

## Dungeon Master's guide

[Comment Feed](#)**BY VICTORIA DAVIS**

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### TRENDING

#### It might get louder

A leaked Air Force memo concedes that afterburners are likely to be used much more frequently with F-35 fighter jets at Truax than originally claimed. The auxiliary burners are used for an extra boost — and they're intensely loud.

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#### Here comes the sun

The threat of a solar storm is out there, but we don't talk much about it. Solar physicists though say the potential for harm is enormous.

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#### A riverway runs through it



VICTORIA DAVIS

Every Thursday, people pack Misty Mountain Games for Dungeons & Dragons sessions.

In the dungeon of “Mad Magic,” Gregory the paladin, Joan the dwarf artist, and Danny the escaped slave march through the darkness with four other magical comrades carefully clutching their axes, amulets and anxieties. Suddenly, slime drips on them. The seven warriors look up in horror to see slime monsters ready to pounce.

It might seem like a miracle today, but 30 years ago Democrats and Republicans came together to protect the Lower Wisconsin Riverway. Will politics ever again work so well?

## Lead with hope, but panic

Thousands of people in Madison joined the worldwide strike demanding action on climate change. The strike was led by youth, “the last generation that can really do something about this.”

## Film for a troubled planet

“Anthropocene: The Human Epoch,” showing at Union South Marquee on Sept. 25, is a chilling look at humans’ impact on the planet — and a call to action.

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What's happening this weekend

“That’s just gross,” says Andy Olson, who rolls his D20 dice for a counterattack. “I really hate these Jellies.” After a long and arduous battle, Olson and the rest of the magical entourage escape their sticky situation, although all sustain significant damage.

The seven players — and one Dungeon Master — are seated at one of the packed eight tables in the back of Misty Mountain Games on Cottage Grove Road. Every Thursday night at 6, roughly 80 people gather here to play *Dungeons & Dragons*, a role-playing game where people assume identities of everything from elf wizards, on-the-run slaves, dwarf artists, halfling wagoners and human paladins. Everyone brings their own dinner and dice bag.

“When you sit down to a *Dungeons & Dragons* game, you’re kind of joining an improv group,” says Joe Alfano, one of the lead organizers for Madison’s Dungeons & Dragons Adventurers League. Tonight, Alfano is his table’s Dungeon Master, the all-powerful and all-knowing narrator of the story.

Ian DeGraff explains his rationale for selecting a character as he flips through the folder containing various identities. “I try to pick the most memorable character possible,” says DeGraff, as he settles on Beatrice Bellatrix. “The wealthiest wizard in all of elfdom.”

“The challenge of role playing is what drew me to *D&D*,” says Mary Pfothenauer, who has been playing here for three years. “Sitting down and being forced to make stuff up on the fly, it’s like a muscle that you have to exercise.”

“It’s incredibly inflammatory when it comes to imagination,” adds Alex Kammer, who owns an enormous collection of vintage *D&D* items, including game sets, maps, posters and player books, all kept in a secret room at his restaurant, Free House Pub, in Middleton. “You can sit down and have a shared experience with people as opposed to most other forms of entertainment. A lot of people thought *D&D* would [die] because of video games but it’s only gotten more popular.”

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Adventurers League sponsors *D&D* chapters around the world — Madison's chapter is 6 years old and has almost doubled its player count since forming. Pegasus Games also hosts games on Saturday evenings.

“The explosion of *D&D* is shocking,” says Brian Kowal, the manager of Misty Mountain, who's been playing since the '80s. “When I was a kid you never told anyone you played. It was just you and your friends in the basement, a lot like *Stranger Things*.”

“*Stranger Things* was basically our documentary,” adds Alfano.

Jason Sauby runs the “Killer Table” at Misty Mountain, where players focus more on competition and strategy than story or fantasy. Nevertheless, Sauby believes it's the storyline that has made the game so popular.

“Role-playing games were invented in the '70s and they used to be very crude,” says Sauby, who began playing *D&D* in the '80s. “So there's been decades of improvement just with *D&D*'s design. The game's fifth edition is the best edition that we've had and it's no longer a game for social troglodytes.”

*D&D* was created by Gary Gygax and David Arneson in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and has since accumulated a worldwide fan base. For years, the game's players were mostly white males. DeGraff and his fiancé, Olson, say that's changing rapidly.

“One of the reasons I just started playing *D&D* now is that the community is a lot more accepting than it used to be of LGBTQ players and even women,” says DeGraff.

“It's very unusual now to sit at a table and have someone say something outright offensive,” agrees Pftenhauer. “Except when Ian plays intentionally offensive characters, and even then, we just laugh at him because he's so terrible.”

Tonight, the tables include players ranging from ages 12 to 70. Lance Larsen, another League organizer, is fighting bandits in a desert alongside his two daughters, Ashlyn and Arianna. “A lot

of people come here to get involved in a community,” says Larsen. “We had a mom who just moved here ask if she could bring her 7-week-old baby and I said, ‘Sure. Start ‘em young.’”

“It’s funny that this game has a stigma for being for antisocial people because this is one of the most social things that I do,” says Pfothenauer. “We all need somewhere to go at the end of the day and pretend to be a giant orc or a tiny halfling that can do somersaults. That’s so much better than anyone’s day job.”

**1974:** First edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* is printed.

**11 months:** Time it took [the first 1,000 hand-assembled games to sell](#).

**\$325 million:** Amount Hasbro paid to acquire *D&D*’s parent company in 1999.

**Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons (B.A.D.D.):** Anti *D&D* group founded in 1983 during [the hysteria that the game](#) was turning children [toward the occult and suicide](#).

**D&D fans:** Sherman Alexie, [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#), Junot Díaz, David Lindsay-Abaire, [Sam Lipsyte](#), George R. R. Martin, Sharyn McCrumb, Paul La Farge and Colson Whitehead.

**150 hours:** Longest game Alfano has played.

**Wisconsin’s [Gamehole Con](#):** Oct. 31-Nov. 3, at the Alliant Energy Center, will feature the largest Adventurers League hall in the world with 100 *D&D* tables playing the same game.

SNAPSHOT



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**COMMENTS (2)**

Type subject here...

## D&D

Very cool to see this, as I started playing the game in the later 1970s and eventually worked as a game designer for the original D&D publisher (TSR Hobbies) in Lake Geneva in 1980-81. I sat in on one of these game store D&D sessions while visiting Madison a few months ago, checking the city out for a possible move from Texas. The gaming scene there is very impressive and only adds to the attraction of living in So. Wisconsin again. My Elf Ranger hopes to battle evil again soon!

Kevin 4 days ago | [REPLY](#)

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## Want to learn more about Madison D&D?

Check out our website -- [www.MadisonDnD.com](http://www.MadisonDnD.com) -- there you'll find links to when we play, how you can sign up play with us, how to make a character and a lot more. Everyone is welcome. :)

Lance Larsen 4 days ago | [REPLY](#)

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