

## GNOMES: NOT MERELY SMALL DWARVES

Ken Wenzler

[Assignment: Write an essay contrasting two objects, actions, persons, or other entities. In a succinct topic sentence embody the essence of the difference between the two. Don't merely say "Jack and Joe are very different." Develop the contrast with specific, concrete details, emphasizing the contrast by conveying the same main points at least, for each of the two main entities.]

(1) Advanced Dungeons and Dragons is an extremely complex fantasy role-playing game. In playing AD&D, as the game is commonly called, each player assumes the identity of a specific character and acts out this personage in unpredictable situations. This character can be a member of any of the following races: dwarf, elf, gnome, half-elf, halfling, half-orc, or human. Of the demi-human races, dwarves and gnomes are the most closely related. They are so similar that their differences are often neglected, and the two races then lose their individuality. Although dwarves and gnomes share many characteristics, gnomes are far more versatile in biological makeup, chosen professions, living environment, and personality.

(2) The biological makeup of the two races provides obvious criteria for comparison and, in addition, emphasizes the versatility of gnomes. Average dwarves are about four feet in height and 150 pounds in weight, and they are stocky and thick of build. Most gnomes are only about three-and-one half feet tall, weigh around eighty pounds, and have a much lighter physique than dwarves. The smaller stature of gnomes allows them greater dexterity and quickness than are possible in the burly dwarves. Dwarves range from light brown to deep tan in skin color, have brown, black, or gray hair, and bright eyes which are almost never blue. Gnomes have skin color varying between wood-brown and gray-brown, hair that is medium to pure white, and eyes which are gray-blue to bright blue. Dwarves are generally rather unattractive in appearance and possess little comeliness. Gnomes, on the other hand, have charisma which surpasses that of their larger relatives. Both races are very hardy, tough, and resistant to most poisons and magic spells. Gnomes, however, have the added ability to learn and cast illusionary spells, while still retaining their innate resistance to magic. This capacity allows gnomes more options when they select an adventuring profession; though no dwarf can cast magic spells, the illusionist class is open to gnomes. Although dwarves are better soldiers and have superior fighting abilities, the lighter physique and greater dexterity of gnomes are more conducive to successful thieving careers. In addition, when a gnome chooses to become multi-classed (having two adventuring professions simultaneously), he has more options than a dwarf has.

(3) Besides being more versatile than dwarves in adventuring professions, gnomes engage in a greater variety of peaceful trades. Both races produce excellent craftsmen; blacksmiths, armorers, weapon makers, and gemcutters of dwarvish or gnomish stock are in great demand. Dwarves make outstanding engineers, and dwarves and gnomes alike are miners of great skill. Gnomes, however, delve into a wider variety of professions. More gnomes than dwarves are hunters or fisherman, and gnomish trappers and furriers have no parallel among dwarves. Some gnomes even venture into farming or animal husbandry, skills unheard of among dwarves. Songs are important in both cultures, both as a way of upholding traditions and as a way of preserving history. They are usually sung without instrumental accompaniment, for both races are somewhat lacking in the fine arts, but gnomes are more likely than dwarves to experiment with musical instruments.

(4) Being far more adaptable than their larger cousins the dwarves, gnomes live in a wider variety of places. Dwarves live only in rocky hills or mountains, while gnomes prefer hilly country for a home. Gnomes often live in forests or woods, and, appropriately, they are more interested in the outdoors than dwarves are. While dwarven tunnels run very deep into the earth, gnomes prefer quick access to the surface world. Gnomes roam the wild to such an extent that they have learned to communicate with burrowing animals of all sorts. In contrast to the dwarven attitude that nature is a force to be mastered, gnomes regard nature as a friend and ally. Gnomes are so adaptable that some clans even live on the sea, a place no dwarf would call home. There have even been reports of complete undersea communities of gnomes. Although they are the rarest of the demi-human races, gnomes are second only to humans in adaptability to different environments.

(5) While the dwarvish lifestyle is often blatantly rigid, gnomes show a broader outlook on life. All dwarves tend to fit one stereotype. The typical dwarf is dour and taciturn, strong and brave. He is hard-working, stubborn, and practical, and he loves beer, ale, mead, and even stronger drink. Dwarves love precious metals, especially gold, and they greatly covet gems, except pearls, which they do not like. Gnomes also love gems, and they can drink as much as gnomes can, but where dwarves are stoic and solemn, gnomes are lively and full of humor. Gnomes are great perpetrators of practical jokes, and a good joke wins great admiration from gnomes. Because gnomes can live for over 700 years, compared to a 400 year average life span for dwarves, they have a more relaxed outlook on life. Gnomes eat, drink, party, and, especially, laugh much more than the dour dwarves. Humor, friendship, and love are all very valuable to gnomes, and courtships can last a hundred years (thereby producing some excellent themes for jokes). On a more serious note, neither gnomes nor dwarves are lazy; dwarves are always dutiful workers, and gnomes will

abandon their fun immediately when work needs to be done. Overall, the gnomes' sense of humor is the key to their lifestyle and adaptability. After all, living for 700 years would be unbearable if life were not fun.

(6) Despite their differences, dwarves and gnomes maintain very close racial ties, both culturally and socially. Although the similarities between the two races facilitate their relationship, gnomes deserve distinct recognition, for their versatility sets them apart from their larger cousins.