Simplified Speech #075 – Dungeons & Dragons

Episode description

Have you ever wished you could join a quest to find hidden treasure, battle bloodthirsty monsters, and cast magic spells alongside a group of your closest friends? Then look no further than this episode, where Andrew and Morag introduce you to the world of Dungeons & Dragons. But beware: it's not for the weak of heart!
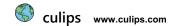
Fun fact

Dungeons & Dragons first began in a basement in Wisconsin. Two guys, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, created a game with role-play characters and storylines in which players work together to journey through the story and complete missions. The genius of this game is that it can be added to or modified in such a way that groups can play the same game with the same characters for as short or long a period of time as they want, whether that be a few days, a few months, or even 50 years!

Expressions included in the study guide

➢ Role-playing game

➢ To stay away from [something]

➢ Avatar

➢ Nerd

➢ Semi-

➢ To think on one's feet

Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to another edition of our Simplified Speech series. And if you don't know, this is the Culips series where we have completely natural, unscripted conversations, but we speak just a little bit slower than we do in our regular, everyday lives. And today I am joined by Morag.

Hey, Morag.

Morag: Hi, everybody. Long time no see, or talk.

Andrew: Long time no talk, yeah, it's a been a while, Morag. I got crazy busy and our schedules just haven't lined up the way that I wished they would. But we had time today, and so here we are. And I'm excited for today's topic, because we get to explore something and talk about something that I really don't know too much about. So, listeners, you and I will learn here together at the same time. Morag, maybe you could let us know, what is our topic for today's episode?
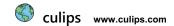
Morag: Well, our topic for today is D&D, also known as Dungeons & Dragons. It is a pretty famous tabletop **role-playing game**. You may have heard this as a RPG, a tabletop RPG, or a pen and paper RPG.

Andrew: OK, a pen and paper RPG or a tabletop RPG. That's very cool. And, like I said, guys, I don't really know about this too much, so we'll learn about this together.

Andrew: But just before we do that, I want to let everyone know about the study guide for this episode. It can be downloaded from our website, Culips.com, and it's jam packed with materials that will help you study with this episode, like a transcript and detailed vocabulary explanations and examples. There's a quiz, there's some speaking and writing prompts. It's just a really nice way to study with us. So if you're interested in checking that out, just visit Culips.com.

OK, Morag, let's get into here. So you told us that Dungeons & Dragons, or D&D as it's called sometimes, is a tabletop RPG game. RPG means **role-playing game**, right? What is the goal of the game? Is there a winner? How do you win the game?

Morag: I think you win the game by, oh, this is going to sound a little cheesy, but I think you win the game by making friends and being creative and learning problem-solving skills.

Andrew: Oh, OK.

Morag: Yup.

Andrew: So it's a really different focus compared to many other types of games where you try to defeat everyone else?

Morag: Well, D&D was pretty much the original RPG, so a lot of the video games that people play nowadays will be based off of some of this systems of D&D. So it's similar in the way that you might fight or make skill checks or try to do stuff, but it's really a collective exercise where you're playing pretend with all of your friends.

Andrew: And maybe I should back up here and we should talk just in general about the theme of Dungeons & Dragons. It's kind of a fantasy game and you inhabit a fantasy world? Is this true? This is my understanding, at least.

Morag: Yup, it's a pretty traditional fantasy world where you have elves and gnomes and orcs and dwarves and humans, too. There are goblins for bad guys and dragons and gods and all of this stuff.

Andrew: Cool. And so pretty much my knowledge of D&D comes from movies and TV shows, I think especially ones that are set in the '70s and '80s. I guess maybe this is when D&D was first released, probably in the '70s. Does that sound right?

Morag: That is pretty much perfectly accurate. I do believe, don't quote me, but I do believe it first came out in the '70s and became quite popular in the '80s, although there was a moral panic surrounding it in the '80s.

Andrew: Yeah, well, this is why I'm not really familiar with the game is because my parents wouldn't let me play.

Morag: What?

Andrew: Yeah, they said that it was a game that was evil because there was these creatures in it, you know? Like you mentioned, the orcs and the dragons and the goblins. And they thought that this would spoil my innocent young mind, I suppose. So I wasn't allowed to play D&D when I was young. And I guess because of this, I always thought that it was, you know, it was something that I should **stay away from**. And now that I'm older, I realize it's just a fun, silly game, right?

Morag: Yeah, it's a fun, silly game. I think that the really good thing about it is that it gets adults to play pretend, to role play, to take on different characters. A big portion of the game is creating who you want to be, what you think is an interesting person for you to pretend to be, and having those play-acting interactions with the people that you're playing with. That's what makes it really good. I think there are some people that play D&D just to see how much damage they can do, how amazingly powerful one attacked can get, or something. However, that's not why I play it and that's not why anyone I know plays it.

Andrew: OK, and I think the same could be said for many different types of games and video games, too, where people have a different **avatar**, different persona in the game than they do in their regular life. It allows you to experiment with different personalities and different identities, and can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on which direction you go, right?

Morag: I think most of the time it's just pretty funny, because you get people playing characters that everybody knows. You tend to take on cultural references that are common to the group. So we have somebody in my group right now that I was just playing with playing Derek Zoolander as a glamour bard. So this is now a bit of an old reference, a comedy movie from 2001, still a fantastic movie.

Andrew: Wow, 2001? It's that old?

Morag: Yeah, it's from 2001. But he plays a very, very beautiful but very, very stupid elf bard who fights with the power of his looks. So it's, most of the time we're just laughing and making jokes with each other.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: Stuff like that.

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Andrew: Sounds fun. So I wanna dive into the group aspect a little bit. You said you play with a group. And could you tell me a little bit about this? How many people play, how often do you play, where do you play? This type of thing.

Morag: I actually—man, I'm such a **nerd**—I actually play with two groups right now.

Andrew: OK, wow.

Morag: I play with two groups, partially because both of my roommates DM, also known as dungeon master. So they're the ones that run the campaigns.

Andrew: Kind of the leader?

Morag: It's a lot of work if you are the DM. You're the one writing the story. So it's a really creative and cool position, but it takes a lot. So both of my roommates do that, so they got me into it. But I'm playing with two groups right now. It's five and five.

Andrew: Five people in each group?

Morag: Yup.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: And we meet between once a week to once a month. It usually goes as often as you can.

Andrew: Yeah, I imagine that it's a little bit difficult to get six people together at the same time.

Morag: Usually it's one week on, one week off is the most common, but being pretty much everybody is in their 30s now, we all have lives and things that take us away. So I would say probably average is every 2 to 3 weeks.

Andrew: OK. And how long does it take to play one game? Some of the board games that I used to play and even now, I play chess, chess can take hours. And when I was younger, I used to play Monopoly and Risk, and sometimes these board games can take all day to play, really. What about D&D, is it a 1-day thing or does it span over many days?

Morag: It is not a game in that sense, it's more like a story. So you meet and you go through as much of the story as you get through in that day, and usually that session or that day will be 3 or 4 hours.

Andrew: Oh, OK.

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Morag: So you meet at 7, you try to go till like 10:30, something like that, and see how much you can get through. But the stories, the campaigns, they go on for years, if you keep the same people.

Andrew: Really?

Morag: Yeah, there's people that have been playing with the same characters for 20 years.

Andrew: Wow, 20 years?

Morag: Or more. If you can keep a group together, then that's really the hard part. It's actually managing people and schedules that's the difficult part. You can play through different stories, and if you have someone creative enough as the DM, they can keep on writing beautiful stories for you, so then you can keep playing.

Andrew: Wow, that sounds like it could be a very involved experience. Now I'm almost a little bit nervous to try and start playing. Twenty years seems like a long time, but I guess if you have a good group and everybody's having fun, then why not keep it going?

Morag: I think at that point, then it becomes a hobby. That's just what you guys do. But not all your friends have to be D&D friends and that doesn't have to be your only hobby. Don't have to do it for 20 years, but I would definitely recommend people give it a try, just because it's a strange experience as an adult, especially, to let go and pretend to be somebody else.

Andrew: Now, I'm wondering if you would recommend this to our listeners. Do you think as an English-language learner that this could be a good, like an educational experience? Do you think you could learn English through playing a game like this and, if so, what level of English do you think you would need to jump into a group and start playing D&D?

Morag: There's a lot of groups online, so I wouldn't be surprised at all if there were spaces where you could hook up with people that had better English than you because the person running the campaign, if it is run in English, would need to be very good. However, you wouldn't have to be very good to take part, and it would be an amazing way to work on your oral comprehension and conversation. You would have to learn some weird, **semi-**useless vocabulary, though.

Andrew: Right, maybe some fantasy vocabulary, right? But it could also be handy if you like reading fantasy novels, then when you're reading these style of books, it would be very useful. Yeah, maybe we're not talking about dwarves and dungeons and dragons every day in conversation.

Morag: No, but the human-to-human problem solving, discussion interaction is something that you do every day, and you have to be able **to think on your feet** and speak to people and understand what's going on. So I would say that for someone intermediate who really wants to work on their interaction with people and oral communication, oral comprehension, it could be really good if you found a group that was open to it.

Andrew: Nice. And, yeah, that's awesome that there's online options. One of the most commonly asked questions that I receive from our listeners is how can I practice speaking? There are no native speakers in my neighbourhood or in my country even, and I just can't get any speaking practice in. Well, here is perhaps one option for anybody that's asking this question, because you could meet a group of players online and learn English through a fantasy **role-playing game**. Sounds pretty fun to me.

Morag: I think that would be great. Give it a shot.

Andrew: Give it a shot. Morag, thanks so much for shedding some light into the world of tabletop **role-playing games** today. It was really cool to hear about it, to learn about it. One of my coworkers actually sent a group message in our coworker messaging chat room thing that we use on our phones, and he said is anybody down to play some Dungeons & Dragons? And I was a little apprehensive, but now I think you've convinced me. I think I'm gonna message him back and say let's do it.

Morag: Oh, it's hot stuff right now. It's popular. Everybody's doing it.

Andrew: Everybody's doing it, all right.

We'll leave it here for now, Morag, but thank you again and thanks to all of our listeners for tuning in. Guys, if you wanna check out the transcript and exercises that we have for this episode, then just visit our website, Culips.com, and you can find out all the info you need to know to get the study guide. And, as well, we are all over the place on social media, on Facebook, on YouTube, on Twitter, and Instagram. So if you use social media and you wanna stay up to date with all the news here at Culips, then just search for the Culips English Podcast and you can follow us.

That's it for us, we'll be back soon with another new Culips episode and we'll talk to you then. Bye, everyone.

Morag: Goodbye.

Detailed Explanations

Role-playing game
Noun

A **role-playing game**, also known as an RPG, is a game in which players take on the roles of characters in a fictional story. **Role-playing games** are like giant stories, and the story progresses based on how the players choose to utilize their characters. **Role-playing games** are centred around some sort of goal or quest, and to reach that goal the players must work together to solve puzzles, battle monsters, and cast spells.

Here's one more example with **role-playing game**:

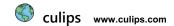|	
Jared:	Did you hear?! The new Pokémon game is coming out for the Nintendo Switch.
Frankie:	Hmm. I'm not really into **role-playing games**. I prefer games with more violence and shooting at things.
Jared:	What?!You don't like Pokémon? Everyone likes Pokémon!
Frankie:	Well, not everyone, 'cause I don't.
Jared:	I'm not sure we can be friends anymore …

To stay away from [something]
Phrasal verb

To stay away from [something] is to avoid something. Oftentimes, parents use this phrase to warn their children from entering into dangerous situations; for example, they say **to stay away from strangers** or, for kids who can't swim well, **to stay away from the deep end of the swimming pool**.

The phrase **to stay away from [something]** can also be used to describe avoiding talking about a certain topic. For example, during the holidays, families try **to stay away from talking about politics**, so that fights don't break out amongst family members.

Here are a couple more examples with **to stay away from [something]**:

Jillian:	Derek, I mean it! **Stay away from me**! I broke up with you, remember? I don't want to see you anymore.
Derek:	C'mon, Jillian. Please, just talk to me. I want you to give me another chance.
Jillian:	Another chance? I've been giving you chances for the last 5 years we've been dating, but you never change! I'm done waiting for you.
Derek:	But I love you!

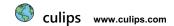|	
Vanessa:	We made it to the top of the mountain at last! The view is amazing! Take a picture of me over there by those cliffs.
Rodrigo:	OK, but **stay away from the edge**. You could slip and fall on those loose rocks. I'm not climbing down the canyon to save you if you fall off the cliff.
Vanessa:	You wouldn't save your best friend if she fell off a cliff?
Rodrigo:	Not if I warned her in advance and she refused to listen to me!
Vanessa:	All right, all right. I'll **stay away from the edge**. Don't be such a worry wart.

Avatar
Noun

An **avatar** is an image or character that represents you in games or online platforms. For example, if you play a videogame, the character that you manipulate in the game is known as your **avatar**. **Avatars** are not strictly related to video game characters. The image you choose for certain social media sites or internet chat rooms are also known as **avatars**.

Here are a couple more examples with **avatar**:

Cora:	Why is your **avatar** a guy? You're a girl.
Jessica:	Because guys would treat me differently in the game if they knew I'm a girl.
Cora:	Like how?
Jessica:	They would constantly be asking for my number, giving me free stuff, making sexist jokes, that kind of thing.
Cora:	Wow, getting free stuff. That sounds awwwwful.
Jessica:	Hey, don't be sarcastic. Really, it's not fun when they do that. It's just annoying. It's like they think girls can't be just as good at videogames as guys can.

Vince:	What do you think of my new **avatar**? I upgraded him, so he's got a mask and this wicked cool suit of armor.
Theo:	He looks awesome! How much did you have to pay for that stuff?
Vince:	It was not cheap. I think it was about 300,000 gold coins.
Theo:	300,000? That must have taken you 2 months to collect!
Vince:	Yeah, it wasn't easy, but it was totally worth it. He's so cool now!

Nerd
Noun

A **nerd** is someone who is extremely smart or someone who knows a lot about a certain topic; however, **nerds** stereotypically lack social skills and get bullied for their love of knowledge. For example, a computer **nerd** knows a lot about computers, while a Harry Potter **nerd** has a lot of knowledge about the Harry Potter universe.

Nerds and geeks are often lumped in the same category. A geek is also extremely knowledgeable about a certain topic, but geeks are usually over-the-top in their enthusiasm for something. Geeks care about the fandom or the collecting of items related to their subject of interest, rather than purely learning about their subject of interest in a more scholarly way like a **nerd** does. Both **nerds** and geeks are known to be introverted and a bit socially awkward.

Here are a couple more examples with **nerd**:

Ralph:	Hey. Wanna shoot some hoops after school?
Travis:	No, sorry. I can't. I promised I'd help Ally with her science experiment.
Ralph:	You're hanging out with Ally again? What's so cool about that **nerd**, anyways?
Travis:	She's not a **nerd**. She's just wicked smart and incredibly talented.
Ralph:	Sounds like you really like her. You got a crush on her or something?
Travis:	So what if I do? She deserves better than a guy like me, anyways.

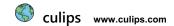|	
Heather:	What are you doing?
Yolanda:	Watching a movie.
Heather:	Which one?
Yolanda:	Star Wars: The Last Jedi.
Heather:	I didn't know you were a closet Star Wars **nerd**.
Yolanda:	Yup, I am. I dressed as a Stormtrooper for last year's Comic Con.

Semi-
Prefix

Semi- is a prefix that means partly or slightly. **Semi-** is used with nouns or adjectives and can be used to make words like **semi-**darkness or **semi-**permanent. In this episode, Morag says that Dungeons & Dragons could be a great way to practice listening and speaking skills in English, but there will be many **semi-**useless words you'll run into that are only useful in the world of Dungeons & Dragons. Words such as orc, spell-caster, and dwarf are **semi-**useless or slightly useless, because they are words that are not often used outside of fantasy novels, games, or movies.

Here are a couple more examples with **semi-**:

Rebecca:	We should go to Sammy's party this weekend.
Lucy:	But we weren't invited. Sammy's the coolest girl in school.
Rebecca:	C'mon. You're the captain of the soccer team. You're **semi-**popular. Ask her if you can come.
Lucy:	I don't know … We aren't exactly friends or anything.
Rebecca:	Hey, the worst she can say is no.
Lucy:	No, she could say no, and then make fun of us, too. She's kind of a bully. I don't know why you want to go to her party, anyways.

Min-Young:	What do you want to make for the bake sale this Sunday?
Ji-Min:	I was thinking about making something simple like chocolate chip cookies.
Min-Young:	That's not bad, but maybe you could mix it up a bit by making a variety of different chip flavors. Like some could be milk chocolate, some **semi-**sweet chocolate, some dark chocolate, and some mint chocolate chip cookies for a Christmas theme.
Ji-Min:	That's not a bad idea! OK, I'll add all those chocolate chip flavors to the grocery list.

To think on one's feet
Idiom

To think on one's feet is to be quick at making a decision or answering a question, especially during a stressful situation. For example, if someone is preparing to give a PowerPoint presentation to the board members of a company but the computer suddenly stops functioning, he would have **to think on his feet** to quickly find a solution to the problem and come up with a different strategy to impress the board members.

To think on one's feet is all about reacting to a sudden change or unknown situation with speed, finesse, and intelligence.

Here is one more example with **to think on one's feet**:
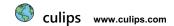
George:	Hey, you like telling jokes, right? Have you ever done improv comedy? You know, that stuff where they have to make up jokes as they go along without any practice or preparation?
Remmy:	No. I don't think I have the skills for that yet. It's really hard to come up with random stories spontaneously without any preparation, and then we have to be funny on top of that, too?
George:	I mean, you've got talent already. You just have to let go, **think on your feet**, and trust that you'll have something to say when the time comes. You should give it a try.
Remmy:	OK, but I'll only do it if you're in the audience, so that I know I'll get at least one pity laugh when I fail miserably.

Quiz

1. Which word is NOT similar to nerd?

a) geek
b) dork
c) jock
d) dweeb

2. Which type of person would be considered semi-famous?

a) a lead actor in a hit blockbuster movie
b) a YouTuber with 30 million subscribers
c) an award-winning film director
d) an author on the top 100 bestselling book list

3. What do you call the character or image that represents you in games or online chatrooms?

a) emoji
b) avatar
c) meme
d) gif

4. Which phrase means to react quickly to a situation, question, or change?

a) to think on one's feet
b) to walk on one's tiptoes
c) to jump the gun
d) to run amok

5. What is the acronym for games like Dungeons & Dragons where people get assigned a role or character that they use to complete quests in the game?

a) RPA (rare people adventure)
b) CBG (character-building game)
c) RPG (role-playing game)
d) PLG (player-lead game)

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. **Have you ever played Dungeons & Dragons? What do you think about it? What have you heard about it?**

2. **Are Dungeons & Dragons and other role-playing games popular in your country?**

3. **Do you have any hobbies that are considered unique or a little bit nerdy?**

4. **What kind of picture or symbol do you like to use as your avatar for online chatrooms? Why?**

5. **Can you remember a time when you had to think on your feet? What happened?**

Quiz Answers

1.c   2.d   3.b   4.a   5.c

Episode credits	
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