

The Cleveland Heights LGBTQ Sci-Fi and Fantasy Role Playing Club

Doug Henderson

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An all-LGBTQ+ Dungeons and Dragons group finds the drama of their latest campaign bleeding into the real world in the novel *The Cleveland Heights LGBTQ Sci-Fi and Fantasy Role Playing Club*.

Every Thursday night, magic and mayhem play out in the back room of Readmore Comix and Games. There, listless, twenty-five-year-old Ben escapes into a fantasy world where druids and bards battle an evil cult. Because he lives at home, where he nurses his broken heart and dodges his mother's pestering about his future plans: Readmore is the only place where Ben feels in control. But then his character is killed off, and a handsome newcomer, Albert, joins his D&D group.

Albert works at the local record store; he is coworkers-with-benefits with Ben's former crush, Jeff. After being rejected by Jeff in a humiliating fashion, Ben thinks he's given up on his love life, which now exists only in the stuffy back room of Readmore. But real life threats, including from homophobia and a rival vampire role playing club, push him to reclaim his confidence and come into magic that's all his own.

The D&D campaign is narrated throughout the text; it's a nail-biting story-within-a-story, though it sometimes overwhelms the story's real life predicaments. Some characters play to stereotypes, including Ben, a gamer who lives in his family's basement, surrounded by dirty clothes and dirtier dishes; and the book's sexual innuendos and descriptions are sometimes gratuitous. But spots of humor, and one fierce, sarcastic character, Valerie, help to retain a whimsical atmosphere in this story about finding your people and never letting go.

Doug Henderson's novel is sure to delight proud nerds with its story of a young man searching to belong against a backdrop of mischief and magic.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (May / June 2021)

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