

The speech I watched was called How Dungeons and Dragons Can Help You (in Real Life) by Ethan Gilsdorf. It talked about a variety of ways that a fantasy role playing game like dnd can help you and your relation to the world and people around you.

The speaker's introduction was fairly strong, if somewhat rambling. The attention getter was a question asking about what kind of dungeons and dragons character you would want to be, but then sets up a scenario (a troll chained to a castle you want to investigate) and gives multiple possible ways to proceed, leading in to some of the main points. The credibility statement was strong, Gilsdorf shows that he is qualified to talk about Dungeons and Dragons itself saying he played it obsessively starting at age 12 in 1979, and again at 40. He also shows that he is qualified to talk about how playing dungeons and dragons can help people, sharing that he used it to cope after a brain aneurysm caused his mother to behave erratically, as well as escape from general issues of adolescence. His relevance in the introduction consists mainly of a brief explanation of Dungeons and Dragons and how it is played, and sharing a list of celebrities (from Vin Diesel to George R. R. Martin) who "cut their creative teeth on DnD," (Gilsdorf 2016). The thesis was interesting and not oversold, "These games are powerful, but fantasy role playing games can help anyone. His preview of main points, though, was mostly just a promise that there would be main points, before swiftly moving into the first one. His conclusion was well written, the reviewed main points were clear but still different enough, and his clincher was both very inspiring and easily actionable.

Gilsdorf's organizational structure was fairly easily understandable, it was broken up categorically based on different lessons you can learn from dnd. There were not really transitions to speak of, the speaker would essentially just say what number the main point was, and the title, such as, "Lesson Two, Preparedness, innovation, and problem solving." It is a bit on the nose,

but it is not a terrible choice. Gilsdorf uses the troll from the attention getter as a through thread between all his main points, relating each one back to it using the many different ways a player could approach the situation. For example, in that main point two, he says, “So, let’s go back to that troll. Let’s say you attack the troll, and kill it. Bravo. You ransack the body, as you’re supposed to do. You look in the troll’s pockets and in the troll’s right pocket, you find a scrap of paper.”(Gilsdorf 2016) This scrap of paper then leads into a discussion of how there could be many ways to solve problems. This central scenario helps hold all the different main points together in the listener’s mind, making the whole thing easier to digest and remember.

The content was quite interesting and all came together to support the main points and the thesis along with them. Gilsdorf relates the fantastical situations and enemies to the real world with phrases like, “Don’t fight, negotiate. With the troll, with the bully, with that uncooperative pain in the ass family member at thanksgiving.”(Gilsdorf 2016). This added relevance truly elevates the content from just a fun speech about different facets of a game, to an incredibly helpful and poignant discussion of how even things that are fantastical can impact your life. Gilsdorf talks about how you can learn to trust each person in a work group to do their own parts of the same project using party dynamics from Dungeons and Dragons. As said before, he talks about how Dungeons and Dragons can teach us how to be more creative problem solvers by presenting us with open ended problems with any number of solutions. He talks about taking risks and acting like a different character in a forgiving environment like Dungeons and Dragons can set you up to be more self-confident and flexible in real life. He talks about how we can learn tolerance and empathy by maneuvering through an imaginary world full of diverse and distinct characters, all with their own stories. He talks about how using your imagination in a game such as this can kindle interest in “so many areas...everything from history, to poetry, to geography, to

languages, to the natural history and biology of elvish maidens,” and he talks about how it can help you “imagine a better world.” (Gilsdorf 2016). Honestly, the only thing this speech seems to be lacking is citations. It seems like Gilsdorf is speaking from his own experience and not necessarily using any research, but he likely should have a source for all the celebrities who played Dungeons and Dragons, because that is hardly common knowledge.

Gilsdorf’s delivery was certainly quite strong, both verbally and non-verbally. He was verbally expressive, varying his vocal patterns and using emphasis when applicable, ramming home his main points when they came in during his information. He was also fairly non-verbally expressive, but not necessarily as much so. He used some gestures, sometimes moving a hand out when referencing the “you” of the audience and counting on his fingers when he listed things out, but most of the time only with one hand (he kept his clicker hand just at his side most of the time) and not all that often. His eye contact was really strong, panning across the audience regularly and keeping everyone in sight. He seemed incredibly well rehearsed, only stumbling a few times, and every time recovering within milliseconds, and he only had two major pauses. His first major pause was because his presentation shut off unexpectedly during a point, and after a second he just rolled with it, saying “...and then the screen goes blank. Luckily, you have torches!” and “So, it’s dark in this dungeon, it’s really dark. So it’s probably a good idea to sleep for the night,” (Gilsdorf 2016). And then he jumped right back into the speech. His second major pause happened as he was closing out his fourth main point about empathy and tolerance. He was listing different people he could now look at with more empathy, and choked up when he tried to mention his mother’s illness. Both were completely excusable, and neither impacted the understanding of the information he was giving.

Honestly, I do not have all that much criticism to give, it was a really good speech, and I learned a lot. I will say though, that he could have used some more information from other sources. It is all well and good to give your personal experience, but everyone's experience is different, so if he had added some research to back up his own information and insights, it would have added that little extra credibility to make sure he knows what he is talking about. Another thing he could have done better were his gestures. They were not terrible, but they were mostly the same time, and did not have nearly as much variation as his diction. He could have added a little extra flair and interest if he had put more practice into his movements. One more thing I think he could have done better is his introduction. It had all it's requisite parts, but it felt longer than it needed to be. At some point I got confused and started wondering if he had started the actual speech without me noticing. If he had made it at least a bit shorter, or more directly structured, it could have been just that little bit better.

All in all, this was a very good speech. It had an interesting thesis, and delivered on that thesis. It had an interesting narrative along with all the information. It pretty clearly showed the listener how a game could help them improve. The introduction was fairly good, despite its shortcomings, and the conclusion was well stated. The organization made sense, and the content was insightful and well reasoned, if a little unsupported. The delivery was solid, and kept me interested. As stated before, I don't have many bad things to say about it. Ethan Gilsdorf did well on this Ted Talk, and I would probably watch it again.

References

Gilsdorf, Ethan. (2016, May) *How dungeons & dragons is good for you (in real life) [Video]*.

Ted Conferences. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PaHJqpQnyw>