D&D has been around for a while—since 1974, in fact. During that time, we've seen the rise of computers and the internet.

Now, in 2020, we have smartphones with internal computers that have more processing power than the computers that brought us to the moon.

Amid it all, D&D remains, perhaps stronger and more popular than ever. Shows like *Stranger Things* and livestream internet shows like *Critical Role; High Rollers;* and *Dice, Camera, Action,* all draw large audiences and have helped bring D&D, previously relegated to local game and comic shops into places like Barnes & Noble and Target.

While the game has gone through multiple editions with varying rules and character options, the core values remain the same—bring your imagination and join your friends on an adventure.

And, while you can still play with pencil, paper, some dice, and a Player's Handbook, the digital era has afforded us some new options.

Websites like D&D Beyond, an official toolset for D&D, allow us to incorporate technology into our games. With D&D Beyond, for example, "you can access digital tools, such as a character builder and digital character sheet, or monster and spell listings that can be sorted and filtered, an encounter builder, and an interactive overlay Twitch Extension. In addition to official D&D content, it also provides the ability to create and add custom homebrew content. And if you're worried about how balanced your creations are, you can hop over to the forums for a second (or third or fourth) opinion.

D&D Beyond also publishes regular original video, stream, and article content, including interviews with *Dungeons & Dragons* staff, content previews and tie-ins, and weekly development updates.

Shows like Critical Role have popularized the use and existence of tools like D&D Beyond with their partnership. During their weekly streams, the cast of Critical Role—who all use D&D

Beyond for their current campaign—shoutout the company before the show with what have now become infamous ads from Sam Riegel, one of the Critical Role castmembers.

[D&D Beyond themesong ad and then D&D Beyond official trailer]

So, how do you decide whether to go digital or stick to the roots of D&D and use pencil and paper? Why not both? Let's see how a literal D&D group—a humble band of adventurers of varying races and classes—decides what to use in their game.

-----------[Below is from the original report]------------

Six friends sit on the floor around a dinged coffee table—the same one you'd find if you went next door, or up a floor, or even down a floor. There's a string of christmas lights outlining the ceiling of the room, and a stack of books on the table.

"No, really, I think you'd be best at it," one of them is saying. She has a mantle of flame for hair, dazzling and bright. It flickers above her head, casting moving shadows across her already coal-dark skin.

"Yeah, I mean, you read a bunch of books, right? You were a librarian," another one says, their voice calm and unhurried. They're leaning back on an elbow, one knee bent and the other leg outstretched, their silvery-white hair a stark contrast to the colored lights above.

"*Are* a librarian," the one in question chimes in, her dark auburn brows furrowing slightly.

"Right, right. But hey, think of this—if you DM for us, then you can be whoever you want. You could be a bunch of people, maybe even all at once," another, tinier—and much greener—one pitches in amid a mouthful of trail mix.

"Right, sure, but what if I'm not very good at it?" auburn-hair says again. She turns to the tiny, green one with a frown, her golden freckles catching a reflection from the flaming hair of the figure to her right.

"Mhyr'as, c'mon. You'd be great! Besides—" a few crumbs of nuts and berries are falling from the green one's mouth, "who cares? It's about having a good time. And," he gestures around, "we can bring snacks!"

"I'll bring the ale!" another short, albeit not at all green, figure says.

"Of course you would say that, Jambart," the final figure says. She has long, straight white hair that splays against the ground, even as she sits straight-backed and tall, legs crossed.

"Would you expect any less, Olviar? You've known me for years," he laughs as he holds up a tankard, "and I always come prepared." The sound of his voice echoes back from the bottom of his near-empty cup.

"Unfortunately," Olviar replies with a sigh.

"Anyway," the fire-haired one interupts, dragging on the first letter. She's holding one of the books in her hand, flipping through it erratically. "Look at all this stuff! Ooh, look, a longsword! And a mace! And a spear!" She flips the book around to show it to the group, "Can my character have, like, five swords?"

"Why would your character need *five* swords, Tintrí? What would you even *do* with that many swords?" the green one says, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"*So* many things, Wart! So. Many. Things." Tintrí flips back around and continues shuffling through the pages, pupil's wide.

"Is it easy to find what you're looking for in that book, Tintrí? If I DM for you all, do you think we'd each need a copy of it?" Mhyr'as asks as she takes a sip of tea from her mug and glances about the room, her silver eyes just peeking over the brim of the cup.

"Hmm, it's not too difficult, but I can't really search for anything unless I know where it is. I mean, it's organized and all, but you have to look through the index. Or you could just flip through until you find what you need."

"That doesn't sound particularly efficient," the one with the calm voice says. "I know some people who use a website instead. You can access digital copies of these books, make your character sheets, and then once you've selected all your options, it'll do the math and everything for you. I think it even has special tools for DMs to enter homebrew content."

"Oh, that sounds helpful. What's it called, Korin?"

"D&D Beyond,"

"Neat! I'll have to—" Mhyr'as stops short as the sound of scratching fills her mind. She glances down to a worn leather tome that's sitting on the table in its own pile yet still as tall as a stack of four books. Korin raises an eyebrow and adjusts their position, leaning on the other elbow.

Mhyr'as smiles meekly and reaches for the tome, flipping it open somewhere near the center. She watches as the familiar, scrawling script appears on the yellowed pages.

Digital tools for D&D? Absolute nonsense. Dungeons & Dragons is meant to be played with quill and parchment only. Anything less is just an imitation.

"How elitist," Olviar says with a glance over Mhyr'as' shoulder.

"Does he not think D&D Beyond is a good idea?" Korin asks with a scoff. "How surprising."

"Whatever leaves my hands free to drink more ale," Jambart pitches in from the back. Olviar rolls her eyes as the familiar sound of Jambart's endless tankard refilling itself fills the silence.

"I mean, D&D is a game all about collaboration, storytelling, and experimentation, is it not? It sounds like that's what D&D Beyond is doing, too," Wart says (Spiro 6). Mhyr'as tilts her head in agreement before looking back down at the book.

Besides, D&D Beyond only wishes to pocket your gold. Every user needs to buy a copy of the

Player's Handbook in order to make a character, even if you already own a physical copy.

Ridiculous!

Wart and Tintrí have joined Olviar in looking over Mhyr'as' shoulder at this point, and the goblin leans his forearms against the coffee table as he reads.

"I've heard, if you're the DM, you can share all your purchases with people who join your campaign," he says.

"Yeah, I mean, they've gotta make money somehow," Tintrí shrugs before going back to the *Player's Handbook* she's holding, occasionally mumbling about wanting a spell. Or a weapon. Or a horse.

She already has a character sheet with a bunch of notes spilling across the predefined areas like blood on the battlefield, her hands leaving smears of ash on the page wherever they rest. Just beyond that, two plastic prisons hold seven dice each. Or at least, they would, if Tintrí hadn't already taken them out earlier and rolled them a few times.

Did she know what she was rolling for?

No.

Did that stop her?

Also no.

But don't be fooled—they had all taken turns rolling the d20 just for fun. Mhyr'as rolled the lowest, with a 3, and Tintrí had rolled the highest, with an 18. She had screamed in excitement and flared her hair, nearly setting off the smoke alarm.

"True. I suppose I could look into it and see what it's like. I'll send you guys an email sometime before session zero next week," Mhyr'as says, keeping an eye on the book to see if

anything else appears. The ink from the previous messages has already faded, and the pages remain blank. For now.

Everyone eventually says their goodbyes and makes their exit, leaving Mhyr'as alone with the books and the lights.

Are you always so old fashioned? She writes onto the now-blank page, the ink absorbing alarmingly quickly, the book a dried and crackling desert and her ink a wellspring.

What do you expect? I am old.

Comes the reply near seconds later. She watches each letter appear even as her quill rests on the opposite page, motionless.

Mhyr'as chuckles to herself, then glances around, suddenly wishing her friends were still there.

How old are you, exactly?

Old enough to know that some things remain the same for a reason. You would do best to remember that.

A bead of sweat drips down Mhyr'as' tanned, olive skin, tickling her temple. She picks up her quill and takes a deep breath.

I'll consider it, she writes.