

ROLLING THE DICE

Xavier Stockmann builds community and identity with Dungeons & Dragons

written by
Tiya Kaul

photographed by
Vincent Hsiao

The forest turns dark. Fog descends from the gloomy sky and powerful gusts of wind sweep fallen leaves off the ground. The party, consisting of an orcish barbarian, an elf ranger, a dwarf cleric and a gnome wizard, becomes alert. Their gaze shifts. Their hearts race. Searching for danger in this new environment, they discern a mysterious figure appearing behind the soaring trees. Outside of this fantasy world, a group of anxious teenagers huddles around a table with a Dungeons & Dragons board. Palms sweaty, they wait for the roll of the 20-sided die. This roll determines everything. As the die is cast, their options change, and a thundering voice falls from the sky. “What will you choose to do now?” This voice belongs to none other than Dungeon Master Xavier Stockmann (12).

As a Dungeon Master, Stockmann narrates the events of the Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) roleplaying game, usually played on a tabletop. As Stockmann questions players and sets up the scene, members embark on a fantasy adventure to accomplish a specific quest.

“I describe a fantasy environment with strong details and specific wording,” Stockmann said. “I’m trying to share the area and experience to my players in a way that lets them truly visualize the setting. Most often, I’ll try to have the characters fit into the setting, either interacting with existing stuff or seeing the space for the first time. In a way, I’m writing a story, but I’m also including the people playing the game.”

Stockmann channels his passion for D&D through the small D&D club after school, which also allows him to collaborate and spend time with his friends.

“We’ve been able to build a very tight-knit and personal community,” Stockmann said. “Most people in the club know each other pretty well.”

Stockmann doesn’t just play D&D for fun, but also to include people with similar interests and give them something to look forward to. He prioritizes making his team feel like a family so nobody feels left out.

“The goal I’ve had in the club is to make everyone feel welcome,” Stockmann said. “I believe that everyone is comfortable being around each other.”

As a result of Stockmann’s passion for D&D, he adopted an influential role in the club and continues to exhibit leadership and kindness when he participates.

“[It’s] pretty rare for someone to come in and just start running a game, but to see him take on the leadership role has been great,” D&D club sponsor and math teacher Garrett White said. “He’s gotten better and better as the years have gone on. Sometimes you’re going to have conflict every now and then, but seeing him, as he’s gotten older, be able to navigate everybody’s personality has been pretty cool.”

Stockmann joined the D&D club as a freshman, and since then, he has transformed into a driving force for inclusivity, friendship and growth among members.

“He brings everybody in,” White said. “He has a nice presentation that he’ll give to people and he has just





a nice way about him. [H]e can interact with all these different kids and it really is cool to see. He's one of the best that I've had."

Stockmann has also experienced profound self-growth through D&D club. Since he began it, the game has evolved into a crucial part of Stockmann's identity. It is not simply a game: it is a powerful form of self-expression and a key part of who he is as a person.

"D&D has become a huge part of my identity," Stockmann said. "It's really helped me embrace myself as more of a nerdy person."

Despite being a game, D&D helped Stockmann approach his real-life problems and friendships with unique perspectives. Stockmann's application of D&D principles in his life helped him build a strong and long-lasting community among him and his loved ones.

"The game has helped me find a lot of good friends, which for a while I found very difficult," Stockmann said. "It's helped me rethink how I solve a lot of problems as well."

Stockmann often uses his role as Dungeon Master to keep growing and inspiring the D&D community.

"He has motivated new people to experience this club that otherwise wouldn't have," club Vice President Natalie Brunworth said. "He helps out with newer [Dungeon Master]'s and players."

D&D also influences the way Stockmann is perceived by others, with his persona being impacted by the game.

"[D&D] affects the way I carry myself," Stockmann said. "Part of my interest in the game is the general fantasy and whimsical vibes of stuff, so in my daily life, I will make connections to the game or connections to similar types of content. [This] will change how I react to things and often, I react to things due to the game."

Due to the sheer amount of time and effort the game takes, Stockmann needs to be completely immersed while playing, especially due to being Dungeon Master.

"Because of how I'm always running the game, I'm very locked in," Stockmann said. "I'm constantly reading lots of stuff, rechecking tables I've written, all the notes I've got, which is really fun for me. The entire time I'm feeling very free."

Despite the pressure to perfect each and every game session, Stockmann prioritizes enjoyment, smooth sailing and having a good time with his friends.

"I'm very happy," Stockmann said. "I always enter a flow state whenever I'm playing D&D and I feel very connected to the people I'm playing with."

Over time, Stockmann has evolved to be more self-assured while leading the game. He is very capable in his management skills and welcomes each player to the club.

"He has become a more confident [Dungeon Master] over the years," Brunworth said. "In the very first few meetings he would go around and make sure everything

was running smoothly and everyone could create their characters."

Since Stockmann runs the D&D club, he has the power to create an inclusive community, and he does exactly that. He puts the club and its members before himself.

"I want to make people around me comfortable being themselves," Stockmann said. "I don't necessarily need them to like me, but I want them to like being in a space that's around me. I want them to be able to be who they are."

Stockmann's benevolence in the game extends not only to the members but to the sponsor as well. His help in managing the club and expressing his love for the game is noticed and appreciated by the whole D&D crew.

"He's made my life very easy, because he runs everything and I don't need to do a lot," White said. "As a matter of fact, sometimes even in the past, we've disagreed on certain things, but he's had really great reasons for the way he feels."

Stockmann ensures that members feel like themselves by making the story fluid and viable to change. If one member wants to roleplay a different persona, Stockmann alters the story to make everybody feel comfortable.

"There isn't one set story," Stockmann said. "While the people are playing as an orc or an elf or a grand wizard, the actual person behind the character is the most important. Their personality always reflects the characters they have or vice versa."

This unity and diversity in the club helps the members embrace themselves in the game as well as real life. Stockmann fostered this environment to make sure that members could use D&D to learn more about themselves and feel comfortable while playing the game.

"We always are going to support each other," Stockmann said. "We are such a tight community, everyone there is so themselves. It feels like we are actually being ourselves in this environment. There is a very strong sense of authenticity and belonging."

Caption: Xavier Stockmann (12) rolls 20 sided die to initiate a game of D&D. Stockmann joined D&D club as a freshman and, since then, has become the Dungeon Master who leads the game. "[I write] different games and [lead] stories and events for the club," Stockmann said. "I organize the different groups and I help [students with] problems involving social stuff that interacts with the rest of the game." (on pages 4-5)

Stockmann manages D&D club materials such as the dice, artwork and sheets with character information. Stockmann's learned many life lessons and organization skills due to his role as Dungeon Master. "A few of [the club members] will have a computer in front to check information," Stockmann said. "I will have a large pile of dice and my small pile of books, full of information as well." *Photos by Vincent Hsiao. (on pages 6-7) ©*

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Xavier Stockmann
(12)