

Half-Dwarves: And Why Not?

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The existence of ‘half’ races in fantasy worlds presupposes functional sexual relations between humans and their demi-human counterparts. In the case of half-elves, that idea seems to be something that we (guys) are all comfortable with. Not for nothing were Liv Tyler and Cate Blanchette chosen to play elvish princesses. The existence of half-orcs is also something we can get our heads around – in that case, conception is assumed to be so infrequent that it becomes excusable (and may not involve consent in any case). But the idea of a rational and mutually satisfying relationship between a human and a dwarf is so immediately repugnant that the creators of Dungeons and Dragons and other game systems seem to have blanked it from their minds. Can you play a half-dwarf? No, you can’t.

Well, not according to the Dungeons and Dragons rulebooks, at least. And half-dwarves aren’t common fantasy fare, either. There is some support for the notion of half-dwarves in C.S. Lewis’ novel *Prince Caspian* (Caspian’s tutor, Dr Cornelius, was a half-dwarf), but other than that, the ledger is blank. There is a Dungeons and Dragons racial statistics block at the end of this article, spelling out what a half-dwarf would be like, if you want to go that far. But it’s unlikely the number of half-dwarves in play will increase as a result of their presentation here. The real question is, why are there no half-dwarves? Are dwarves and humans incompatible?

Why There Are No Half-Dwarves

The real reason that there are no ‘half-dwarves’ is because of the perceived ‘hierarchy of racial attractiveness’ that exists in the generic fantasy realm, which is, from top to bottom:

1. Elves

It is a testament to the strange combination of arrogance and insecurity that marks the human race that we have created an archetypal fantasy environment in which human beings are the *second* most attractive, powerful, charismatic and intelligent humanoid race. Elves are at the top of the tree. We desire them always, and sometimes they deign to marry us, knowing that if things don’t work out they’ll only have to put up with us for a comparatively short time.

2. Humans

According to our own analysis, many of the other races are attracted to us because of our power and beauty, and our options for making half-human offspring with other races are numerous. However, as it turns out, elves are the only other race we are actually attracted to, leaving members of the other races to fantasize about what might have been, had they been born ‘Aramil Felosial’ instead of ‘Boddynock Nackle’.

3. Dwarves, Gnomes, and Halflings

To these races we have attached the trappings of inferiority in all our descriptions of them; they are short, uncharismatic, hairy, and either boring or very irritating. Despite this, they are useful, being good at inventing and manufacturing things, leaving to us and the elves the nobler arts and magical pursuits. We are not attracted to them for the same reason that we are not attracted to boring, ugly, hairy, servile people in the real world.

4. Giants, Orcs, and other Monstrous Races

Questions linger as to whether these creatures qualify as people. Certainly we are not attracted to them, and nor is anyone else in the racial attractiveness hierarchy. We are not attracted to them for the same reason we are not attracted to dangerous and destructive wild entities such as lions, or termite colonies. The real danger of conception lies not in mutual consent, but in their frequent and violent incursions into our border farming communities.

Thus, there are no half-dwarves because humans don’t like dwarves ‘in that way’, and dwarves don’t pillage in human lands, so chances for conception between dwarves and humans are limited. However, the story of the half-dwarf does not end there, as we shall see.

What is a Dwelf?

When reading descriptions of the half-races in the Dungeons and Dragons Player’s Handbook and elsewhere, our smug 'humanocentrism' creates the unspoken assumption that the ‘half’ that is not demi-human is ‘normal’, and therefore, must be human. Another option remains unexplored – that the other ‘half’ of a half-elf is actually dwarvish, and that the character in question is a ‘dwelf’, the offspring of the improbable union between a dwarf and an elf. It is doubtful that you will find anywhere a rulebook that tells you that the two races are incompatible (all that the Player’s Handbook has to say on the subject is that the two races do not get on together, something that they have

in common with countless real-world married couples). And therefore, why not?

If there is a thought more repulsive than the lovechild of Gimli and Eowyn, it is surely that of Gimli and Galadriel. Who asked whom? And who said yes? Once again, it doesn't bear thinking about. A statistics block for a 'dwelf' (dwarf-elf) is found below, for curiosity's sake more than anything else. In the long run, the 'dwelf' is bound to suffer the same fate as the 'half-dwarf' – deemed a temporary distraction, but no fun to play in the long term.

Other Crossbreeding Options

Looking back to the 'racial attractiveness hierarchy' above, we see that our next option for a new crossbreed race comes from a union between a dwarf and another type 3 demi-human. A statistics block has been provided below for a 'gnarf' (a gnome-dwarf). Here, we are on slightly more believable ground. For a start, gnomes and dwarves are known to get along well, and may even be distantly related, so the idea of the two races sharing a bed doesn't raise the bile quite as much as some of the other matches discussed earlier (although it still doesn't bear thinking about too hard). The personalities and appearance of the two races are more compatible too. In fact, the whole notion is so easy to grasp that it fails to produce a crossbreed that is noticeably different from either of the two parent races; a bit like playing a high-elf / wood elf crossbreed.

So finally, we come to our last and most appealing option – the fruit of a union between a dwarf and a 'type 4' humanoid, namely, an orc (a 'dwarf-giant' was ruled out for reasons of simple logistics). And here the result is something distinctive, powerful, and truly different from either parent race. Dwarves and orcs, at loggerheads throughout history, have had the occasional period of peace, during which limited trade and other tentative relations sprang up. And from such unlikely circumstances comes the Wild Dog Dwarf (don't call them 'dworcs' – they won't like it). The final statistics block gives details on these fine creatures.

The Racial Compatibility Matrix

A whole range of other options for half-breed characters remain to be discussed. To save time, here is a simple matrix showing the compatibility of the six basic races in the Dungeons and Dragons system (including orcs),

noting the kind of half-breed they might produce. GMs might also wish to include giants, ogres and other creatures to add additional options.

	Human	Elf	Dwarf	Gnome	Halfling	Orc
Human	-	½ elf	½ dwarf	note 2	note 1	½ orc
Elf	½ elf	-	‘dwelf’	note 4	note 4	note 3
Dwarf	½ dwarf	‘dwelf’	-	‘gnarf’	note 1	wild dog dwarf
Gnome	note 2	note 4	‘gnarf’	-	note 2	note 2
Halfling	note 1	note 4	note 1	note 2	-	note 2
Orc	½ orc	note 3	wild dog dwarf	note 2	note 2	-

Note 1. References to ‘Stouts’ and ‘Tallfellows’ (halflings with dwarvish and human blood, respectively) are already present in Dungeons and Dragons lore.

Note 2. Gnomish and halfling sexual behavior is something of a frontier science (in the sense that it is something no one wants to know about). If a possible crossbreed is marked ‘note 2’ on the matrix, it might be worthy of further study, but no information is currently available.

Note 3. Elves are not compatible with gnomes and halflings. We have to draw the line somewhere.

Note 4. A ‘half-orc half-elf’ might well make an interesting addition to any party!

Four New Racial Variants

The statistics presented here were designed for Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 1st edition but can be adapted for other versions.

1. Half-Dwarf (Human-Dwarf)

- +1 Constitution, -1 Charisma
- Medium Size
- +1 to saves vs. enchantment
- Base Speed 30 feet
- Darkvision to 60 feet (can see in total darkness).
- +1 bonus on saves vs. poison and spells
- +1 bonus on attacks against orcs and goblinoids
- +2 dodge bonus against giants
- Favored Class - Rogue

Many half dwarves are generally surly and bitter about their appearance, and the way they are normally treated. With an appearance always bordering on the ridiculous, a true half-dwarf (50% of each race) stands at about 5 ¼ feet tall and is heavy set, although with gangly limbs and oversize knees and elbows. Their hair and eyes are nearly always a drab brown. Half-dwarves in dwarven lands favor huge bushy beards, while those in human lands go clean-shaven, albeit under large wide-brimmed hats. They can live to an age of about 250 and reach adulthood at about age 30, but tend to remain immature in character throughout their lives.

Dwarves shun half-dwarves as an abomination. Humans treat them much as they do normal dwarves, and elves can't tell the difference between them and normal dwarves at all. Gnomes and halflings sympathize with them, and half-orcs don't care much either way. Half-dwarves often opt for the life of an adventurer because they figure they haven't got anything to lose.

2. Dwelf (Dwarf-Elf):

- +1 Dexterity, -3 Charisma
- Medium Size
- Base Speed 30 feet
- Lowlight vision (can see 120 feet in low light)
- Darkvision to 30 feet (can see in total darkness)
- +1 bonus on attacks against orcs and goblinoids, +1 dodge bonus against giants
- Immune to sleep spells, + 1 on all spell saves, +2 on Enchantment saves
- Favored Class – Rogue

Nothing can prepare you for the ugliness of a dwelf. They have the almond-shaped eyes and pointy ears of elves, which appear hideously incongruous in

their otherwise broad and hairy faces. They are often mistaken by town guards and the like as elves posing as dwarves, or vice versa, and many is the time that someone has attempted to pull off a dwelf's beard, assuming it to be false. They stand at just under 5 feet tall, on average, and are usually slender but with wide shoulders, thick necks and large pot bellies, and commonly have purple or greenish eyes and curly red-white hair. They achieve adulthood at around age 70 and can live to be 500, although few make it that long, as they live disordered and dangerous lives. A dwelf will attempt between four and eight hours of 'trance' per evening, often giving up in frustration, or falling asleep in the middle of the attempt.

A dwelf is always found in human lands. Dwarves and elves both shun them, although both the pure races may make use of the talents of the half-breed during adventures. Gnomes and halflings get on well with them, and half-orcs find them amusing. They take to adventuring for the same reason that half-dwarves do. Dwelfs are born sterile (like mules), which is a good thing for all concerned.

3. Gnarf (Dwarf-Gnome):

- +3 Constitution, -1 Charisma, -1 Strength
- Medium Size
- Base Speed 20 feet
- Lowlight vision (can see 120 feet in low light)
- Darkvision to 30 feet (can see in total darkness)
- +2 on saves vs. illusion, +1 vs. other spells, +1 on saves vs. poison
- +1 bonus on attacks against kobolds, orcs and goblinoids
- +4 dodge bonus against giants
- Speak with a burrowing mammal once per day, as per *Speak with Animals* spell
- Favored Classes – Rogue, Illusionist

A gnarf is welcome as a curiosity in either dwarvish or gnomish communities but they tend to prefer life among gnomes where their 'great height' gives them a feeling of superiority (they stand at a towering 4 feet tall). Gnarfs have neat beards and bright, inquisitive eyes, but slightly misshapen lips and noses and broad foreheads. They live to the same age as dwarves (about 400), and reach maturity at age 50. They inherit the love of gold and gems from both parents and are thus perhaps the greediest creatures on earth, hence their fondness for adventuring. Their dwarvish blood overrides the gnome's natural

spell-casting ability, although the affinity with burrowing creatures is retained. They more commonly display the characteristics of the gnome (curious and mischievous) than the dwarf (dour and taciturn), and tend to play up the gnomish side of their heritage when questioned by outsiders. Incidentally, most other races can't tell them apart from gnomes and would assume that they were simply a tall and ugly example of the gnomish race.

4. Wild Dog Dwarf (Dwarf-Orc):

- +2 Strength, +2 Constitution, -1 Intelligence, -3 Charisma.
- Medium Size
- Base Speed is 30 feet
- Darkvision to 60 feet (can see in total darkness)
- +1 bonus on saves vs. poison and spells
- +1 bonus on attacks against orcs and other goblinoids, elves and humans
- +1 damage on all unarmed combat attacks
- Favored Class – Barbarian

Wild Dog Dwarves are aggressive and destructive by nature, but are not without a certain animal magnetism. Their appearance is so appalling that after a while, observers tend to forget about it (in the same way that people do not keep noticing that gorillas are no good at chess). They stand at about 5 ¼ feet tall, and are heavy-set and very muscular. Their grayish, warty skin and fangs of the orc do not mingle well with the thick dwarven hair and bulbous nose. These creatures smell as bad as they look. They have powerful arms, complete with talons, and many do extra damage on unarmed combat attacks for this reason. They reach adulthood at age 30, or even earlier, and can live to be 150, but frequently die much younger.

A Wild Dog Dwarf can be found almost anywhere, as they are prone to wanderlust (and no one else likes them hanging around either). Most civilized races fear them, and will try to kill or capture them unless they know they are friendly. Orcs and half-orcs like them and will try to befriend them. Elves detest them and may leave any adventuring party that includes one. They take to adventuring because they are fond of violence, and because they are often arrogant and foolish enough to believe that it will bring them easy money.