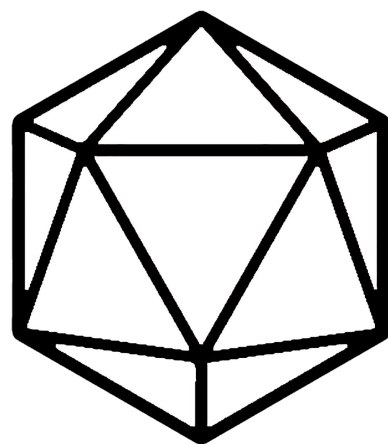


A Year's Worth of Dungeons-and-Dragons

by Madison Ferdman

Dungeons-and-Dragons (D&D) is portrayed time and time again in media and pop culture. Games like *Baldur's Gate 3* or the animated series *The Legend of Vox Machina* rely heavily on its rules and lore. Even the well-known Netflix series *Stranger Things* has villains who are based on and named after infamous *D&D* monsters (demogorgon, mind flayer, Vecna). But what exactly is *D&D*? Simply put, *Dungeons-and-Dragons* is a tabletop game of interactive storytelling. Players create characters of different classes and mythical races used to follow a plot controlled and often created by that campaign's Dungeon Master (DM). Sounds pretty straightforward, right? Well, maybe in theory. The game leans heavily on role playing with the impact of each character's action determined by how high a dice roll is. In other words, anything can happen.

After years of wanting to play, I finally had my chance to do so in March of 2023. Thanks to the suggestion from a friend, my peers and I, all of whom were taking the Imagineering class at Cal Lu, formed a campaign. Starting at 7:30 PM the following week, we each promptly showed up to the WRAC, taking over room 111 as we pushed tables and chairs together.



The DM assisted me in creating my first character, a kenku ranger called Kiko, a raven-like person named after my pet cockatiel. The session began shortly after, though I was unfamiliar with the rules, and even more unfamiliar with my classmates who made up the campaign's party. While I'll admit I'm normally quiet, I was more quiet than ever, unsure of what to do or who to talk to when my character was first introduced. Regardless, the session moved on, and from there we agreed to continue to play every following Wednesday.

A few months later, a new campaign began and the party had shrunk in size. Now familiar with the concept of the game, I was able to create a new character on my own. Named after the flying lemur from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, this new character was a 2 foot tall lizard person, a kobold rogue named Momo. Like a sewer rat, she stole, fought, and clawed her way to defeating villains and creatures alike, acting on the basis of being chaotic just for the sake of it (or maybe for a slice of cake in return). The creation of a more outgoing character allowed me to get to know my peers better as we played side-by-side. Together, we watched the *Dungeons-and-Dragons* movie *Honor Among Thieves* and attended last year's Renaissance Faire. With time, I became lucky enough to call them my friends.

Most recently, I played as a minotaur barbarian called Bern, named after Bernard from the *Where the Wild Things Are* film adaptation. With a personality similar to Ferdinand the bull, Bern was a gentle giant until it came time to avenge characters from his past. Together, my friends and I fought villains more powerful than any we had fought before. We defeated an undead spellcasting lich, a war-hungry cyclops, and many, many zombies.

While the campaign is on pause, we will soon return to fight another lich as we made the mistake of freeing him from his prison during a jailbreak. In the meantime, my friends and I play board games, race against one another in Mario Kart, and return to old D&D campaigns.

In the span of a year, I have formed new interests and made long-lasting friendships. Having become a close friend group, my party and I actively hang out together outside these mystical realms, hosting movie nights, meeting for weekly dinners, and, once again, attending this year's Renaissance Faire. Now, some are even creating Dungeons-and-Dragons companies together, in which they write and sell campaigns with exclusive merch. D&D brings people together both inside and outside fantastical worlds, and I am grateful for the adventures it has taken me on.

