featured in a multitude of media with some examples being novels, series, games, and podcasts. The blockbuster movie *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* came out only a month ago with major actors like Chris Pine and Michelle Rodriguez starring in it. *Stranger Things* has major plot points connected to the universe of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Many bookstores feature books by authors like Robert Anthony Salvatore who is famed for his thirty-nine books in *The Legend of Drizzt* series. It is without a doubt that D&D has made a place for itself in the broad media and influences how that media is produced. What these creations have in common is that they all exist in the D&D universe and reflect its canon. Towards the end of his review of the first edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* Benjamin Markovits writes that he heard that:

> Novelists such as Junot Diaz and George R. R. Martin have described D&D as good practice for their writing, but I can't say I learned anything about storytelling from it. It seems a better training ground for lawyers. You get to grips with a complex world, one with obscure (and sometimes inconsistent) rules and competing jurisdictions […] (2020)

This indicates that some players of the game are most likely to indulge in the vast ocean of rules which are presented in the rulebooks, more so than the story itself. There is some merit to what Markovits says in his review of *AD&D*, but there is also some ignorance as to what the rules are. Some of them are messy, and take a long time to resolve, fair enough. However, most players want their characters to advance to the next level, to the next ability, or find the next item that will make them more powerful. They want their characters to be powerful and viable

from the start. Not only that but before starting the game, they already have an idea of what D&D is supposed to be, I mean, there must at least be dragons right? These are rules that play an integral part in dictating the storytelling and narrative.

What holds this D&D universe together, are the constant publications of rulebooks and adventure modules. Between TSRs 1974 publishing of the original D&D and WotCs publishing of the fifth edition of D&D, there were many iterations of the game. Since 1977, the game has been standardized in that its core rulebooks are: the *Player's Handbook* (PHB), the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG), and the *Monster Manual* (MM). This standardization means that every edition of D&D includes these as the core rulebooks. Technically, a player does not need all three to play the game, but it is implied throughout the book that players and dungeon masters should have these books. It is important to note that these rulebooks have gotten larger and more intricate over time, the first three pamphlets produced by TSR in Gygax's basement spanned only 112 pages. Comparing it to the current publications of *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th edition the *PHB*, *DMG*, and *MM* span a total of 988 pages. In the preface of the first edition *AD&D Player's Handbook* (1977), Gygax mentions that the world of D&D needs organizers and adventures to order and explore it without a particular winner nor a final objective. This means that a structure is needed to play the game. The organizer is the Dungeon Master (DM), this is the person in the game who creates a world to exist in the game and keep track of the world while being the final referee if there is a dispute about rules. The adventurers on the other hand are all the other players who join the Dungeon Masters' game. They create characters in the setting provided by the DM, and by playing the game their characters can become stronger and more powerful as well as develop their characters' story. Original D&D consists mainly of rules focused on character experience, their abilities, and combat. The player reading the original D&D pamphlets learns of different characters and races and is supposed to first pick a class. In *Men & Magic* we find three main character classes: fighting-men, magic-users, and clerics. After the player has picked a class, they need to pick a race, here the choices are human, dwarf, elf, halfling or "other" stating that "there is no reason that players cannot be allowed to play as virtually anything, provided they begin relatively weak [...]" (8). It is at this point in character creation where we learn of the concept of alignment. The moral compass of the imagined character can be law, neutrality, or chaos. It is also here we learn that races are tightly connected to their alignment, like elves being neutral or follow the law, men can be of any alignment and orcs are evil or neutral (*Men & Magic*, 9).

Inspirational Reading:

Anderson, Poul. THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS; THE HIGH CRUSADE; THE BROKEN SWORD

Bellairs, John. THE FACE IN THE FROST

Brackett, Leigh.

Brown, Fredric.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. "Pellucidar" Series; Mars Series; Venus Series

Carter, Lin. "World's End" Series

de Camp, L. Sprague. LEST DARKNESS FALL; FALLIBLE FIEND; et al.

de Camp & Pratt. "Harold Shea" Series; CARNELIAN CUBE

Derleth, August.

Dunsany, Lord.

Farmer, P. J. "The World of the Tiers" Series; et al.

Fox, Gardner. "Kothar" Series; "Kyrik" Series; et al.

Howard, R. E. "Conan" Series

Lanier, Sterling. HIERO'S JOURNEY

Leiber, Fritz. "Fafhrd & Gray Mouser" Series; et al.

Lovecraft, H. P.

Merritt, A. CREEP, SHADOW, CREEP; MOON POOL; DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE; et al.

Moorcock, Michael. STORMBRINGER; STEALER OF SOULS; "Hawkmoon" Series (esp. the first three books)

Norton, Andre.

Offutt, Andrew J., editor SWORDS AGAINST DARKNESS III.

Pratt, Fletcher, BLUE STAR; et al.

Saberhagen, Fred. CHANGELING EARTH; et al.

St. Clair, Margaret. THE SHADOW PEOPLE; SIGN OF THE LABRYS

Tolkien, J. R. R. THE HOBBIT; "Ring Trilogy"

Vance, Jack. THE EYES OF THE OVERWORLD; THE DYING EARTH; et al.

Weinbaum, Stanley.

Wellman, Manly Wade.

Williamson, Jack.

Zelazny, Roger. JACK OF SHADOWS; "Amber" Series; et al.

Picture 1 Appendix N (*Dungeon Master's Guide,* 1977, 244)

APPENDIX E: INSPIRATIONAL READING

INSPIRATION FOR ALL OF THE FANTASY WORK I HAVE done stems directly from the love my father showed when I was a lad, for he spent many hours telling me stories he made up as he went along, tales of cloaked old men who could grant wishes, of magic rings and enchanted swords, or wicked sorcerers and dauntless swordsmen. . . All of us tend to get ample helpings of fantasy when we are very young, from fairy tales such as those written by the Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang. This often leads to reading books of mythology, paging through bestiaries, and consultation of compilations of the myths of various lands and peoples. Upon such a base I built my interest in fantasy, being an avid reader of all science fiction and fantasy literature since 1950. The following authors were of particular inspiration to me.

—E. Gary Gygax, Dungeon Master's Guide (1979)

A great deal of fantasy literature has been published since the co-creator of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS wrote those words, including breakthrough works set in the shared worlds of D&D. The following list includes Gary's original list and some additional works that have inspired the game's designers in the years since.

Ahmed, Saladin. *Throne of the Crescent Moon.*
Alexander, Lloyd. *The Book of Three* and the rest of the Chronicles of Prydain series.
Anderson, Poul. *The Broken Sword, The High Crusade,* and *Three Hearts and Three Lions.*
Anthony, Piers. *Split Infinity* and the rest of the Apprentice Adept series.
Augusta, Lady Gregory. *Gods and Fighting Men.*
Bear, Elizabeth. *Range of Ghosts* and the rest of the Eternal Sky trilogy.
Bellairs, John. *The Face in the Frost.*
Brackett, Leigh. *The Best of Leigh Brackett, The Long Tomorrow,* and *The Sword of Rhiannon.*
Brooks, Terry. *The Sword of Shannara* and the rest of the Shannara novels.
Brown, Fredric. *Hall of Mirrors* and *What Mad Universe.*
Bulfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's Mythology.*
Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *At the Earth's Core,* and the rest of the Pellucidar series, *Pirates of Venus* and the rest of the Venus series, and *A Princess of Mars* and the rest of the Mars series.
Carter, Lin. *Warrior of World's End* and the rest of the World's End series.
Cook, Glen. *The Black Company* and the rest of the Black Company series.
de Camp, L. Sprague. *The Fallible Fiend* and *Lest Darkness Fall.*
de Camp, L. Sprague & Fletcher Pratt. *The Compleat Enchanter* and the rest of the Harold Shea series, and *Carnelian Cube.*
Derleth, August and H.P. Lovecraft. *Watchers out of Time.*
Dunsany, Lord. *The Book of Wonder, The Essential Lord Dunsany Collection, The Gods of Pegana, The King of Elfland's Daughter, Lord Dunsany Compendium,* and *The Sword of Welleran and Other Tales.*

Farmer, Philip Jose. *Maker of Universes* and the rest of the World of Tiers series.
Fox, Gardner. *Kothar and the Conjurer's Curse* and the rest of the Kothar series, and *Kyrik and the Lost Queen* and the rest of the Kyrik series.
Froud, Brian & Alan Lee. *Faeries.*
Hickman, Tracy & Margaret Weis. *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* and the rest of the Chronicles Trilogy.
Hodgson, William Hope. *The Night Land.*
Howard, Robert E. *The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian* and the rest of the Conan series.
Jemisin, N.K. *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* and the rest of the Inheritance series, *The Killing Moon,* and *The Shadowed Sun.*
Jordan, Robert. *The Eye of the World* and the rest of the Wheel of Time series.
Kay, Guy Gavriel. *Tigana.*
King, Stephen. *The Eyes of the Dragon.*
Lanier, Sterling. *Hiero's Journey* and *The Unforsaken Hiero.*
LeGuin, Ursula. *A Wizard of Earthsea* and the rest of the Earthsea series.
Leiber, Fritz. *Swords and Deviltry* and the rest of the Fafhrd & Gray Mouser series.
Lovecraft, H.P. *The Complete Works.*
Lynch, Scott. *The Lies of Locke Lamora* and the rest of the Gentlemen Bastard series.
Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones* and the rest of the Song of Ice and Fire series.
McKillip, Patricia. *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld.*
Merritt, A. *Creep, Shadow, Creep; Dwellers in the Mirage;* and *The Moon Pool.*
Miéville, China. *Perdido Street Station* and the other Bas-Lag novels.
Moorcock, Michael. *Elric of Melniboné* and the rest of the Elric series, and *The Jewel in the Skull* and the rest of the Hawkmoon series.
Norton, Andre. *Quag Keep* and *Witch World.*
Offutt, Andrew J., ed. *Swords against Darkness III.*
Peake, Mervyn. *Titus Groan* and the rest of the Gormenghast series.
Pratchett, Terry. *The Colour of Magic* and the rest of the Discworld series.
Pratt, Fletcher. *Blue Star.*
Rothfuss, Patrick. *The Name of the Wind* and the rest of the Kingkiller series.
Saberhagen, Fred. *The Broken Lands* and *Changeling Earth.*
Salvatore, R.A. *The Crystal Shard* and the rest of The Legend of Drizzt.
Sanderson, Brandon. *Mistborn* and the rest of the Mistborn trilogy.
Smith, Clark Ashton. *The Return of the Sorcerer.*
St. Clair, Margaret. *Change the Sky and Other Stories, The Shadow People,* and *Sign of the Labrys.*
Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings,* and *The Silmarillion.*
Tolstoy, Nikolai. *The Coming of the King.*
Vance, Jack. *The Dying Earth* and *The Eyes of the Overworld.*
Weinbaum, Stanley. *Valley of Dreams* and *The Worlds of If.*
Wellman, Manly Wade. *The Golgotha Dancers.*
Williamson, Jack. *The Cosmic Express* and *The Pygmy Planet.*
Wolfe, Gene. *The Shadow of the Torturer* and the rest of The Book of the New Sun.
Zelazny, Roger. *Jack of Shadows* and *Nine Princes in Amber* and the rest of the Amber series.

Picture 2 Appendix E (*Player's Handbook,* 2014, 312)

It is not like these concepts of races, classes, and alignments came out of nowhere. Gary Gygax was an avid reader of books, and in fact it was also how he met one of his main game designers in TSR: Jim Ward. Ben Riggs in *Slaying the Dragon: A Secret History of Dungeons & Dragons* writes that Gygax and Ward first met at a bookstore, as they were holding the same seven books in the sword-and-sorcery genre, they ended up talking and Gygax invited Ward to a game of D&D (4). Gygax's inspiration taken from the fantasy genre is clear. In the first edition of AD&D (1977) he included the, now famous, appendix N (picture 1) as part of the DMG where the players can see what kind of authors Gygax was fond of. Gygax writes that "Upon such a base I built my interest in fantasy, being an avid reader of all science fiction and fantasy literature since 1950. The following authors were of particular inspiration to me" (*Dungeons Master's Guide,* 1997, 224). It is really the classical mishmash of fantasy authors like John R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, and Howard P. Lovecraft. These names should spark an idea that it is not surprising that there are elves, barbarians, dragons, some motifs of horror, and tons of clichés in Gygax's work. The new editions also have appendixes of authors used as inspiration (Picture 2), and the lists are quite similar, albeit way longer than the one from 1977.

As this thesis in general deals with the fantastic, it is important to talk about the genre. In *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* John Clute and John Grant try to define the genre and its subgenres (8). One definition they decide on is one worked on by scholars like Brian Attebery who calls the genre "a fuzzy set", meaning that the genre is not defined by its. The definition tells us that: "A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative which, when set in our reality, tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it [...]" (8). Sadly, this is something which has been used against fantastical texts in academia. Lack of realism, and the addition of magic and its supernatural effects, made it so scholars deemed the genre not useful in academia. Luckily, not all scholars are alike. Weronika Łaszkiewicz in her article on fantasy literature and Christianity (2018) writes that Brian Attebery not only defined fantasy, but also says that the fantastic and representation of real world does not exclude each other, as there are no works of fiction which are purely one or the other. Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion* writes that fantasy, like any other text, is produced within, and determined by, its social contexts (3). Without a doubt it is also a genre which is extremally popular through different channels of media like games, literature, movies, and series. Helen Young in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* writes that fantasy itself has a reputation of being a Eurocentric genre which she defines as "by, for, and about White people […]" (1). Furthermore, she argues that concepts and ideas like racial hierarchies remain strong in the fantasy area (42). The concept of racial hierarchies is something which will be seen in this thesis, as it is one of the systems that has existed since D&Ds early days and has stuck with it for a long time. Looking at what D&D is based and inspired upon, the fantasy genre has an immense number of clichés and stereotypes around it. There are in fact so many, that Diana Wynne Jones wrote *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* where she (in a satirical way) describes common tropes of the fantastical. In here we find a wide arrangement of races presented like orcs[1] or gnomes, but also general tropes like the use of colour coding[2] in fantasy. Many of these tropes and clichés can be found in D&D. Some of them evolved into more complex ideas, others stayed the same. Every player of D&D has seen their fair share of evil orcs, tinkering gnomes, rogue halflings, rangers who copy Aragorn[3], and the most popular of all: starting the adventure at a tavern. Jones also lists *xenophobia* as one of the tropes of fantasy, and this is indeed something which exists and will be shown later in this thesis (232). To this it would also be

---

[1] "Newer and better mutation of GOBLINS, even nastier, and always in service of the DARK LORD" (Jones, 139).
[2] "Hair. Black hair is Evil, particularly if combined with a corpse-white complexion. Red hair *always* entiles magical POWERS, even if these are only latent. […] Fair hair, especially if it is silvery-blond, *always* means goodness" (Jones, 39, emphasis in original).
[3] They might also look like Viggo Mortensen

possible to add the wide range of misogyny. As shown in this thesis, D&D embraces a lot of these stereotypes and clichés into the core rulebooks of the game. This thesis acknowledges that the game of D&D, through its rules, allows the possibility for the players to create wonderful, complex, and impressive characters and worlds. But, as shown later for that to happen the player needs to push against the cliché, something which is not easy as the game itself holds onto the sword and sorcery by any means. Furthermore, as seen in this paragraph not all clichés or stereotypes are good, and therefore it is important to be aware of the power which is held by companies like historically TSR or WotC does now.

This thesis argues that the game of D&D tends to limit [4]the narrative freedom of the player by enforcing rules, and canonical narratives through their rulebooks. Given D&Ds' imprint on culture around us through inclusion in games, literature, and movies, these rulebooks have an impact on how the narrative in these different medias work. This thesis examines rules of original *Dungeons & Dragons* created by Gary Gygax and TSR with its focus on the games' characterization during the character creation process. By looking at the first D&D novel *Quag Keep* written by Andre Norton it is possible to see how this characterization process established by TSR spills over to other media. Furthermore, the characterization in the game and the novel is clearly developed to focus on the characters role in the game through clichés and stereotypes built on the games' system of race. The game itself, together with its player base, has grown, but Wizards of the Coast seem to hold tight onto the original roots of the game by implementing rule changes slowly. This thesis also argues that Wizards of the Coast through their core rulebooks create an overarching canonical narrative which their players can fall into. Wizards of the Coast hold real power by choosing what is and what is not considered their world, thus the sword and sorcery setting. By examining the descriptive texts of races and classes provided for the players in the fifth edition of *The Player's Handbook* and some of its supplements, it is possible to ascertain that these texts create a D&D narrative which works canonically for the authors and players inspired by the game. This reflection is often shown in stereotypical usage of characters, either their race or class, and of the addition of major clichés known in the TTRPG space into the narrative.

---

[4] Note the use of word *limit* here. I acknowledge the vast amount of game design theory that goes into creating a TTRPG. While I, throughout this thesis argue that some rules, and text in rulebooks, limit the freedom of the players, there is also many of these rules which create freedom for the players. This game, after all, is about improvisation and roleplaying. Steven Lumpkin in the chapter *Procedural Storytelling in Dungeons & Dragons* talks a great deal about the freedoms which this game brings, compared to for example computer games where the freedom is limited by pre-written stories and by code (258).

Chapter one will inspect the character creation process from early editions from the game, mostly original D&Ds first publication named *Men & Magic*, and its supplements found in magazines like *The Strategic Review* and *The Dragon*. I argue that this character creation process is found in novels inspired by D&D through characterization, therefore I will look at the first novel in this genre, *Quag Keep* written by Andre Norton. This author is of particular interest as she wrote this novel after playing a session of D&D together with Gary Gygax. On top of this, her name appears in appendix N in *AD&D DMG* (1977), and in appendix E in *D&D PHB* (2014, 312). In the latter appendix, her name appears together with the name of the novel *Quag Keep* which further incentivises its importance. To be able to examine characters in both the novel and the rulesets I will look closely at the idea of *characters* in literature. Uri Margolin's theory how readers can characterize the character by *role* will be utilized throughout this thesis.

Chapter two investigates the evolution of D&D from the point of fifth edition (2014), through some of its supplements, to the earliest play-test material of the upcoming edition to see how general themes and ideas of original D&D made its way into the current rulebooks. Here I argue that the rulebooks stopped forcing players into making character decisions based on rules, but that they are instead creating a D&D world canon. This narrative canon creates a sense of forcefulness, again during the process of character creation through notions of race, class, and even gender. In this chapter I argue that it is important to hold actors like Wizards of the Coast accountable because of their power in culture at large. This power is reflected in novels *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* written by Marieke Nijkamp (2021), and *Legends & Lattes* written by Travis Baldree (2022).

It is important to provide an understanding of game rules and why they are important to this thesis. In *Homo Ludens A Study of the Play-Element in Culture,* Johan Huizinga explains the concept of *play* as having certain characteristics, and these include "proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner" (9). On top of this he writes that play creates the idea of order, and any deviation from that order spoils the game and makes it worthless (11). This means that rules are vital to understanding the game at hand, and without them, the game would not be playable due to chaos. This is tricky in D&D. As already stated, there are rules, and many of them too, but the addition of a referee (the DM) makes them more fluid. A ruling can lead to discussion in a party, and the ultimate decision on who is right and who is wrong is up to the DM. This is not the only complex detail of rules though. D&D portrays itself as an embodiment of freedom through prefaces like the one in *Player's Handbook* where Mike Mearls writes that "D&D is your personal corner of the universe, a place where you have

free reign to do as you wish" (2014, 4). This free reign goes against Huizinga's notion of order during play, if all the players can do as they wish, chaos emerges. The free reign also juxtaposes the *Player's Handbook* itself where rules are in place to determine the exact amount of free reign you as a player have. However, I will throughout this thesis argue that the game is not as free as it makes it out to be, and rulebooks are a major part of this. Visualize a dwarf in a fantasy world. John Clute and John Grant in *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* (1997) write that they are "often associated with mines, and may be portrayed as greedy and covetous, particularly of gold" (304). In *Men & Magic* and the *Chainmail* "Fantasy Supplement", dwarfs are considered either of the law or neutral alignment, described as small and stout and their natural habitat is deep underground. In D&D5e *Player's Handbook* dwarfs are also described as short, stout, full of vengeance, and slow to trust. The latter characterization is important as it further builds on the relationship between the race of the dwarfs and other races in the D&D universe. These note that elves are considered untrustworthy, and that halflings are foolish (18-19). This sort of information from the rulebooks spills over to the culture around them, as seen in a study done by Antero Garcia where he studied race, gender, and critical systems in a school setting where his students were a part of a D&D club. One of his students said, "I piss a lot of people off when I play dwarfs like dwarfs," referencing the implied notions from the rulebooks that elves are flighty and frivolous and halflings could not be taken seriously (12). This student takes the text out of the rulebook, plays his character as written, and proceeds to build on the fundamental cultural ideas, like racial hierarchy, which Wizards of the Coast deems correct. While Garcia's focus is purely educational in this study, I argue that this implied canon created by Wizards of the Coast is also reflected in novels written by authors who are inspired or are basing themselves off the game. Here it is important to note that I am not considering rules evil, or that they limit freedom of the players totally. Anja Kern in the article "Exploring the Relation between Creativity and Rules: The Case of the Performing Arts" she states that "Rules are not only regarded as constraints and invariants for activity, but also as sources of creativity." (63) It is important to note that rules are not necessarily only limiting, but that they also steer the creativity of the players.

Jannidis Fotis in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* defines *character* as a "text- or media-based figure in a storyworld, usually human or human like" (1). Characters are therefore considered fictive people. Furthermore, a character rarely exists without characterization, which Fotis explains as the process of "ascribing information to an agent in the text so as to provide a character in the storyworld with a certain property or properties" (7). Uri Margolin in his article *Characterization in Narrative: Some Theoretical Prolegomena* (1983) writes that the character,

or *narrative agent* (NA), is an individual in the story-world who is human or human-like, and whose actions can be predicated (2). NAs can be found and understood by readers in different means as a character can be an *actant,* a *role,* an *individual/person,* and finally as a *narrative device* where the character in question can for example take the role of a *symbol* (2, 3)*.* According to Margolin, the number of features and traits increases as one moves from character as an actant to character as a person. He explains that actant presupposes only a few traits and characterizations (for example a hero), a role presupposes the concept of social interaction of a social group (the role within a community, for example a judge), finally a character as a person includes many more aspects to the character like thoughts and personality type (2). Another aspect of a character as a person is that in many ways they closely relate with characters as a role in that slight or large deviations from their presupposed behaviour from their role changes the way they are perceived. In D&D the character creation process can be described as a characterization process of your character. As explained earlier, the player must pick a race, class, alignment, and create a general background for their character so that it can operate within the world created by the DM. By creating rules which the players must answer to, the players are forced into one type of character which enforces the stereotypes and clichés brought to the table by Wizards of the Coast. This limits the amount of freedom the player has and is apparent in the early editions of the game. This type of forceful narrative is more subtle; however, still apparent in later editions of the game through inclusion of an overarching narrative. Here the reader gets explanations of hypothetical descriptions of generic characters, for example that orcs are brutal in nature, or that dragonborn are considered a rare race. The reader gets a general idea of how the world looks like, and builds on it, instead of acting on the freedom which is originally implied as a goal of the game. The reflection we can find through other narratives, like novels based in the world of D&D, show us that this narrative canon of D&D might exist. On top of this, the companies which publish these rulebooks, have a narrative power which spills over to other media.

Chapter 1: Racial hierarchies, misogyny, and rules in *Quag Keep*

In this chapter, this thesis argues that original D&D created by Gary Gygax and some of the published magazines create an overarching narrative of what a D&D world is. This is mostly portrayed through characterization, as TSRs rulebooks and supplements through magazines enforce how the game is supposed to be played. This shines through in their portrayal of racial hierarchy, and how little focus is put on women in their game, as indicated by the title *Men & Magic* (1974) and their inclusion of "Notes on Women & Magic" in the third number of *The Dragon* magazine from 1976. It was also that year when Gary Gygax had a chance to invite Andre Norton, an author he enjoyed reading, to play a session of D&D at his table. Norton at that time was already a well-known writer of science fiction and fantasy. She was often called the legendary grand mistress of both the fantasy and the science fiction genres, and it is therefore not a surprise that Gary was fond of her work. The invitation to Gygax's table was accepted, and Norton played a session of D&D. It is not known what took place at that table that night, or what kind of story they played through, but Norton was taken by both the world and the game. Her experience at the gaming table inspired her to write a novel as seen in the preface of the book: "The author wishes to express appreciation for the invaluable aid of E. Gary Gygax of TSR, expert player and creator of the war game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, on which the background of Quag Keep is based" (6, emphasis in original). Note that Gygax is noted as "an expert player and creator" which shows Norton's respect for his work. In the preface, the background indicates both the setting of the campaign they played, and the game's ruleset. Settings in D&D are the same as in any other book: a specific type of surrounding and world where the story is set. Although in D&D it also means that the core rules of the game are translated into these settings, albeit some undergo changes to fit the world more, like changing classes and races. The most popular settings right now are - Forgotten Realms, Greyhawk, and Spelljammer, but there are many more worlds explored by players. By no means is it necessary to create a game in those settings either as DMs are free to create their own worlds as well. This can be seen in many different non-canon TTRPGs created by TSR and others at that time but remember that the settings mentioned above are all similar in that they represent the Sword and Sorcery fantasy genre, therefore the ruleset from both original D&D and its future publications like AD&D affect the setting they impose.

Greyhawk is the setting which Norton explores in *Quag Keep* and is also the setting which she played with Gygax at his table. While it is possible to assume the setting of the session they played, it is impossible to know what exact edition of D&D they played. At that time the edition that was out and available to the public was the original D&D pamphlets, but it is a known fact that Gygax's home campaign was a place for testing and iterating new

mechanics, classes, and stories into the game. This is confirmed by Gary Gygax himself in a long running Questions and Answers section on the EN World forums, under the name of Col_Pladoh. One example of such rules and inclusions in *Quag Keep* is the bard class as one of the characters, which did not come out before the second volume of *The Strategic Review* (1979), a magazine sent out to TSR subscribers which not only updated the game by adding new classes, races and options, but also gave Gygax and TSR the possibility to answer questions from players on how certain rules are supposed to work in different situations (Doug, 11). The setting of Greyhawk itself was published for the original D&D in 1975 by means of short and singular adventures that took place in Greyhawk, but the first official supplement for *AD&D* did not come out before 1980 as a part of the *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* adventure module. The adventures written for original D&D were some of the first previews that readers and players had into the home campaign of Gary Gygax.

On the cover of *Quag Keep* the reader is greeted by an illustration of a golden dragon and some adventurers. The same cover features a review by the *Milwaukee Journal* which says that "This newest yarn is one of Norton's best," and to be fair this, together with the reviews on the back of the book, might be one of the few positive ones out there. On the contrary, it is much easier to find reviews that criticize the book from different standpoints, like breaking the illusion of the game and story or being one dimensional and linear (Hämäläinen), as well as others like the one by Chuck Schacht who writes that while Norton manages to put the adventurers through exciting action through her masterful writing, some of it disappears towards the end when concluding the story. Norton's novel is important for the D&D and TTRPG community, given that the author is in the appendix N, and that *Quag Keep* is the first D&D novel, so there are actually new reviews coming in quite often on the internet. Judith Tarr says that the novel reads almost like a marketing device in that it tries so hard to showcase the theme of D&D to the reader, somewhat in agreement to Schacht who also mentioned that Norton seems almost scared to leave any of the core D&D out of the novel, like rules and setting, but also the experience of the players, which leads to an overwhelming amount of information at some points. A reader who has not played D&D will not be familiar with the rules of the game. It will be hard for them to realize which parts of the narrative are led by the rules, and which are not. However, the novel itself reads like a standard quest fantasy[5]. In *Quag*

---

[5] A sub-genre of fantasy where the adventurers must use their different abilities through their journey to solve an important issue. They are usually forced out of their hometown, to either save themselves or something dear to them by encountering dangers, which at the start are simple and then escalate into more threatening encounters. (Senior, 190)

Keep, the reader who is familiar with D&D rules realizes that Norton used these rules to build the characters, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse as explored in this chapter.

Johan Huizinga writes that one of the very positive features of the concept of play is that it creates order. Any deviation from that order spoils the game and makes it worthless (11). He goes on to write the same about rules of play. They are supposed to be absolutely binding and allow no doubt. I do not speak for all D&D players, but I do believe that most would laugh at that statement if someone was to assign these traits to D&D. Yes, order and rules are there, but even in the preface of the 5th edition *Player's Handbook,* Mike Mearls writes that "To play D&D, and to play it well, you don't need to read all the rules, memorize every detail of the game, or master the fine art of rolling funny looking dice. None of those things have any bearing on what's best about the game" (3) What is different about D&D is that in its collaborative nature of roleplaying, discussing, and writing it exemplifies freedom. It breaks Huizinga's characteristics of play because he roots these characteristics in words like "poise, balance, rhythm and harmony," and while it can be those things, the game is more chaotic than orderly. Quag Keep, as will be show in this chapter, follows rules of the game closely something which makes the narrative quite bland and its characters flat. The rules which characterize roles of the adventuring party we find in original D&D, stay very true to the main characters which are presented to us throughout *Quag Keep*. Freedom is the most appealing and scary aspect of D&D. In one of the first D&D adventure modules *In Search of the Unknown* (1979), Mike Carr writes that "The D&D game is a role-playing game and is unlike traditional games which have a firm basis of regulated activity and repetitious action. A D&D adventure is free-flowing, and often goes in unknown and unpredictable directions – and that is precisely the reason it is so different and challenging" (5). This freedom is given both to players and DMs, whether it is the characters, their story, or the world around them, it is ultimately up to them. This chapter builds on the idea that while a lot of the game embraces this freedom, there is some of it which is limited and linear because of rules of the game. The directions which Carr speaks of, are not always as unpredictable as seen later with the characters of Yevele and Gulth.

Quag Keep is a short novel spanning only 192 pages, few characters, and only a handful of places. To my understanding, this novel is a portrayal of Norton's experience at Gygax's gaming table where they played one session. This experience closely resembles the idea of a one-shot[6], because as a one-time player it is hard to get deep in the narrative aspects of the story,

---

[6] A one-shot is a D&D gaming session where the players meet up to play only once. Their characters are not supposed to be fully fleshed out and have the perfect backstories. They are more incentivized to be simple, the same goes for the story the DM prepares for the session, its main goal is to be playable in one evening. The other

or other players backgrounds, and this is something that is evident in *Quag Keep* as well. Another major giveaway that this in fact might be a novelized one-shot, is that the main non-player character says that the characters are under the influence of a *geas*. A geas in D&D terms is a spell that forces the recipients to perform some tasks, decided by the magic-user casting the spell. The spell states that "any attempt to deviate from the performance of the task will result in weakness, and ignoring the geas entirely brings death. The referee must carefully adjudicate the casting and subsequent performance of the geased individual when the spell is used" (*Men & Magic,* 32). Diana Wynne Jones talks about this trope in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* as it "can be a nuisance, because the Geas takes no account of the feelings you may have about whatever is laid on you" (77). The usage of this particular spell in D&D is often connected with the term rail-roading[7].

The story of *Quag Keep* allows us to look at how Andre Norton incorporated rules of the game into the narrative. It reads like she wanted the readers to experience D&D first hand, but while it seems open and versatile, the rules she shows end up more freedom-restraining, and this results in the characters becoming more one dimensional in their characterization. The narrative itself has a complicated start but turns into a simple and generic quest fantasy novel. What is complicated about it, is the fact that Norton introduces us to two different worlds from the start. World 1 (W1), where the players Eckstern (Dungeon Master), Martin, Nelson, James, Susan, Lloyd, Bill, and Max*,* are about to play a war game, and World 2 (W2) where we see the perspective of the characters that are being played by the players in W1. While this acts like a complicated matter, it does not actually come up that often in the novel but remains a main motivator for the characters in W2 to figure out what is going on. There is a character called Harry as well, in W1, but for some reason he does not appear later when they explain which characters they play. Note the disparity between genders at the gaming table, a foreshadowing to what we are about to see in the novel, but also a comment on how the TTRPG gaming sphere at the time looked like, as it was mostly created by white men, as indicated in the title of original D&D. The start of the plot in W2 is probably the most stereotypical start of a *D&D* campaign. The protagonist Milo Jagon*,* who is a human fighter*,* sits in a tavern called The Sign of Harvel's Axe located in the city of Greyhawk. There is nothing more cliché in a D&D campaign than

---

type of campaign is a longstanding campaign, where the players meet up quite often to play and continue the story on a session-to-session basis. Understandably the characters and story become more complex over time.

[7] In D&D the term *railroading* means forcing the characters into a prewritten story. Often because the DM has prepared a part of the story which they want their players to explore. It is something that is fraught upon as most players want to experience potential freedom of collaborative storytelling, but in reality it is a much larger and conflicting topic.

starting your story in a tavern, and there are many texts out there who point towards other possible starting points for adventures. But there is some merit to this cliché, and thus to the norm created in the gaming community. A tavern has historically been the centre of social life, with good chance of meeting other people. In a game where you start in a tavern, the DM has a chance of portraying the world to you through something you already know. Norton uses this cliché to build the world for the reader. Milo is sure of where he is; however he does not know why or when he got there, as he experiences a sense of amnesia. Norton uses this as a plot device throughout the story, constantly reminding Milo that he is constantly unsure about his past. This also makes Milo into an unreliable narrator throughout the story, albeit he gathers more information about his past later. After indicating where Milo is, he notices that he has a bracelet with strange dice on his wrist and spots another character in the tavern that wears the same trinket. They confront each other, and Milo finds out the character's name, Naile Fangtooth, who is a were-boar berserker. As the story unfolds, the characters (and an elf ranger, Ingrge, who joins them on their way) are led to a local wizard tower, hosted by Hystaspes, who tells them that they are under a geas and that their bracelets are a part of that. Their actions are controlled by the people from W1, and they have little to no autonomy in what they do. Their main goal is to find out what these bracelets are, and how they are connected to whatever is going on in the other world. At this point the protagonist gets introduced to the rest of their crew, who all wear the same bracelets (meaning they are all part of the game from W1). John Clute and John Grant in *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* would define a group like this *a dirty dozen* (220). Meaning a group which is brought together more or less by force. The group consists of the three characters mentioned above as well as: the battle maid Yevele, the cleric Deav Dyne, the bard Wymrac, and the lizardman fighter Gulth. The wizard Hystaspes, like a true non-player character, tells the characters the ins and outs of the quest that they are supposed to solve. As they venture into the wilderness, the characters learn about each other's abilities throughout combat and survival, like Deav Dyne's ability to look at their enemies from afar, Yevele's battling skills, Ingrge's tracking ability and his prowess in nature. These abilities can be found in the rulebooks of oD&D and later editions of the game. The morality of Gulth's character is under constant questioning from the party, but especially from Naile Fangtooth who constantly bullies the lizardman comments regarding Gulth's race. Later, this chapter argues that this is mostly because of the narrow possibility of character creation in early D&D as well as its big focus on both alignment and racial traits of creatures who are less humanoid than a "normal" human. This is further explored in the character of Yevele, who is one of the two female characters in the novel (something not uncommon in the genre at that time) and builds on many

misogynistic stereotypes. The adventurers then travel to meet the golden dragon Liches who explains more about their geas and where they must go. As they explore the desert, they also stumble upon a ship filled with the undead. After a long night of combat, the main character is charmed by a witch and led into the unknown. It takes the party a while, but they find Milo near the entrance of a swamp, where for the first time the character of Gulth deems himself useful and lets the adventuring party through the terrain. Finally, they head towards their goal of meeting "the referee". Milo and the party confront the DM, and looking at his table they see notes, dice, and miniatures of their world. The adventure ends as Milo takes their fate into his own hands and throws "the master dice" himself. Before this thesis ventures into the territory of general characters, I want to point out how the plot of this novel is extremally linear. The usage of the spell *geas* does not leave much opportunity for characters to explore the world. Their goal is to go from point A to B to C because they are under a spell and need to finish it to achieve their freedom.

The enforcing of D&D rules in *Quag Keep*

As mentioned in the introduction, character creation and character development has always been a vital part of the D&D experience. The DM creates non-player characters (NPCs) while the player creates player characters (PCs). These work with each other throughout the narrative as the DM uses NPCs to create a meaningful experience of the world for their players. The NPCs exist to give the characters a quest, sell weapons, tell rumours, or simply bring an empty space to life by existing. The character of Hystaspes is the perfect portrayal of an NPC led by a DM. His main and only role in the narrative is to explain to the adventurers that they are under a geas. This pushes the narrative into a certain direction, one which the adventurers cannot run away from because of the possible repercussions of the spell. Milo questions his motives when he notes that "[…]know the strength of your opposition, as well as the referee might allow, that was the rule of the game. It might be that this wizard was the referee. But Milo had a growing suspicion that the opposition more likely played that role" (Norton, 30). There is a notion of players being suspicious of every single NPC the DM throws at them. Way too many players of this game have experienced betrayals from NPCs, hiding as the actual big-bad-evil characters. It is interesting that Norton turns this suspicion to the characters being suspicious of other characters in the novel. Clearly implying the division between player and character in that moment.

Ever since the game came out, stereotypes have played a big role in both the creation of NPCs and PCs. John Clute and John Grant in *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* write that the genre is filled with stereotypical portrayals of its fantastical beings and places (356, 396). This is no different in D&D as many stereotypes and cliche's exist in the game as well, and as established in the introduction, many of them originate from the fantasy genre. Gygax has for sure taken different inspirations from other authors and literary works around the world, like in the original D&D where the race of hobbits, together with balrogs and ents[8] existed for the first five printings of the boxset (Acaeum). Establishing that D&D is rooted in a lot of the original thoughts of the fantasy genre is important when looking at the characters in D&D literature. The AD&D first edition (1977), which was the first published material after the pamphlets of oD&D (1974), lets a player pick between seven races: dwarfs, elves, gnomes, half-elves, halflings, half-orcs, humans. These races are all closely related to the human race and only "special racial characteristics which are dissimilar to humans" are dealt with in the race chapter of this edition (Gygax, 15). On top of the race of the character, the player must also pick a class, meaning a specialization of their adventurer. Here the choices are many and were often updated through magazines after the original publishing of AD&D, something that both TSR and Wizards of the Coast kept doing thereafter. The class choices for the players are as follows: cleric, druid, fighter, paladin, ranger, magic-user, illusionist, thief, assassin, monk. It is also worth noting that players can multi-class their character, meaning they can combine two or more classes. Throughout the story of *Quag Keep*, we meet characters who match different types of criteria pointed out in this paragraph.

In *Quag Keep* characterization similarly to D&D comes in different ways. Remembering back to Uri Margolin's idea of characterization in narratives, they can be read as actants, roles, individuals, narrative devices, or as symbols (1983, 2). Because of alignment, it is possible to characterize the characters of *Quag Keep* as ones who follow the law (except for Gulth as shown later), but it does not mean we can classify them as heroes. In the narrative, they are protagonists of this adventure, yes, but there is no major quest to save the world as everything resolves around their own existence. There is no doubt that the majority of D&D rules focuses on characterizing as a role. Readers who are familiar with D&D/roleplaying games, and to some extent the fantasy genre, should not have any issues with recognizing some of the races/classes that exist within *Quag Keep*. Readers who are not familiar with these can

---

[8] This did not last long as Scott Baird (2020) writes about the Tolkien Estate suing TSR into changing these three. On top of this the Tolkien Estate tried to take ownership of words like *dragon, dwarf, elf, goblin, orc, and warg*, but luckily for the fantasy genre they ended up losing that battle.

still recognize some of the stereotypes and expectations which these roles bring to them. Remembering that in this chapter we are dealing with the earliest editions of D&D, the choice of race, and class greatly decides the role which the characters play within a party of adventurers. A fighter will have certain physical aspects attached to him like wielding melee weapons, having a larger amount of hit points, and taking the role of a so-called tank in the group, meaning they are the ones standing in front while the party is fighting. A cleric on the other hand, will be more prone to fighting from a range, as well as being able to heal (give hit points to his allies) the party. On top of these mechanical aspects, being a cleric also implies that the character is a part of some sort of religion in the world and shares its values. The second way in which characterization comes forth in D&D is with alignment, something which gives us insight in how character can act on a moral scale. This moral scale often ranges between good and evil, as well as lawful and chaos, all four of these also cross the neutral scale. This is often the base of characterization for PCs and gives us insights in how the character thinks about his surroundings. This will become clearer when we get to the characterization of Gulth, the lizardman. In World 2 *Quag Keep* introduces fifteen different characters, seven of which are in the main party. In World 1, there are a total of eight characters, seven players and one dungeon master. Out of these eight, only one is a woman.
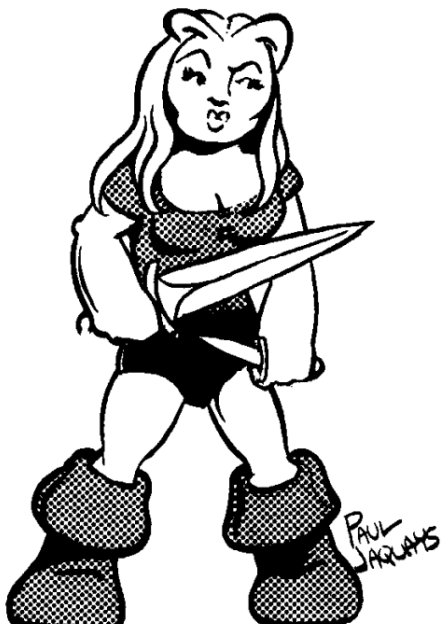
Picture 1 The Dragon vol. 1 no. 3 "Notes on Women & Magic" (1976)

It is difficult to write about characterization, and not include the wide range of misogyny [9]and racism in the space of both fantasy and TTRPGs. Whether on purpose or simply a reflection of how the fantasy/TTRPG space was at the time, Norton portrays the role of women in fantasy through *Quag Keep*. There are two female characters in the novel, compared to the many men, and as shown later, the female characters' place in the narrative is much narrower than the other characters. In vol. 1 no. 3 of *The Dragon* the reader can find an article called *Notes on Women & Magic* written by Len Lakofka (1976). It is on page seven where the reader can

---

[9] Heidi M. Olson in *Dude, Where Are the Girls?* Writes about the vast number of issues in the tabletop sphere ranging from oversexualization of women in games (both in and outside of the game), to issues with the gaming systems at large. Some went as far as creating a separate system for a TTRPG game so that it could promote a more "collaborative tone and promoted a feeling of safety among players." This speaks volumes on how this space still struggles with being male dominant.

locate this article, and the first thing we notice is a drawing of a woman with exaggerated features, wearing a t-shirt, *very* short shorts, and boots. Presumably, she is a thief[10], because of her short sword and the dagger she holds in her hands. It looks satirical, but the text in the article implies otherwise. Lakofka opens the article by stating the differences between men and women characters in game:

> There will be four major groups in which women may enter. They may be FIGHTERS, MAGIC USERS, THIEVES and CLERICS. They may progress to the level of men in the area of magic and, in some ways, surpass men as thieves. Elven women may rise especially to high levels in clerics to the elves. Only as fighters are women clearly behind men in all cases but even they have attributes that their male counterparts do not! (1976, 7, capitalization in original)

The article features a variety of rules on how to incorporate and play female characters into the game by posing different statistics, spells, and classes than those of men. Taking the fighting-man class for example, the women equivalent was not meant to go above a certain level (which the man equivalent could) because they were not able to achieve the same amount of dexterity and strength ability scores. On top of this, Lakofka in *The Dragon* suggests that the charisma ability modifier should be exchanged with a beauty score and used to cast spells such as "Seduction" and "Charm Men" abilities which their male equivalent (if one could call it that) did not have (7). The blunt misogynistic language can be found across many volumes of *The Dragon* and other additions to D&D at the time, mostly because there were few articles written by women at the time as Aaron Trammel (2014) points out in his article on misogyny in D&D. It is worth noting that it took them three publications of *The Dragon* to consider adding a section on how women are supposed to be playing the game. It makes it obvious that the games' imagined player base was male, even though there were for sure at least some women playing (Norton for example). Trammel further points out that Lakofka was known to work with Gygax, which means we can assume that the creator of D&D if not used these rules, at least knew about them. This connection is reflected in *Quag Keep* if we look at the character of Yevele, the only female character in the party. She is described as a battle-maiden. This is important because Norton in *Quag Keep* uses the term swordsman when describing Milo Jagon at multiple points throughout the story, as well as calling it a "mark of a seasoned warrior" (123). This is a term

---

[10] Lakofka's level up ranges for the female thief class are "wench, hag, jade, succubus, adventuress, soothsayer, gypsy, sibyl" I am not saying that the other ranks for other classes in this article are better, but "enchantress, valkyrie, or prioress" for sure sound better than "wench, or hag" (7).

which Gygax and Arneson in *Men & Magic* use to describe levels of experience in the fighting-men class which technically is a level 4 fighting-man. Norton also makes sure to point out the level of another character, namely Deav Dyne who is a cleric of the third rank and follows the god named "Landron-of-the-Inner-Light" (20). The term battle-maiden which Norton uses in her book looks like it's taken directly from the previously mentioned volume of *The Dragon*, especially if we add the fact that Yevele's mother used to be a "powerful Valkyrie", which in that article is the description for a fighting-woman of 8th level. On top of this, Yevele uses some sort of magic in one of the fights the party encounters early on to paralyze two men and their horses.

The male characters in the story (mainly Milo Jagon and Naile Fangtooth) always seem surprised at her ability to do…anything really. Milo seems "chilled" at the fact that Yevele has a brutal and tough past to the point where he has to look past his attraction to her (51), questions whether she will manage in a fight: "Yevele — weapon wise as she was — how could she fare" and then is surprised when he finds out that she has dealt with more enemies than him in a fight and brutally on top of that (81).Yevele is also often referred to as "girl", compared to the others who are referred to as either "men" or simply by name. The character of Naile Fangtooth does not even seem to acknowledge her before one third of the novel has passed where Milo observes that "for the first time Naile looks at her as if he really saw her. Though he had showed antagonism towards Gulth, he refused to see Yevele at all." (63) Gulth being the lizard-man, whom Naile hates (some because of his history with lizard-men, some because of prejudice), seem to be more noteworthy than Yevele at all accounts. Her character is also less fleshed out than the others. She is to be considered as the main part of the adventuring group as multiple times they split up; she is with the main character. While she is in the main party, this is not reflected at all with how little space she takes in the narrative. Throughout the whole novel Yevele reaches a mere 125 sentences of dialogue, while another character in the same group, Naile Fangtooth, registers that number only halfway through the book. The sad truth is the way in which women were portrayed by the tabletop community, which at the time mainly consisted of men, as seen in *The Dragon* can be seen in the novel as well, and not only from the rules, but also from language and narrative. It seems like Milo searches for the attractive parts of Yevele, not really seeing her as anything more than that, and every time he is met with traits of her which go against the stereotype, he seems shocked. While the character of Yevele has some good dialogue throughout the book, where she portrays her backstory, the strength of the character disappears as Milo only looks at her as something he desires. One of these moments happens towards the end of the book where Milo is being charmed by the second female

character of the novel, a witch who portrays herself as Yevele. While the trope of women charming men by means of magic is old, Milo's reactions to what is happening to him seem to be of a man scared of women:

> She stood with her back to him, her hands upheld to the moon itself. [...] Yevele! No helmet covered her head now, nor was her hair netted tight. Instead it flowed about her like a cloak. [...] She had used the spell of immobility—what other sorcery could she lay tongue and hand to? There were women secrets that even the wizards could not fathom. Milo had heard tell of them. He shook his head as if to loosen a pall of dust from him mind [...]. Women magic — cold. Moon magic. … All men knew that women had a tie with the moon which was knit into their bodies. What she wrought here might be as alien to him as the thoughts and desires of a dragon — or a liche — if the dead-alive had thoughts and not just hungers and the will of Chaos to animate them. Yet Milo could not turn away — for still that trilling enticed, drew him. Soldier's women he knew, for he had the same appetites as any man. But Yevele—though mail like unto his own weighted upon her, blurred the curves of her body — Yevele was unlike any woman he had stretched out hand to before. (Norton, 150).

Not only that, but when the witch shows herself in her true form, most of the focus from the characters is on her ugliness, and not necessarily on the power she possesses. This is something that again can be brought back to *The Dragon* article where Lakofka writes under the sub-section "Horrid Beauty" about abilities witches possess based on their looks. "Grotesque witches" can scare the victim to death, these have a beauty score between 2-5, while "Gorgeous witches" can seduce instead (Lakofka, 10). There is for sure a huge amount of male-gaze in the texts examined so far. Felix Rose Kawitzky in their article on *Magic Circles – Tabletop role-playing games as a queer utopian method* quotes Jennifer Grouling Cover who in her book notes that TRPGs suffer from a reputation of being the "province of privileged, white, cis and heteronormative men and boys" (130). Furthermore, Kawitzky tries to build onto this statement by writing that "these reputations […] are representative of the social, political and economic conditions of their respective industries, and the groups they have been marketed to" (130). As stated earlier, the early iterations of D&D were made for men, and by men, and this is perfectly reflected in the character of Milo, who embodies the rules from the game created for him and against the character of Yevele. Purely speculative, I also believe that the male-gaze focus of Milo seen in the paragraph above, can also stem from him being attracted to the player who plays the character of Yevele. To summarize, the novel characterizes *Yevele* as a powerful *fighting-woman* with a brutal background where she lost her tribe, but as the story progresses

the character is often ignored and overthrown by the other male characters who have much more space in the narrative. However, Norton's comments throughout the novel leave the reader imagining the blunt ignorance of the male characters.

It is also worth looking at the character of Naile Fangtooth. His role in the party is to be the "big fighting-man", and his class is that of a berserker. We also learn that he is a were-boar. These classes and races were part of oD&D since the start, but not as playable characters, more as enemy non-player characters which the players would fight against. But, in the previously mentioned *The Dragon* volume, John Pickens introduces a new character subclass in the "Plethora of Obscure Sub-Classes" section. This subclass is called "The Berserker'" and builds further on the fighting-man. Furthermore, they develop an ability to transform into a rat, wolf, boar, tiger or bear, depending on which clan they are a part of. To the people who are familiar with *D&D*, this is of course a weird predecessor of the barbarian class from the newer editions. This addition leads me to believe that Andre Norton either read that volume of *The Dragon*, or Gygax and co. sent her some notes which were included in that volume. While there are similarities in class and race of the berserker in *Quag Keep*, the character in question is quite problematic. Most notably with his hatred towards one of the party members, the lizardman Gulth. Something which he makes sure to point out in almost all of the chapters by means of calling him a "snakeskin":

> What man shares a venture with an eater of carrion? Get you out, scale-skin, or I'll have that skin off your back and ready to make me boots!" (Norton, 20)
>
> "Snake-skin?" Naile spat out. "He has no right to ride with real men!"" [...], "Care for him! [...] Tarred with the filth of Chaos they are, most of his kind. What if he does wear the bracelet—the lizardfolk claim to be neutral, but it is well known they incline to Chaos rather than the Law. (Norton, 59)
>
> "Let him (*Gulth*), return whence he came, [...] I know of old these snake-skins. They are as full of treachery as a drinking horn of ale in an indifferent inn. We should have been better, priest, had his spirit departed from him." (Norton, 105, parentheses added)
>
> (as *Gulth* is dying because he lacks water) "So he dies. [...] The world will be the sweeter with one less snake-skin in it!" (Norton, 122, comment added)

There are more instances of this, and it must be said that Norton took Gygax's description of what it means to be a lizard-man quite literally. Rob Kuntz together with Gary Gygax created

the first supplement for the Greyhawk setting in 1979, where they introduce the monster called lizard-men:

"These aquatic monsters have a rude intelligence, using weapons such as spears and clubs. They are fond of human flesh, and they will generally capture as many humans as they can when offered the opportunity to take them to their lair and have a tribal feast. They live either wholly under water or in very wet places." (35)

This description leaves little room for character development if the author leaves the description as is. It is an interesting description because they are painted extremely black and white, and one would think that they are supposed to be evil. However, they are neutral in terms of alignment as seen in the same supplement for the Greyhawk setting (6). This means that in theory, Norton has the ability to create the character of Gulth as is, a neutral creature. Instead, she does everything she can to make sure that the character of Naile points Gulth out to be of "Chaos rather than the Law" which seems rather intentional. In the novel, the character of Gulth is pretty much useless to the party throughout the adventure. However, for the narrative it makes the reader learn a lot about the characters around Gulth. The author of the novel uses Gulth as a portrayal of the alignment system, given that he is supposed to be neutral, the characters have different inclinations towards him. Naile Fangtooth despises the lizard-man and has clearly racist remarks towards him throughout the story. Nonetheless, every single time these comments arise, other characters step in to discuss Gulth's partaking in the adventure like in these examples:

Gulth wears the bracelet [...] it could well be also that he likes us and our company as little as you appear to care for him. (20)

Perhaps, [...] they find their species do not get an open-handed reception from us. However, Milo is right — Gulth wears the bracelet. Through that he is one with us. Also the geas holds him. (59)

One expects nothing from the boar but blind rage and little thought." [...] But think of this, boar warrior. [...] Seven of us bear this. Do you not speculate that if we are so tied, the fate of one is in the end entwined with the fate of the rest? I know not what magic has bound us on this wheel of companioned adventure, but I should not care to take the chance of losing any one of you. Not because together we may be mightier than we are separately. (123)

While Naile's character clearly is not happy with the character of Gulth, it gives the other characters reasons to develop through their own prejudice. The main character is not equally hateful towards the lizard-man, but he questions him multiple times throughout the story. The narrator also uses language like "alien" instead of Gulth sometimes throughout the story (49). It is worth noting that the comments in the passage above, while defending Gulth's partaking in the adventure, are not necessarily purely of kindness, but more "fate brought us together, we need you" type of thing. Gulth's character is put in the story to develop other characters around him, even those who hate him from the start. Gulth's characterization reminds closely of Margolin's idea of characterizing as a narrative device, which only exists to push others above himself. Nearing the end of the story we finally arrive at a swamp where the character of Gulth is finally met with an area in the wilderness he thrives in. Even though the lizard-man is clearly trying to get the party through the swamp and takes some hits along the way to save them, some of the party still question him. This surprised me as I always read the alignment charts of early D&D as plain good-neutral-evil charts, where the neutral creatures were always in a moral limbo, and from the outside while it was hard to know how the character will react, it was obvious that you needed experience with the character to know their intention. Norton's "alignment" chart includes law-neutrality-chaos, and while it is different from the one with good and evil, there are similarities. Her read on neutrality is clearly engraved in the character of Gulth as characters throughout the story share their scepticisms around the lizard-man in that they do not know his intentions. Although some characters try to wait before judging him, the main character has his doubts throughout the story as to "if they really are in the game, who would like to play the like of Gulth.", by which he shows his hesitation to him and his existence. Alex Woloch in *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, writes about two different kinds of minor characters who are extremes of each other within the nineteenth-century novel: "[...] the worker and the eccentric, the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative, and the fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot." (25) The character of Gulth is an example of the worker, his existence is tied to be a topic for the other characters to discuss, and his usefulness only comes forth towards the end of the book. Across all characters he has the least dialogue at two sentences. However, the main character sometimes notices that Gulth nods as a form of communication.

This chapter examined how the rules found in original D&D, AD&D and its supplements work as characterization devices for the players. Throughout the chapter I examined parts of the ruleset which showcase how freedom restraining the rulebooks are. The

players' freedom and imagination are limited by the characterization tools provided by TSR, from the idea that certain classes cannot be of certain alignments, races tightly connected with classes, and the lack of female representations, provides little wiggle room for players. Not only are the rulebooks freedom restraining, but they also build on stereotypes built by the (often misogynistic and racist) culture of the gaming sphere. This is reflected in *Quag Keep* through the characters of Yevele, which is clearly built on the ruleset provided in *The Dragon*. While the female battle-maiden has a place in the narrative, her space is much less compared to that of her male company, and some of her companions think less of her than of Gulth who in many ways is denominated into being "alien" and/or "animal". The next chapter examines how rules from original D&D made their way into newer versions of the game by the inclusion of a D&D canon-like world created in the core rulebooks the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide,* and *Monster Manual*. It will also examine how these inclusions made their way into narratives of newer novels.

Chapter 2: The ambiguous evolution of *Dungeons & Dragons*

In the last chapter I showcased some of the problematic rules included in the early editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), and how many of these rules follow into the cultural world around them through characterization of other story worlds like *Quag Keep*. Antero Garcia in his article on privilege and power in D&D writes that a game never stays the same, as it needs to adapt to the world around it. D&D is now owned by the company Wizards of the Coast who purchased TSR in 1999. The game since then has changed a lot, and in theory should offer Wizards of the Coast a chance to evolve into a game which more closely reflects the people who play the game around the world. This chapter will be about that change, and how Wizards of the Coast continuous development of their game in the direction of the sword and sorcery genre creates less freedom for their players than they themselves claim. Mike Mearls writes, that "The first characters and adventurers you create will probably be a collection of clichés" (*Player's Handbook*, 4), and it is true. Most D&D players can agree to this statement. However, he continues by playing more and continuing the character creation process, you will be able to "create anything, from a character's background story to an epic world of fantasy adventure" which I do not agree with because it does not mean you will be able to create cliché-less characters or original characters for that matter. Think back to Markovits' review of *AD&D* (1977), he states that it did not make him a better storyteller, but that the game creates better rule-lawyers. This attention to the rules is important when examining *Dungeons & Dragons* because it is one of the things players focus on the most. This chapter also examines two novels *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* by Marieke Nijkamp, and *Legends & Lattes* by Travis Baldree in light of characterization theory and proposes that a possible world of D&D might exist through the cliché and stereotypical portrayal of race, class, and feature in the game.

Next, it is important to look at the major changes and the development of the fifth edition of D&D, as there have been adjustments in how the game is written. The raw mechanics of the game have changed drastically. There are simply more classes, races, and rules that dictate the pace of the game, and most of them are also simpler to understand which played a big role in the wide market appeal of the game. The core rulebooks are also way more narrative driven in that it leads the player into believing that they are creating a real character, as much of the focus is not only on the mechanical aspects of your character, but also on its background, like where they are from, what kind of family they have, and what they like to do. In this chapter I will purely focus on the fifth edition, labelled 5e, and some of its supplements that came out in the later years as there are simply way too many books to cover if one would go through all editions. One of the biggest changes, is the amount of flavour text the reader sees when creating a character. Across all races, classes, and backgrounds the player experiences an immense input

of examples on how halflings can be in the world or the hierarchy of elves. In the introduction to "Chapter 2: Races", the players are given a prompt on how it is to be in the worlds of D&D:

> Visit to one of the great cities in the worlds of Dungeons & Dragons — Waterdeep, the Free City of Greyhawk, or even uncanny Sigil, the City of Doors — overwhelms the senses. Voices chatter in countless different languages. The smells of cooking in dozens of different cuisines mingle with the odors of crowded streets and poor sanitation. Buildings in myriad architectural styles display the diverse origins of their inhabitants. And the people themselves — people of varying size, shape, and color, dressed in a dazzling spectrum of styles and hues — represent many different races, from diminutive halflings and stout dwarfs to majestically beautiful elves, mingling among a variety of human ethnicities. Scattered among the members of these more common races are the true exotics: a hulking dragonborn here, pushing his way through the crowd, and a sly tiefling there, lurkin' in the shadows with mischief in her eyes. A group of gnomes laugh as one of them activates a clever wooden toy that moves of its own accord. Half-elves and half-orcs live and work alongside humans, without fully belonging to the races of either of their parents. And there, well out of the sunlight, is a lone drow — a fugitive from the subterranean expanse of the Underdark, trying to make his way in a world that fears his kind. (*Player's Handbook*, 17).

Descriptions like these are not rules by any means; however, they are a part of the rulebook, and are also the first thing a player sees when starting a new chapter, or sub-chapter. In the passage above, the player is first met with the idea that there are many different settings in D&D like I covered in the first chapter, but here they are presented with city names. Then the player can acknowledge that these are in fact multicultural cities, and its inhabitants vary from corner to corner, and that they differ in their physical aspects as well, there are "stout dwarfs" and "beautiful elves". Wizards of the Coast actually characterize the players' theoretical character already in the preface of the race section. In their narrative, dwarfs are stout, and elves are beautiful, but who is the one describing these characters as such? It is indeed hard to define, as the narrator of these sections is simply an omniscient narrator who is not defined in any place. It is safe to assume that it is Wizards of the Coast who are narrating their world to the players. Then we enter the zone of what they call the "exotics". Checking the statistics from D&D Beyond, an online companion site owned by WotC where players can both buy books and use their tools to play the game with digital help, showcases how weird the phrase "exotics" really

is. Gus Wezerek wrote an article called "Is your D&D character rare?" where he investigates statistics on class and race combinations from D&D Beyond (2017). According to him, the three most popular races are human, elf, and dwarf. "Exotics" then are a bit all over the board: half-elves take the third place, dragonborns take fifth, tieflings take sixth, half-orcs take ninth, and our inventive gnomes end up on a sad tenth. The "diminutive" halfling is also on the lower part of the bracket, in a cosy eight place. The imagined city portrayed by Wizards of the Coast, greatly differs from the imagined city of the player. Note also how the tone in description changes after "exotics". There is the "hulking dragonborn" and a "sly tiefling" who lurks around. The half-elves and half-orcs lack belonging in either part of their race. The flavour text is now actively taking place in characterizing the races by comparing them, and players can actively look at this text to imagine how races should act in a city. They double down on their argument of "uncommon races" in the section where they introduce the race of the dragonborn. Note here how Wizards of the Coast characterizes the uncommon races:

> In cosmopolitan cities of the D&D multiverse, most people hardly look twice at members of even the most exotic races. But the small towns and villages that dot the countryside are different. The common folk aren't accustomed to seeing members of these races, and they *react accordingly* (*Player's Handbook,* 33, emphasis added)

The "common folk" are also described as "people", to me indicate the normal human, or at least the "popular races" of the D&D multiverse. Their reaction depends on the races they meet. Wizards of the Coast states that common folk who meets a dragonborn will react "with caution rather than outright fear", and people who meet a tiefling will "make warding signs as a tiefling approaches, cross the street to avoid passing near, or bar shop doors before a tiefling can enter" (*Player's Handbook*, 33). Note that I am not arguing that all campaigns in the world are built like this, neither are all characters built on these ideas. However, it is clear that Wizards of the Coast has a preference on how their sword and sorcery game should look like. Thinking back to Uri Margolin and his idea of characterizing as actants, roles, or persons (4), WotC seems to like the idea of limiting the possibility of characterization in their game. They achieve this by creating descriptions which lead to characterization as roles related to race, and as we look closely in literature based on D&D, this image stays similar.

The half-orc is the perfect example. The player entering the pages of this race is first met with a passage from the novel *Swordmage* by Richard Baker. Here he describes the war chief Mhurren who "roused himself from his sleeping-furs and his women and pulled a short

hauberk of heavy steel rings over his thick, well-muscled torso." (*Player's Handbook*, 40) Certainly, puts the players right on the spot in imagining how the half-orcs are, but as the quote continues the player can clearly see that the lack of belonging described in the passage above, is reflected in the quote here as well. "[...] he rose before most of his warriors, since he had a strong streak of human blood in him [...] Human ancestry was no blemish against a warrior — provided he was every bit as strong, enduring, and bloodthirsty as his full-blooded kin. [...] Half-orcs who were weaker [...] didn't last long among [...] any other orc tribe for that matter." (*Player's Handbook*, 40). Richard Baker's novel takes place in the Forgotten Realms setting and is published by WotC. The passage here exists mostly to spark interest in the half-orc, but also provide inspiration to the players when creating their character. Still, that inspiration is limited in tone and characterization. The readers learn that half-orcs have historically been disliked by other races, and that their acceptance is notoriously thin. On top of this there is a hint of bigotry and oppression as stated by Antero Garcia when reading half-orcs abilities [11] like "savage attacks" (241).

There has been some critique, like the article from Linda Cogeda (2022) or Patrick Tierney (2020), on how Wizards of the Coast handles the concept of race in their game. A month after the murder of George Floyd, D&D created a blog post on their commitment to diversity in the game (June 2020). Here they explain what they will improve but also acknowledge some of the issues the concept of race brings to the game. One of which is their portrayal of orcs, here they state that "using descriptions that are painfully reminiscent of how real-world ethnic groups have been and continue to be denigrated. That's just not right, and it's not something we believe in." It takes them fifty years to address this, and in a 2022 forum post called *Moving on from "race" in One D&D* created by D&D Beyond, they state that they understand how the term "race" is problematic in that it has "prejudiced links between real world people and the fantasy peoples of D&D worlds.", and that since the release of 5e in 2014 they "took a conscious decision to reduce the usage of the term race to only apply to game mechanics". It is worth noting that this was not long after they had to scratch the race of "Hadozee" from their newest reprint of *Spelljammer* because their history included a wizard travelling to their planet to make them intelligent, their nicknames described them as apes, and they were covered in varieties of brown colour. Long story short, this was met with deserved

---

[11] Racial differences also come forth in the rules themselves as the flavour text examined in this chapter often is mirrored in the mechanical rules themselves. For example, the half-orc is often described as physically strong, and the mechanical rule for this situation is that the race gets the ability increase of +2 to their strength score. This is worth mentioning, but not in the main focus of this thesis because of the *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* rules examined later in the chapter.

outrage from the community which deemed this racist, and it is a racist metaphor. One of the latest developments is that in 2022 an *Unearthed Arcana* was published, which is a playtest version of the game, titled "The Cleric and Revised Species" where WotC decided to replace the term "race" with "species" completely. I do agree with the change as the term "race" is outdated, but it will take a long time before the change makes an impact. Therefore, I fear that Garcia's findings in his study on prejudice of gender and race, will not be affected by a simple change of term. If the student who "plays dwarfs as dwarfs and pisses people off" with it learned that the dwarf is a species and not a race, the result would have been the same. This chapter has so far shown the fundamental issues of how the games' system is written and how it plays out, therefore I hope that WotC finds ways of incorporating anti-racist systems to their game. It is possible, as seen in *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* (2021) which was a result of the blog post from 2020 on diversity in D&D. It proposes a "custom lineage" rule for players. Here the player is allowed to create a race themselves based on a set of rules called "custom lineage", where the player is in total control of the characters' lineage (*Tasha's Cauldron of Everything,* 8). There are some simple rules which the player must follow, but these are all alike to every "custom lineage" character made. The characters who are made this way are known to be mechanically more powerful than characters who follow the normal creation by just "picking" a race. The rulesets shown in *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* is for sure a good start, but this direction of development needs to continue.

The argument in this chapter is still to look for how Wizards of the Coast has a powerful impact on the stories created with their system. What I propose is that the D&D canon can be found in culture around D&D which is why I am examining two different novels, the first one being *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* by Marieke Nijkamp, and the second one is *Legends & Lattes* by Travis Baldree. The former is based on two characters from the popular podcast/show *Critical Role*[12] made by voice actors based in Los Angeles. *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* is the first novel based on the characters from Critical Roles season one and focuses on the backstory of two of its characters, Vex'ahlia and Vax'ildan, which in the show are played by Laura Bailey and Liam O'Brian. The second book I chose for this chapter is *Legends & Lattes*, its cover states that it is a novel "of high fantasy…and low stakes". The story of the novel focuses on what happens after an adventurer is done with their…adventuring and does so by inverting tropes and stereotypes seen in *Dungeons & Dragons* and the fantasy genre. Baldree does not characterize through the idea of roles which can be found in *D&D* from before, but more

---

[12] *Critical Role* is an extremally popular franchise and can be found across many different media including board games, novels, television series, and of course their podcast which now spans three different seasons.

naturally lets characters be examined through how they think and act in the novel. *Legends & Lattes* is in my opinion, a result of the more welcoming rules included in *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything.* As this chapter progresses, I will go through some of the chosen characters from each of the books, and finally touch on something which seems to be included in most major D&D books, the thieves' guild.

The D&D canon in *Vox Machina Kith & Kin*

In *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin*, the twin half-elves Vex'ahlia and Vax'ildan start off in the city of Westruun. Here the characters encounter the thieves' guild called the Clasp. Vex'ahlia is on the Clasp's hit-list and Vax'ildan does not want her sister to be brought to the Clasp. In return for his sister safety, they are tasked to steal a ring from the Shadewatch in Jorenn Village. On their way there, a series of unfortunate events splits them apart. The novel now follows each character some chapters at a time, with space for flashbacks to their time in the elven city of Syngorn. Vax'ildan is saved by the underground society of local miners, and their leader Thorn explains that Vex'ahlia is in the city of Jorenn with its leader, Derowen. This thesis focuses on the chapters of this novel which examine the characters history, as well as the characters' connection to the Clasp. Therefore, as a general note, the rest of the narrative focuses greatly on the twins' problem solving. This leads to them solving the respective issues of each of the camps, as well as their Clasp contract. However, the story ends with Vax'ildian deciding to join the Clasp. As they leave the town of Westruun, they decide that their next target is the city of Stilben. This novel's setting is in the world of Exandria, on the continent of Tal'dorei created by Matt Mercer. It is not the setting that is default in D&D 5e as players can play it through some of the rule books Critical Role has published with (or without) the help of WotC. Other than the world itself, the rules of the game stay mostly the same.

The characterization which is built on class, mostly comes from how they fight, and their strengths when figuring out problems. Vex'ahlia is much more reliable in places of nature, like forests, and looks for knowledge about dragons, her favoured enemy. Meanwhile Vax'ildian is the typical rogue, doing rogue things, like staying in the shadows, pickpocketing people, enjoying a noisy city, and as this thesis examines later, being a part of a thieves' guild. Race on the other part, seems to stick with the characters throughout their whole history. Vex'ahlia and Vax'ildan experience nasty and unfriendly comments like when Vax'ildan asks

one of his father's helpers whether there will be a lot of half-elves in the city of Syngorn in one of the flashback chapters:

> A shadow crossed over Tharyn's face, and for the first time they looked uncomfortable. They threw a glance in the direction of the other guards, who were not quite out of earshot, and their hazel eyes were guarded. "Not many. You will be the only ones that I know of." (67)

Shortly after this explanation the twins are introduced by the eldest guards as "Ambassador Sydor's *half-elf* children" (67, emphasis in original), remarks which are met with both frowns and disgust according to Vax'ildan. This thesis already stated the fact that race is in fact often characterized in hierarchical manner. While it is not as bad as in original D&D, it still exists, like in this example with half-elves and an iteration of high elves adapted into the setting of Exandria. Wizards of the Coast characterizes the half-elf race as one which is "Walking in two worlds but truly belonging to neither [...]", and that many chose to live in solitary by wandering or joining "other misfits and outcasts" because of their lack of belonging (*Player's Handbook*, 38). Not only half-elves have this kind of textual descriptions, the "high elf" race is described as "haughty and reclusive, believing themselves to be superior to non-elves and even other elves" (*Player's Handbook*, 23). It seems like players, in this example it would be the actors of Critical Role, create characters and base them on a lot of the material published by Wizards of the Coast, even though they have a whole different world setting [13]than the one presented in the core rulebooks. There is of course nothing that forces authors to use these same tropes, stereotypes, and racial characterizations. In this case Marieke Nijkamp is certainly in a peculiar situation. As these characters are already pre-made, and a lot of the canon is already established, for example through a later meetup between Vex'ahlia, Vax'ildian, and their father, Nijkamp has little wiggle room to do something different. Because of the established lore by players and the DM, she is forced to build up on the racial inequalities in the elven city of Syngorn. She does so by letting viewers see it through flashback chapters, for example when Vex'ahlia talks about her experience with other elves around Syngorn and compares it to the no-nonsense approach from Iova:

---

[13] Matt Mercer's world of Exandria is a different setting from the one created in the core rulebooks. There are different places, languages, a wholly different world structure, as well as a whole new system of religion. However, while the world he uses is different, the core rules of D&D still shine through as seen in this chapter.

"It was far easier to handle that than the shar comments of elves who set about reminding them it was their own fault that they were treated as such, because they could never do as well as *pure elves, never as gifted, never as worthy.* To them, half-elves were a stain on the history of Syngorn. To Iova, they were merely inferior in the same way all non-elves were." (87, emphasis added)

The characterization in Vex'ahlia and Vax'ildan happens then through three different channels. First is that the reader looks at them as half-elves and their class in the D&D ruleset. The second is through the characters' own thoughts. In this novel, this mostly comes from both characters' frustration at how people look at them because of their race, mostly in Syngorn. Finally, the reader can characterize them through their own experience of race in real life. Certain characters and their choices can be easily connected to real world situations, something which Uri Margolin mentions as the "characters as readerly mental construct" (76). The language used in the passage above can bring up connotations of real-life racism and thoughts of eugenics. This is not a language that originates in this book alone, but the backstory of elves starts already with WotC and their descriptions of elves. Players, authors, and readers alike read the rules presented by the company as the norm and something that ought to be followed, creating further systems that are built on stereotypes and clichés. The systems they produce have a real-world impact, take for example the article *D&D Clubs Bring Educational Adventures to Schools* written by Matea Tuhtar, about one teacher who uses the D&D system in his classroom. He says that "all he knows is his students will have a ton of fun and do a lot of learning along the way – often without even realizing it." (2023) While there is a filter between the game of D&D and the students, in the teacher, the canonical implications of the D&D genre still exist. It is incredibly important to take Wizards of the Coasts impact on culture seriously.

Embracing monsters in *Legends & Lattes*

In her book *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness,* Helen Young writes that orcs have always been a distinctive marker in fantasy, compared to elves and dwarfs because "They differ from wizards and indeed the other humanoid species conventionally associated with fantasy — elves and dwarfs — because they were, from their first appearance, monsters." (88). In the introduction, this thesis established that the fantasy genre is rooted in western Eurocentric thinking. Furthermore, in this chapter I examined the new core rulebooks,

and how that thinking still exists in the world of D&D. Building on the idea that it is possible to build characters without problematic portrayals of race it is important to look at what Wizards of the Coast has done[14], and how it reflects on the culture around it. Therefore, this chapter now moves into the cosy territory of orcs and cafés. In Travis Baldree's *Legends & Lattes* we follow the character of Viv, a retired orc barbarian, in her attempt of opening a coffee shop in the city of Thune. The prologue gives us some background into what kind of a job Viv had before these newfound plans, where she, together with her party, were killing the Scalvert Queen for its treasures and bounties. It is also from this creature that she retrieves the so-called Scalvert stone, which according to her has magical abilities. She uses the magical stone to read "lay lines", which are supposed to show places that are more fortunate than others. By following the stones directions, Viv is pointed towards an old stable and looks for its owner so that she can buy it. As she goes through the notions of creating a business like building her café together with a woodworker named Calamity, hiring the succubus Tandri to help her manage the day-to-day operation, and trying to convince the population of Thune that coffee is a good and tasteful thing, we learn a lot about the characters in the story. Viv also crosses paths with the local thieves' guild called The Madrigal, but in the end, it is one of her ex-party members who created the most trouble for her as he wants the Scalvert Stone for himself. He burns her café to retrieve the stone, and it is under the rebuilding of it, Viv sees the impact her café has had on the population around her, as everyone wants in to help. Baldree's attention is fully on the characters and their supposedly inverted roles and stereotypes, like having two "creatures" from the *Monster Manual,* the orc, and the succubus, as the main characters. As this thesis mostly focuses on characters and their characterization, the first section will be on Viv, Tandri, and Thimble.

First and foremost, the race of Orcs does not appear as playable until the publishing of *Monsters of the Universe*, but it exists as a monster. In the *Monster Manual* published by Wizards of the Coast in 2014, the Orc is described as "savage raiders and pillagers with stooped postures, low foreheads, and piggish faces with prominent lower canines that resemble tusks." (244), on top of this they are also of the "chaotic evil" alignment. This idea of orcs, half-orcs and barbarians being of chaotic/evil alignment is not new and has existed in fantasy for a while. Helen Young quotes the author Jessica Langer who wrote a book on the role of race in *World of Warcraft* where she finds that the game world is structured "not by virtue of distinctions between good and evil but rather by distinctions between civilized and savage, self and other,

---

[14] *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* rules of "custom lineage"

centre and periphery." (89). This distinction in game appears exactly between the groups of the Alliance which consists of humans, elves, and dwarfs, and the Horde which consists of Orcs, Undead, and Troll. Looking at this in D&D terms, it would not be far off to assume that this distinction can appear where WotC mentions the "exotic" races, and those they label as more evil than others. In *Monsters of the Universe*, so after the errata mentioned earlier, the player playable race is written as tracing their creation to the one-eyed god Gruumsh who was an unstoppable warrior and powerful leader, and it exemplifies the qualities of Gruumsh like toughness and tenacity (28). The wording is certainly different and allows for a kinder characterization of an orc character. The succubus on the other hand, were not equally lucky. The creature who often appeared as a mythological creature, or in folklore stories as a means of representing temptation, has similar qualities in WotC's *Monster Manual*. They are described as "Dark-winged fiends" who can be "found in service to devils, demons [...]", and they are used to "tempt mortals to perform evil acts [...]. Sleeping Victims are tempted to give in to their darkest desires, indulge in taboos, and feed forbidden appetites." (284). As shown in the following paragraph, Baldree attempts at rewriting these descriptions by giving his characters more room to be ambivalent in their alignment, and in creating an area around them that is more welcoming than the usual quest fantasy setting.

As written earlier, the prologue introduces the character of Viv, and her brutal character as she kills the Scalvert Queen and barbarically opens her skull to take out the Scalvert Stone. The novel is told from a third person narrator who is limited in knowledge to the main character's thoughts and her observations. We quickly learn of her wish to go away from her current occupation as "an Orc's life was strength and violence and a sudden, sharp end [...] It was time for something new." (3), and Baldree quickly draws the character as someone with new ideas when she says that "I'm opening a coffee shop. [...] But why would you buy a horse stable for that? [...] Thing's don't have to stay as what they started out as." (15), stating that similarly to the horse stable, Viv would not want to be portrayed like her past. The female orc also goes through self-reflection, using the stereotypes of her own race to her own advantage. "The miller grinned smugly after she paid, no doubt imagining the trouble an orc would face hitching up a horse, but she gripped the traces in both hands, lifted, and easily got the cart moving by herself." (33). Although Baldree's whole novel is about Viv finding home in a new place, the uncertainty of her past stays with her with her portrayal of race. This is something that sticks with her through the book, and the clear historical aspects of Viv stay with her, either through race, or her past profession of a brutal adventurer. The second surprising addition to Viv's found family is Tandri, a succubus. During their first meeting Baldree presents the

character to the reader through Viv's point of view. "Viv wrestled with what she was about to say. She'd never been skilled at putting things delicately. It had never been particularly important up 'till now. Succubae had a reputation for certain … biological imperatives. Were their needs and predilections even a choice? She forged onward. "You're a … succubus. Right?" (60). As mentioned earlier, this description is not something that is only found in D&D, as succubae have been used in mythology and folklore from before. But, similarly to Viv, Baldree tries to stick to Tandri's race as a part of her characterization. Ever since this moment, and there are multiple moments, Viv questions whether Tandri has a certain effect on people, because as she states multiple times, people respond to her "*something*", hinting at her succubus abilities (67, emphasis in original). On top of this, Tandri has a stalker, Kellin, throughout the story who constantly states that they should be together because of fate, and that Tandri should "*feel* this … [...] This *attraction* [...]", even though she states that there never has been such attraction to begin with (121, emphasis in original). Viv and Tandri deal with this character throughout most of the story, up until Viv deals with the Madrigal once and for all. To me, it seems like Baldree puts out these racial D&D stereotypes for the reader, only to deal with them a while later. In the introduction, I quoted Antero Garcia who quotes one of his students that he "pisses a lot of people off when I play dwarfs like dwarfs" (12). Well, in Legends & Lattes, the dwarf is not like this but instead is welcoming at the sight of Tandri. A simple sentence really, but in fantasy literature rarely seen. Towards the end of the novel, Viv reveals that what she thought was Tandri's natural abilities of seduction coming through, was their own attraction towards each other (316). Finally, I want to touch on the character of Thimble, who is a rattkin. This is not a race which exists in the world of *D&D*, but together with Viv and Tandri, showcases how the "Custom Lineage" rules mentioned earlier can work in practice (Tasha's Cauldron of Everything, 8). Thimble is described as a humanoid rat, with whiskers and a big leather apron dusted with flour (98), who does not utter that many words throughout the story. The amount of dialogue this character has, is probably close to Gulth's in Quag Keep. However, Baldree characterizes this character not through his race, looks, or alignment, but instead focuses on his skill. Thimble's main form of communication is through writing shopping lists for Viv and Tandri, of items which he uses for baking. Still, even though Baldree's focus seems to be on inverting tropes, he still managed to include tinkering gnomes. At least instead of exploding something, they created the coffee machine.

The cliché of the thieves' guild

In his book *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law,* Hal Gladfelder writes that the basic ingredients of the picaresque novel are "a protagonist whose social position is marginal and who views events from the perspective of the outsider, an episodic structure, usually organized around a succession of journeys and chance encounters; a satirical presentation of diverse social levels and milieus; a lingering over scenes of brutality, trickery, and humiliation; the exposure of pretence; and a protagonist constantly scrambling to survive" (34). Gladfelder points out that this type of novel has been modified into other modes as well, like for example by reversal of its terms, from satire to tragedy, and by incorporating a plotted narrative. On top of this, the constructed narrative around thievery and crime, is often portrayed as "[...]belonging to a special domain, alien to the social and moral world inhabited by the reader[...]. some effort is made to describe "the thieves' society — its laws, hierarchy, and special language" (25). Crime and thievery in the fantasy genre is represented in different ways. In D&D, the most apparent entryway into the world of crime is through the character class of rogue. The class characterization focused on the role of the character. The three flavor texts presented after the rogue class are of rogues who are "picking a lock" in a dungeon, "lurking in the shadows of an allay" as a part of an ambush, and pick pocketing a guard of his keys to free their companions from prison (*Player's Handbook*, 94). It goes without saying that if you are a rogue, you are not a lawful character. The sole idea of a rogue's existence in D&D is to be *other* than the rest, in terms of morals, hierarchy and language. The section called "A shady living" says that these "scoundrels" (WotC wording) are often organized into thieves' guilds or crime families (*Player's Handbook*, 94). On top of this, the rogue has a special ability called "Thieves' Cant", meaning they can understand the secret language of the thieves, and figure out, based on observation of such cant, where the nearby thieves' guild is located. Both novels in this chapter have their own version of a thieves' guild. In *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* there is "The Clasp", while in *Legends & Latte*s there is "The Madrigal". Even in *Quag Keep*, adventurers go through a Thieves' Quarter right at the start of the adventure, where they meet their ranger elven companion. It is a cliché almost as big as starting out in a tavern, but it manages to hide behind its alienating domain, which for the readers is something new, compared to the tavern. In both novels in this chapter, the thieves' guild is used as a narrative force, to drive the characters into a quest like in Vox Machina when The Clasp forces the characters to go to Jorenn. Or the thieves' guild is used as a motivation for the character to develop like we see in Legends & Lattes. Technically, these guilds are very much the same, as

they operate outside of the law, but their appeal lies in the characters. The Clasp, and The Madrigal are both there to be scary. The former has a contract out to hunt down Vex'ahlia. Vax'ildian during his meeting with Lyre and Clasps leader, first hand sees how brutally they deal with people who do not finish their contracts in a proper way when Gideor uses magic to turn Lyre into Vex'ahlia, and then yanks his tongue out (Nijkamp, 54). The Madrigal on the other side threatens Viv's coffee shop, multiple times when she refuses to pay the "tax" which The Madrigal requests from everyone who has a business set up in Thune. The big twist in the narrative comes from Viv's meeting with The Madrigal who turns out to be "A tall, elderly woman sat ensconced in one of the armchairs, her silver hair in a severe bun, her face regal but not unkind. She was crocheting a fresh doily and took her time completing a round before absently looking at Viv." (Baldree, 188). Similarly, to the story of Vax'ildian, the two women end up striking a deal, as The Madrigal is impressed with Viv's business and says that they share a lot of similarities. From that meeting and onward, Viv looks at local thieves' guild as something different, and not necessarily evil (even though they still collect taxes from everyone around her). Vax'ildian does the same and also agrees to join The Clasp even though he portrays them as brutal. Remembering how thieves are portrayed as chaotic in the rulebooks, the authors of both novels are giving the readers the information that neither Vax'ildan, nor Viv is lawful by any means.

To conclude, even though *Dungeons & Dragons* had a long time to evolve into something different, most of the characterization aspects of their game stayed the same. Characters and their racial abilities are still in the game, albeit are undergoing a change in the next iteration of the game, and this is reflected through D&D literature like the two novels I examined in this chapter. Most of the characterization we see in both the game and novels around it, comes from their role, meaning either race or class. Vox Machina: Kith & Kin focuses deeply on the racial aspects of the protagonists, two half-elves who struggle to find their identity wherever they go. In Legends & Lattes, Travis Baldree does everything he can to turn stereotypes and tropes upside down. In the introduction of this thesis, it is mentioned that it is not easy to steer away from the cliché. Baldree manages to do this in his character building as we see the main characters living normal lives. Despite that, do notice that while the characters are breaking apart from their usual stereotypes and tropes, some of the world around them still sees them as the creatures from the rulesets. The cliché nature of the genre can also be seen through the inclusion of a thieves' guild in both novels, especially knowing that they are similar. It seems that the world created by TSR and later by WotC still persists to this day, mostly through inclusion of old tropes, stereotypes, and clichés, as well as ideas like hierarchy of races.

Conclusion

This thesis main argument is that the game of D&D tends to limit the narrative freedom of characters through creating a canon which to some degree controls the character creation process in the game. The thesis also looks out for the cultural imprint D&D has on the world and argues that its generic sword and sorcery genre spills over to culture around it. Throughout the first chapter I examined the historical aspect of the game and its rules of characterization. Here the case was straight forward as original D&D forces its players into tropes, stereotypes, and clichés by making the character creation process linear. The alignment rules of the game force players into thinking that certain races and classes are on a simple spectrum of good, evil, or neutral. The game itself builds these values based on tropes and stereotypes found in literature written by authors in appendix N, this is seen through how rules imply which races are evil, and which are not. Finally, the game is also created and written by men, and aimed at men. All of this can be seen in the first (unauthorized) D&D novel written by Andre Norton *Quag Keep.* Not only the characters, but also the plot itself, follows a simple quest fantasy narrative in which many of the characters do not have time to develop. The character of Yevele and their connection to the article in *The Dragon* showcases how misogynistic the sphere of gaming has historically been. The character of Gulth on the other hand showcases some of the issues with a hierarchical approach to race in games like D&D. Their characterization is taken directly from the game. Chapter two of this thesis examined how D&D evolved into the game it is now. As rules have changed, its rulebooks did the same. WotC now publishes a set of three books which create a basis of knowledge for the players. Even though the game promotes freedom, and achieves this by giving players tools which is used in this game of improvisation. These rulebooks promote a canon narrative created by WotC that has its historical roots in the stereotypes, clichés, and tropes from the sword and sorcery genre. This genre brings over certain problematic aspects like, again, a hierarchical structure of race. This has a clear impact on culture, as seen in the two novels examined in chapter two. In *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin* the twins experience racial comments throughout the whole story because of how half-elves are written in the rulebooks. This thesis also acknowledges that clichés can be broken, and freedom of stereotypes can be achieved, however WotCs proposed canon spills over to works done with this in mind as seen in Travis Baldree's *Legends & Lattes*. Here the characters experience issues because of their race, and are constantly being reminded of what they are. D&D is a fantastic game, but the players need to be aware of the canon implied by the rulebooks. Essentially, do not we all want freedom?

Works Cited.

Acaeum. *Original D&D set.* www.acaeum.com/ddindexes/setpages/original.html, Date
    Accessed: 2023.04.27.

Alimurung, Gendy. *How Dungeons & Dragons somehow became more popular than ever.*
    Washington Post. 2019

Baird, Scott. "Lord Of The Rings' Complicated Legal History With Dungeons & Dragons."
    Screen Rant. 2020.05.02. www.screenrant.com/lord-rings-dungeons-dragons-dnd-
    race-controversy-lawsuit/ , Date Accessed: 2023.04.18.

Baldree, Travis. *Legends & Lattes.* Cryptid Press, 2022

Carr, Mike. *Dungeon Module B1, In Search of the Unknown.* TSR hobbies, 1978 Lake
    Geneva.

Clute, John, and Grant, John. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Codega, Linda. Why race is still a problem in Dungeons & Dragons. Gizmodo. September,
    15th 2022. www.gizmodo.com/one-dnd-racism-rpg-stereotypes-dungeons-dragons-
    wotc-1849531852

Col_Pladoh. *Q&A with Gary Gygax.* "EN world, Morrus Unoficial Tabletop RPG News."
    2005.05.12.
    www.web.archive.org/web/20200223020416/https://www.enworld.org/threads/q-a-
    with-gary-gygax.22566/page-260#post-2766231 Date Accessed: 2023.04.27.

Fotis, Jannidis. "Character." *The living handbook of narratology.* Hamburg: Hamburg
    university. www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/character Date Accessed: 2022.09.10.

Garcia, Antero. Privilege, Power, and Dungeons & Dragons: How Systems Shape Racial and
    Gender Identities in Tabletop Role-Playing Games. *Mind, Culture and Activity,* vol.
    24, no. 3, 2017. pp. 232-246

Gladfelder, Hal. *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England : beyond the Law*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Gygax, Gygax. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook.* Carr, M., 1st edition, TSR games, 1978, USA

—. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeons Guide.* Carr, M., 1st edition, TSR games, 1979, USA

—. "The Meaning of Law and Chaos in Dungeons and Dragons and Their Relationships to Good and Evil". *The Strategic Review.* February 1979. www.annarchive.com/files/Strv201.pdf Date Accessed: 2023.03.21, p. 3-5.

Gygax, Gary, and Kuntz, Rob. *Dungeons & Dragons Additional Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures.* Supplement 1, Greyhawk. TSR Games, 1974.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy : The Literature of Subversion*. Routledge, 2003.

Jones, W. Diana. *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland.* London, Firebird, 2006

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.* Angelico Press, 2016

Hämäläinen, Mervi. "Quag Keep". *Curled Up With A Book.* 2007, www.curledup.com/quagkeep.htm, Date Accessed: 2023.01.23

Kawitzky, Felix Rose. "Magic Circles." *Performance Research*, vol. 25, no. 8, 2020, pp. 129–136

Lakofka, Len. "Notes on Women & Magic" *The Dragon,* Kask, Timothy (editor), Vol 1, No. 3, TSR, October 1976. www.annarchive.com/files/Drmg003.pdf Date Accessed: 2023.22.04

Lumpkin, Steven. "Procedural Storytelling in Dungeons & Dragons." Procedural Storytelling in Game Design, 1st ed., Routledge, 2018, pp. 257–268.

Łaszkiewicz, Weronika. *Fantasy Literature and Christianity: A Study of the Mistborn, Coldfire,*
    Fionavar Tapestry and Chronicles of Thomas Covenant Series. Vol. 63, McFarland &
    Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018.

Margolin, Uri. Characterization in narrative: Some theoretical prolegomena. *Neophilologus*
    67, 1–14 (1983).

---. *Character*. The Cambridge Companion to Narrative. Ed. Herman, David. Cambridge,
    2007.

---. "Individuals in Narrative Worlds: An Ontological Perspective." *Poetics Today*, vol. 11,
    no. 4, 1990, pp. 843–71. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1773080. Accessed 11 May
    2023.

Markovits, Benjamin. *When We Fought a Lot of Dwarves: The Advanced Dungeons &*
    Dragons Player's Handbook. Times Literary Supplement. Issue 6097. 02.07.2020.

Mearls, Mike. *Player's Handbook*. 5th edition, Wizards of the Coast, 2014.

Nijkamp, Marieke. *Vox Machina: Kith & Kin.* London, Del Rey, 2021

Norton, Andre. *Quag Keep.* DAW Books, 1979

Olson, M. Heidi. "Dude, Where Are the Girls?" *Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy*,
    Cogburn, Jon, and Silcox, Mark. vol. 70, Open Court, United States, 2012, pp.
    Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy, 2012, Vol.70.

Riggs, Ben. *Slaying the Dragon. A Secret History of Dungeons & Dragons.* ST. Martin's
    Press, 2022, New York.

Schacht. "Quag Keep." *School Library Journal*, vol. 24, 1978, p. 139. Date Accessed:
    2023.01.24.

Schwegman, Doug. "Statistics Regarding Classes: (Additions) — Bards". *The Strategic*
    Review. February 1979. www.annarchive.com/files/Strv201.pdf Date Accessed:
    2023.03.21. p. 11-12.

Senior, W. A. *Quest Fantasies*. In the Edward J. and Farah M. Cambridge companion to
    Fantasy Literature. 3rd ed. 2012. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Tarr, Judith. "Rolled by the Dice in Andre Norton's *Quag Keep*". 2020.01.06,
    www.tor.com/2020/01/06/rolled-by-the-dice-in-andre-nortons-quag-keep/, Date
    Accessed: 2023.02.12.

Tierney, Patrick. It shouldn't have to take "several years" to fix race in D&D. The Gamer.
    December 4th, 2020. www.thegamer.com/years-fix-race-dnd-wizards-coast-
    controversy/

Wezerek, Gus. *Is your D&D character rare?* Five Thirty-Eight. October 12. 2017.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many : Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in
    the Novel*. Course Book. ed., Princeton University Press, 2004.

Winninger, Ray. Book Updates: Sage Advice. 2021. www.dnd.wizards.com/sage-
    advice/book-updates

Wizards of the Coast. *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything.* D&D 5th edition, 2020.
—. *Monster Manual.* D&D 5th edition, 2014
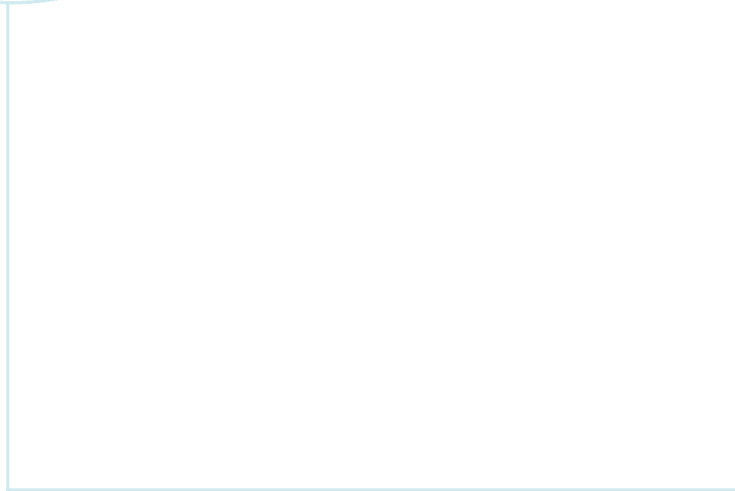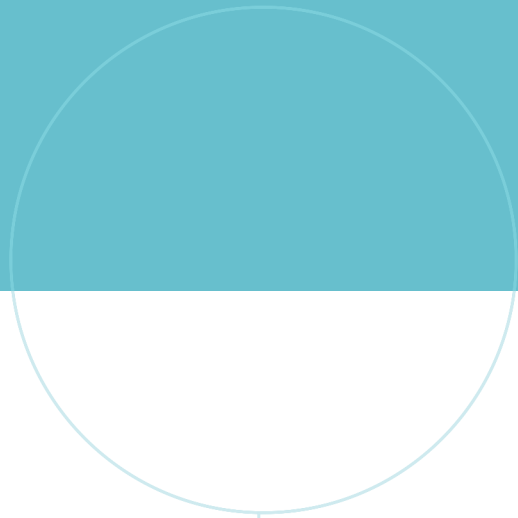—. *Player's Handbook.* D&D 5th edition, 2014

Wizards of the Coast. *Unearthed Arcana: The Cleric and Revised Species*. D&D 5th edition
    playtest material, 2022. www.dndbeyond.com/sources/one-dnd

Young, Helen. *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*. Routledge, 2015.

Appendix

A Teachers Reflection

This thesis is not pedagogical or didactical in nature. However, it will without a doubt have an impact on my future work as a teacher in Norway. The three core elements of the English subject in LK20 are communication, language learning, and working with texts in English. It is very improbable that any of my future students will ever inquire or read the novels which were read for this thesis, but it is also about the system of Dungeons & Dragons, which uses systems taken from the theatre in the form of roleplaying and improvisation. Without a doubt, these systems are something which can be incorporated into teaching communication, language learning, or simply working with texts, but the knowledge on how to use such systems is necessary. In this thesis we find many scholars who use Dungeons & Dragons in their school settings, either during class as a learning tool, or in a club setting. It is therefore necessary to know what lies behind a system like this. This thesis went deep through the rules of the game and showed its impact on culture. By knowing what kind of stereotypes, clichés, and tropes the game is built on, it is possible to cater to a wider range of students by limiting any which are deemed problematic. Even better, it is possible to let students do it themselves and let them use reflection as a tool when working with text. Which brings me to the second part of this reflection. This thesis examined how rules guide a player of D&D into certain tropes. It is also true that rules in D&D have the ability to spark creativity, and this was no different for me. Ever since I got exposed to D&D (and other TTRPG systems), writing has become much more enjoyable. As the fantasy genre gets more and more popular, it is possible that teachers use this to their advantage, and if they see fit it is possible to use character creation systems from these games in the classroom. Exercises like these can bring forth learning of grammar and text structures, but also develop into analytical tasks where students can discuss and reflect on form, content and language features, and literary devices which they can use themselves throughout a task like this. On top of all, this thesis has also given me the ability to grow both in knowledge of theory and in my writing, both of which will be useful in the field.