

Excerpt from:

***Confessions of a Part-time Sorceress: A Girl's Guide to the Dungeons & Dragons Game* by Shelly Mazzanoble**

Babes in Boyland

Let's get one thing straight: I am a girly girl.

I get pedicures, facials, and microderm abrasions. I own more flavors of body lotions, scrubs, and rubs than Baskin Robbins could dream of putting in a cone. I organize my shoes by heel height, sort my handbags by strap length, and store my nail polish on the butter shelf of my refrigerator. I shop, watch soaps, and religiously dish on the fashion choices and bad judgment of whomever *Us Weekly* deems the most newsworthy. I not only embrace my inner girl, I full on squeeze the stuffing out of her.

I am also an ass-kicking, spell-chucking, staff-wielding 134 year-old elf sorceress named Astrid Bellagio. At least I am once a week when I play *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Let's not get carried away here. I wasn't always a gamer. Until recently my escapades involving anything with dice, boards, and little primary colored markers were limited to *Chutes and Ladders*, *Sorry!*, or a warm keg of beer and a red plastic cup.

I have those friends who are *very* into games, mainly the computer or video game variety. Heard the one about the guy who turned down tickets to a U2 concert because it was the same night that his *World of Warcraft* guild held strategy council meetings to plan for Saturday's raid? Yeah, I know him. In fact, I dated him for two years. He was smart, charming, compassionate, and good-looking. He was also a level fifty-four gnome warrior named Aggro. We broke up shortly after he answered my panicked phone call from the shoulder of I-5 during rush hour with, "I can't talk now! I'm fighting the end-level boss in the Zul' Gurub raid!" Well screw you, Zul' Gurub and the end-level boss!

His girlfriend was stranded on the side of one of the country's most congested freeways with a flat tire. Not to mention I was wearing white pants that day.

The reason I never got into games is simple: I'm not competitive. It's also why I never kicked Cindy Bleacher's ass for making out with Kyle Pinter in eighth grade even though she *knew* I liked him.

Right around the time Grandma and Grandpa gave us a shiny new edition of *Monopoly*, my brother Mike was finishing Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal*. I liked *Monopoly* because I could personify a dog moving around the board. Mike liked *Monopoly* because it allowed him to practice everything The Donald taught him about financing, developing, and constructing big ocean-side condominiums on his naïve younger sister and her little dog, too. Mike granted me the less affluent neighborhoods like Baltic or Vermont Avenues and he'd humor me into buying great plots of land with wonderful development potential like New York and Kentucky Avenues. I knew better than to go after Boardwalk and Park Place. Once I even lent him money to finance a hotel on Marvin Gardens, which he conveniently forgot when I landed there.

"That's \$2,200," Mike would say.

"I don't have \$2,200! I gave \$1,500 to you!"

"Donald Trump doesn't care for your excuses. You'll be hearing from the bank."

"Mom!"

Just a few years ago the family tried busting out the old *Monopoly* game on Christmas Eve, but *The Apprentice* was still alive and well inside my brother. He booted mom out of a quaint little house on Oriental Avenue and suckered dad into spending his entire savings on a dilapidated hotel on Pacific Avenue seconds before he landed on

Mike's Boardwalk hotel, casino, and arena where his eponymous hockey team played.

My parents were so devastated by his behavior that they changed their will to ensure

Mike would have nothing to do with their long-term health care or retirement funds.

I can't say that Mike's ultra-competitive nature ruined *Monopoly* and other board games for me (mostly because I'm afraid he'll read this, put me in a headlock, and give me noogies on my head until my overpriced highlights fade out), but every now and again when I'm in my condo, relaxing with a pint of ice cream and a *Felicity* rerun, I can't help but picture Mike jumping from behind the curtains waving my deed in the air and demanding I hand over my parking spot and the keys to my storage unit.

Even though games and I aren't exactly peanut butter and chocolate, or even peanut butter and pickles for that matter, I somehow managed to find myself working in the games industry at a company called Wizards of the Coast. Job description

I don't know what I expected when I first started my job, but it wasn't to be waiting at the copy machine behind a guy dressed as a *Star Wars* storm trooper. At first I thought it was one of those cardboard standees you find at Blockbuster, until he turned around and asked me if I knew how to make double-sided copies. What's more surprising is I had no one to commiserate with, because no one else thought this was weird. The only questions he got were about the suit's authenticity. (It was the real deal, by the way. Cost a fortune, which may be why he chose to wear it anytime he could.) I work at a place where a dragon is suspended from the lobby ceiling, video game consoles line the conference rooms, and sci-fi villains sit in offices, processing your vacation time and issuing purchase orders. What had I gotten myself into?

It wasn't long before I heard the sounds of trading cards shuffling and dice rolling. I saw the remains of cryptic maps and strange words like *Xen'drik* and *Q'barra* left on whiteboards with the words "DO NOT ERASE. EVER." written over them. I'd walk past meeting rooms and see groups of co-workers gathered around tables or staring intently at what looked like someone giving a presentation, and minutes later they'd be broken up with laughter. No one ever laughed in my meetings. What could these people possibly be talking about?

Finally I worked up the nerve to ask what was going on in there.

"We were playing *Dungeons & Dragons*," explained one of my coworkers.

"Like that?" I asked, giving a nod to his polo shirt and khaki pants. I guess I expected him to be wearing some kind of armor, or at least have a sword attached to his expensive snakeskin belt. I didn't know what to expect not only from a *Dungeons & Dragons* game, but about the people who played it. Certainly not the normal-looking crowd I saw hunched over the conference room table.

For many years, my relationship with *Dungeons & Dragons* (or D&D, as it's commonly known) was neutral. Kind of like the vanilla, no-frills relationship you have with your coworker's spouse because you only see each other once a year at the company holiday party. *Dungeons & Dragons* and I would nod to each other in passing. We said polite good mornings at the coffeepot and smiled at the other's reflection in the mirror when we were both washing our hands at the bathroom sink. D&D didn't bother with me and I didn't bother with it.

Then one day my cubicle neighbor, Teddy, performed a fifty-seven minute monologue about how weaponry in *Dungeons & Dragons* doesn't pay a lot of attention to historical reality.

"You just find things like a falchion being a two-handed scimitar in D&D, and a one-handed infantry sword in history," he explained. "But that's fine. D&D is a game, not a historical simulation."

I politely endured, nodded instinctively, inserted some "wow's" and "oh cools" as needed. And then politeness bit me in the ass.

"If you're interested in historical weaponry, you'd probably love playing," Teddy said. "I'm starting a new group on Monday nights. Why don't you join?"

If niceness were a D&D skill, Teddy would be a trillion-level uber-human. Saying no to Teddy would be like saying no to Winnie the Pooh. Besides, since *Melrose Place* went off the air, Mondays really suck.