

What Have We Learned from #OpenDnD

January 30, 2023



January 2023 was a rough year for the TTRPG industry. 5e developers found ourselves dividing our time between protesting and planning for a nebulous future. When [WotC finally waved the CC-BY white flag](#), we [celebrated like the end of Return of the Jedi](#). But **experience doesn't make you wiser. It makes you older. Learning from experience makes you wiser.** So how can we gain XP from this experience to level up?

D&D is HUGE

If this had happened fifteen years ago, nobody would have noticed, and nobody would have cared. In fact, *it did* when WotC released D&D 4th Edition with a GSL instead of an OGL in 2008. That led to the release of Pathfinder. But nobody outside the TTRPG community had any idea. But thanks to the success of Fifth Edition, D&D has firmly entrenched itself in the mainstream consciousness. As a result, [mainstream news](#) and [financial analysts](#) took notice, and the final nail in the OGL 1.2 coffin may have [come from Alta Fox Capital](#), Hasbro's largest investors, who recognize the size and value of the fanbase. The upcoming movie and TV show could never have had their big budgets without the size of the 5e fanbase. **We are legion.**

D&D ≠ WotC

I've said it often. [Mike Shae](#) says it so often, he should trademark it. And it's 100% true. WotC isn't D&D. WotC owns the D&D trademark, but they don't own the game. **D&D is more than a fancy ampersand – it's a global community** of 50 million TTRPG players who play 5e more than anything else, but we also play [many other systems](#). But even in the 5e community, we don't need WotC. We can either start with the free [Basic Rules](#) or [another 5e-based game](#) and develop our own content for it or [purchase high quality content from over 8500 options](#).

But even at the height of these shenanigans, we knew that they couldn't take our books away, and no matter what changes they make in the future, we'll just keep on playing what we want to play. And if they intend to [replace book releases with microtransaction-based digital content](#) and slap the ampersand on it, they can do that, but they don't get to define what D&D is. **Every table, whether stone, formica, or VTT, decides what D&D is for them**, even if there's no ampersand to be found on any of your resources. And you don't have to buy their latest products or update to new editions if you don't want to!

The players are heroes too, not just the characters

When the community learned of the [plot](#) to wipe out other 5e creators, [we rolled initiative](#). In 8 hours, a [Discord assembling to defend the OGL](#) had 500 members, and at its peak, it had about 1700 sharing information, writing letters to Hasbro, WotC, the [EFF](#), the FTC, and more. [77,407 people signed a petition](#). YouTube and every social media platform came alive with reports and shared information so powerful, it [crashed D&D Beyond with a flood of 40,000 unsubscriptions](#). OSR and 5e fans set aside their

edition preferences to take up arms together. We fought. We fought hard. It was exhausting. But we won. **You don't just play a hero. You are a hero. Don't ever think you're not.**

Trust the action economy

According to the cliché, it's always darkest right before the dawn, and in this case, that was true. Many [believed the battle was lost](#), and we all planned our contingencies, when WotC suddenly dropped their treasure and fled. They made the mistake of trying to slip legal shenanigans past Rules Lawyers, a group of **people who scrutinize word usage as a hobby**. They presented a seemingly unstoppable force to **people who strategize ways to overcome impossible odds for a living**.

We challenge the schemes of dragons and archdevils for fun! WotC, did you really think you were more powerful than that?!

No single player had the power to defeat this BBEG ourselves. But the most powerful among us, bards like Linda Codega, Ginny Di, and Indestructoboy, were only as powerful as those they inspired. The true power came from the action economy, the 5e principle that multiple weaker actors can defeat a more powerful being based on the number of actions each can take in a given round, which is why [multiple monsters multiply the XP in an encounter](#). We continued to act while they struggled to move.

5e is the final version of D&D

OneD&D was [already touted](#) as the final unifying version of D&D, which seems like a bold claim, but this event may have solidified that, yet not in the way WotC intended. Instead of unifying around WotC products, including their online strategy, by releasing [SRD 5.1 into Creative Commons](#), an entire industry of creators can keep making 5e content forever, modifying,

tweaking, expanding, or pantomiming, and while system overhauls are inevitable, the 5e flywheel's momentum is seemingly unstoppable.

Unless we have a reason to unite against it.

Responding to the OGL 1.2v1 Survey #opendnd

January 30, 2023



You have heard, "Everyone's entitled to their opinion." I disagree, at least if you're going to be making decisions with it that affect others. I contend that, "Everyone's entitled to an **informed** opinion." So having read the [proposed OGL 1.2v1](#) I offer my answers to the questions in the [OGL 1.2 Survey](#) with suggested reading so you can express your own informed opinions. I hope this will also help others understand why the entire community is upset about these changes. Special thanks to Justin Alexander for [posting these \(with his informed responses\)](#) and to all those who offered their informed opinions to help inform mine.

Note that the responses are necessarily plain text in the form, but I've added formatting for reference and readability here.

2. Now that you've read the proposed OGL 1.2, what concerns or questions come to mind for you?

I feel betrayed. From January 2004 to the end of 2021, **18 years**, you had these words on your website <<https://web.archive.org/web/20060106175610/http://www.wizards.com:80/default.asp?x=d20/oglfqa/20040123f>>.

7. Can't Wizards of the Coast change the License in a way that I wouldn't like?

Yes, it could. However, the License already defines what will happen to content that has been previously distributed using an earlier version, in Section 9. As a result, even if Wizards made a change you disagreed with, you could continue to use an earlier, acceptable version at your option. In other words, there's no reason for Wizards to ever make a change that the community of people using the Open Gaming License would object to, because the community would just ignore the change anyway.

Ever since you removed those words, your communication with your passionate loyal customers has been a string of lies. Since you sent NDAs to some of the small companies that you portrayed as "big corporations" (most less than 10 employees!), literally every public communication has intentionally contained multiple deceptions, and this document and its associated FAQ are no exception.

My concern is that I can't do business, nor can I in good conscience give my verbal or financial support, to a company that lies to its fans and, when called out for it, doubles down on the lies. I have been a hardcore fan and Dungeon Master since 1982. I fought against the Satanic Panic at age 10 and have

extolled the game's virtues and fun for forty years.

Just a few weeks before this became public, I encouraged my 2500 loyal customers to buy OneD&D when it launched, and we would support it with revised and optimized content. Now, I have to tell them that if they want to use our unique disability-representative and accessible content, they'll have to follow us to another system like Black Flag and stop buying WotC materials. I don't want to do that.

3. After reading the proposed OGL 1.2, how has your perception of the future of Dungeons & Dragons changed compared to before reading OGL 1.2?

Much Worse

4. What would be needed to improve your perception of Dungeons & Dragons' future?

Stop the empty apologies. This is still a critical failure. Every third party publisher encourages their fan base to buy your content, fights against piracy of your materials, and fills niche gaps that you can't. **Look at the comments and replies on all your social media channels over the past month. 99% of the comments are negative, pointing out that you're not fooling anyone.**

And these are your fans, the people who chose to follow your channels! That's not just the publishers that you've alienated!

I work with a lot of teens, including my own children (all D&D fans until now), and I always tell them, **“When you’ve dug yourself into a hole, the first thing you need to do is put down the shovel.”** Until Hasbro puts down the shovel, the hole will only get deeper, and now that the financial trades have started reporting it, everything looks bleak for WotC.

That said, you need to understand that **D&D ≠ WotC. D&D isn’t about the ampersand. It’s about the community.** And you can’t take our community away. We—the fans, not just the 3PP—will find another home, and we will migrate together, and we will support OGL 1.0a developers by buying their old products. We would like WotC to be part of our community, but that requires mutual respect and trust. You’ve repeatedly broken our trust, so now you need to do something Herculean to redirect that torrent. Replace 1.0a with 1.0b that adds “irrevocable” without an Orwellian redefinition, and only then will you be able to begin to claw your way out of the pit you’ve trapped yourself in. **We’ll even help you, as we are right now,** collectively putting hundreds of thousands of hours into these surveys and other feedback channels to offer you our ropes out of the pit, but we’re all hanging onto the same rope, since we fully expect you to pull us down with you, but together, we’re stronger than you.

5. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 2

6. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the content found in the SRD that will be released under Creative Commons?

Understanding: 4; Satisfaction: 2

7. Do you have any other comments about the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International and/or the content that will be released under Creative Commons?

I heard about the Creative Commons license before I even got to read the post. As a longtime fan of the Open Source movement, I was shocked and thrilled.

And then I saw what it actually included.

Those sections are nearly useless as shared content. It describes combat but doesn't tell me definitely whether I can say, "Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage."

90% of what's listed there is uncopyrightable, so by making it Creative Commons, **you actually took away rights** by requiring attribution for something that's nearly all public domain. Another deception to fool your investors. We're not fooled. Put down the shovel.

This would be useful if you also included lists of names of monsters, classes, and spells that we can safely use unless you actually plan to sue someone for saying, "The Wizard can cast Magic Missile," without including the stat blocks. Tell us what feature descriptions we can use for homebrew monsters like the standard breath weapon syntax.

And then there's the legal confusion whether those sections are Creative Commons or OGL. You can't assign 2 different licenses to the same content, so which is it? Is this some other kind of trap? If we use this Creative Commons content, because the OGL declares it to be Creative Commons, are we thus submitting to the new OGL? If the OGL, which declares this content to be Creative Commons, is terminated, does that also deauthorize the Creative Commons license? You'll have to forgive the questions, given the context of your behavior in recent months.

This raises more questions than it answers, and nobody knows whether we gain anything from this besides being able to say, "hit points," and, "Armor Class," and maybe do skill checks, so can we use that and related standard 5e phrases under Creative Commons? **Give us an SRD of what is CC, how we can use the content on those pages, including a list of representative examples in terms of phrase and term usage.**

And most importantly, **this gives us nothing more than we already had** with 1.0a, like a trip to the Wonderful Wizard of Ogl, where he gives gifts to the quartet that simply tell them what they already have and says, "Oh, no, my dear; I'm really a very good man, but I'm a very bad Wizard, I must admit." (That text is public domain. We know we can use it. See the value of clear licensing?)

8. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the Notice of Deauthorization?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

9. Do you have any other comments about the Notice of Deauthorization?

You made a promise for 18 years. **18 years!** And then you claimed you could just deauthorize it without terms in the contract to determine how or under what terms you could do so.

This is straight-up bullying, because you know this is dishonest, and the only way you might get away with it is by pushing us around. But you have to understand that many of us, especially those of us who have supported you for 40 years, spent a lot of our formative years being bullied, often because we liked playing D&D! And now D&D is bullying us! But we're not little kids anymore. **We've spent more decades than the OGL strategizing, coming up with creative solutions against impossible odds, sticking together, standing up for each other, and not giving up.**

I wrote a book of disability mechanics under 1.0a and made those mechanics OGC to allow other publishers to easily add disability representation to their content. Now neither I nor they can use those mechanics unless we both submit to your revision, **a setback to disability rights.**

This raises so many other questions. For those not following industry news or your social media channels but producing

content via OGL 1.0a around the world, **how can they agree to a license they've never heard of?** You can solve this with a new SRD 5.2 with updated content, offering something new, but leaving those who are willing to accept the limitations of SRD 5.1, giving your fans a choice instead of forcing thousands of people to walk away from D&D forever. **We love D&D. We're growing the hobby as we have for decades. Work with us instead of against us.**

Be the heroes. Put down the shovel, and pick up the sword. Be the brave swashbuckler who makes the hard call for the benefit of all. If you don't, we will. You've seen how we've banded together. A month ago, we were arguing like siblings over which edition is best, or D&D vs Pathfinder, but **you've united the entire global community by giving us a common enemy – Hasbro.** You rolled initiative first, not us. And we will keep fighting for what's right, but we don't want you as enemies. We want you as allies, even if less than trustworthy allies. Right now, you're still the BBEG. (Since I notice Hasbro executives clearly don't know D&D from what we've seen the past few weeks, that's, "Big Bad Evil Guy," the villain at the final showdown.) When your children and grandchildren talk about you, let it be with pride – "They fought for freedom and stood up against lies!" **It's not too late for each person at Hasbro reading this to do the right thing.**

10. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the types of content covered by the proposed OGL

1.2?

Understanding: 4; Satisfaction: 1

11. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the content ownership rights outlined in the proposed OGL 1.2?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

12. Do you have any other comments about the types of content covered and/or the content ownership rights outlined by the proposed OGL 1.2?

Content Types

As an advocate for disability rights, specifically within the TTRPG space, this is completely unacceptable. **I have been working with publishers big and small in the past year to improve accessibility throughout the entire industry, and you're trying to stop that, or you at least don't want third party D&D content to be accessible.** While an audiobook version may arguably be a static file, since the only examples you've given are print, PDF, and ePub, and you said other formats cannot be under this license, **you are forbidding disability access.** I'm committed to making audio versions of our books, but under this, I can't unless I make them Fan Content, which would contradict

this license and be financially unfeasible. **So much for all the talk about inclusion and preventing discrimination, yet another lie.** Many publishers have wikis, which make their content easier to navigate and more accessible to people with a wide variety of disabilities. People use browser plug-ins to meet a wide range of accessibility needs, and you just forbade us from producing content in formats like dynamic HTML to offer maximum accessibility.

But it's not just a matter of adding a few extra file formats. It's any number of possibilities, most of which don't exist yet. That's why I want to make them. I want to make an audio mouseover plugin for Foundry VTT that tells you what you're pointing at and can even work like a geiger counter to find the closest token. That's just one idea. For ADHD, I have trouble picking out specific items on a screen of too many things. Some kind of animation with a search function would be helpful, and spell effects help everyone see who's doing what. Someone with short term memory loss might benefit from those frequent animations. That's VTT.

And then there's apps, like imagine a wiki-like app that's all voice controlled and has audio capabilities. Could be done as a web app, but would be nice as a standalone mobile app, too. Encounter builders that allow you to adjust color, font size, background, etc. for different sensory needs. "It's your turn" flashy animation could be helpful for multiple attention & sensory needs. And you forbade interactive character sheets, which are helpful for those with learning and sensory differences. And why do you hate random generators? Those are mostly just harmless fun but can help those with executive dysfunction. The number and variety of assistive technology are infinite and will change as other technology or ideas come available. We need to have those options available and not forbid creative problem solving.

Don't claim that this is all about preventing discrimination. That's just hypocrisy when the license itself is inherently discriminatory. Another lie. But if you insist on that path, you'd better check every line of those 4 corners with an ADA lawyer. I already am.

Content Ownership Rights

You included "Irrevocable" but then immediately redefined it. To quote Inigo Montoya, "You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means."

irrevocable (meaning that content licensed under this license can never be withdrawn from the license).

This doesn't prevent the license itself from being revoked, and if the license is revoked, then that inherently revokes our license to use it. Even if our existing content couldn't be revoked, which this doesn't guarantee, I can't sign contracts with creators for projects that could suddenly become impossible to complete due to license termination. The wording in 1.0a was clearer than this, and we all know how you handled that. **This is a bad faith redefinition.**

13. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the "You Control Your Content" section?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

14. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the “Warranties And Disclaimers” section?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

15. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the “Modification Or Termination” section?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

16. Do you have any other comments about the “You Control Your Content”, “Warranties And Disclaimers”, or “Modification Or Termination” sections?

You Control Your Content

You claim we own our content, but you can at any time terminate this license for some or all of us, thus removing permission to publish it. If you control its distribution, then we don't truly own it. **Another lie.**

Warranties And Disclaimers

(e) No Illegal Conduct. You will not violate the law in any way relating to this license or Your Licensed Works.

Which law? I've published content showing women's knees, which is illegal in some countries. I've published content depicting LGBTQ+ characters, which is illegal in some countries. This would also prevent using it for political speech in some contexts.

No Hateful Content or Conduct. You will not include content in Your Licensed Works that is harmful, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, or harassing, or engage in conduct that is harmful, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, or harassing. We have the sole right to decide what conduct or content is hateful, and you covenant that you will not contest any such determination via any suit or other legal action.

You reserve the right to define this without any ability to contest it? I have friends whose content has been pulled from the DMs Guild for showing "male nipples." This license itself discriminates against disabled, neurodivergent, and mentally ill people. You still sell *Oriental Adventures* and very recently published hateful content in *Spelljammer*. **We clearly cannot trust you to be sole arbiters to define what is and isn't hateful.** If you want to include this, you need to find an independent third party organization or work with the TTRPG community to establish an independent organization to make these decisions using a process that will not put the financial burden of defense on us. Some examples include We Are Many-United Against Hate, Southern Poverty Law Center, The Leadership Conference Education Fund, and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

OGL 1.0a has been available for 18 years, and in that time, the most problematic content has come from WotC, not 3PP. When hateful content surfaces, the community has self-policed the content more effectively than this policy would be. This is a solution to a non-existent problem, an excuse to rescind the rights promised in 1.0a.

Modification Or Termination

Because this license includes several termination options, the **modification rules are meaningless**, since you could at any time terminate the license and replace it with a new one, as is the case with this one.

And because you can use 7(b)(i) at any time without recourse to terminate anyone's license immediately, given the problems with 6(f), and without an independent third party to determine intellectual property infringement, these termination conditions are unacceptable.

And these words, "Creators using OGL 1.2 waive all right to participate in class, collective, or joint action," **fundamentally misunderstand what the D&D community is all about. We don't split the party.**

17. How would you rate your level of understanding and your level of satisfaction with the Virtual Tabletop Policy?

Understanding: 5; Satisfaction: 1

18. Do you have any other comments about the Virtual Tabletop Policy?

First, in case this content is broken up in your system, my comment from #12:

It's any number of possibilities, most of which don't exist yet. That's why I want to make them. I want to make an audio mouseover plugin for Foundry VTT that tells you what you're pointing at and can even work like a geiger counter to find the closest token. That's just one idea. For ADHD, I have trouble picking out specific items on a screen of too many things. Some kind of animation with a search function would be helpful, and spell effects help everyone see who's doing what. Someone with short term memory loss might benefit from those frequent animations.

This policy, which you claim is about preventing hate and discrimination, is a hateful discriminating policy. You believe you can tell people, including disabled people, how to play D&D and what tools we need to do it, but you don't know everyone's abilities, experiences, and needs. VTTs have allowed many people with social anxiety to play D&D on their own terms, and **you're restricting their experience, punishing them for their mental illness**. I understand that you want to eliminate competition for your upcoming VTT, but by trying to do everything yourselves, you place an impossible burden on your developers, and everyone loses. In D&D, you're supposed to be able to play anything you want any way you want, but for the first time in its history, you're dialing that back and placing restrictions on creative expression. That will not endear you to your fans, and "forbids assistive technology for disabled people" isn't a good look in the headlines.

And then there's the lack of a license. This doesn't just have a kill switch. It's just a policy, which can be changed with a single meeting, which you've shown you're likely to do. I can't afford to invest in assistive development for 5e VTT players with the threat that you could forbid it at any time with a company memo. The entire fanbase won't play 5e anywhere online with that threat. We'll move to a different system before you ever get your VTT up and running, and even those who come back will miss all the options they had before.

This also raises the question of whether pre-existing 1.0a content can be published as VTT content once 1.2 "deauthorizes" 1.0a. Since I noted elsewhere all the discriminatory elements of 1.2, my disabled customers are depending on me and others to convert our existing content to VTT for accessibility, but you've made that impossible, since accepting 1.2 for VTT conversion prevents creating audiobooks. We literally have to choose between allowed accessibility measures, depending which license we're using.

And then of course, there's the strange NFT reference you shoehorned into this policy. The entire 3PP industry hates NFTs. The one company (besides Hasbro!) that has attempted this is Gripnr, and the entire fanbase rejected them when announced.

This takes us back to your own words <<https://web.archive.org/web/20211127200600/http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=d20/oglfaq/20040123f>>:

Q: I want to distribute computer software using the OGL. Is that possible?

A: Yes, it's certainly possible. The most significant thing that will impact your effort is that you have to give all the recipients the right to extract and use any Open Game Content you've included in your application, and you have to clearly

identify what part of the software is Open Game Content.

One way is to design your application so that all the Open Game Content resides in files that are human-readable (that is, in a format that can be opened and understood by a reasonable person). Another is to have all the data used by the program viewable somehow while the program runs.

Distributing the source code not an acceptable method of compliance. First off, most programming languages are not easy to understand if the user hasn't studied the language. Second, the source code is a separate entity from the executable file. The user must have access to the actual Open Content used.

See the Software FAQ for more information.

Which reads
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20211122085557/http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=d20%2Foglfaq%2F20040123i>>

Q: So what kinds of programs can I make with the OGL?

A: Anything. Character generators are popular, as are programs that help GMs keep track of their adventure. Random treasure generators are also fun.

Q: So I could make a game?

A: Sure. Remember though, you cannot use any Product Identity with the OGL or claim compatibility with anything. So you can't say your game is a d20 System game or uses D&D rules or call it Elminster's Undermountain Crawl.

You said in the FAQ for this policy:

For over 20 years, thousands of creators have helped grow the

TTRPG community using a shared set of game mechanics that are the foundation for their unique worlds and other creations. We don't want that to change, and we've heard loud and clear that neither do you.

You are clearly changing this and restricting it to everyone's detriment. **You are telling us how we can and can't play D&D. We call this, "Gatekeeping."**

19. Have you used the OGL 1.0a or previous versions of the OGL to create third party content?

Yes

20. Do you want to create third party content for Dungeons & Dragons in the future?

Maybe

21. Would you be comfortable releasing TTRPG content under the proposed OGL 1.2 as written?

No

22. Why do you say that?

Until two weeks ago, I passionately wanted to create under the

OGL, to improve representation and accessibility throughout the D&D ecosystem. But with these strongarm tactics, it's getting harder to justify creating content that supports such a company. I wanted to change the industry for the better, but everything about this new OGL makes it worse. **I can't find a single improvement that this new license provides, and I refuse to discriminate against gamers by accepting the terms of this license.**

If you want us to accept a new license, you need to give us a reason that doesn't feel like extortion.

23. Compared to the OGL 1.0a, do you feel that you would be able to continue developing content the same way under the proposed OGL 1.2?

No

24. Why do you say that?

I've worked with a lot of people in abusive relationships. I have personal experience with them. The way this process has been handled has mirrored the hallmarks of abuse: refusing to take responsibility for your actions (It was just a draft!), gaslighting (We added "irrevocable"!), aggression (Threats toward the "Big 20" to sign with little time to decide), excessive monitoring (financial reporting, scrutinizing our content), attacking our intelligence (If you don't like legal terminology, you can just accept it without reading!), mind games ("claiming you're "giving" us public domain content as Creative Commons), isolation ("Creators using OGL 1.2 waive all right to participate in class, collective, or joint action."),

and promising to change and then doing it again (in the same sentence!).

Between this behavior, the built-in termination options, and the ableist discrimination inherent in this license I cannot in good conscience work under this license.

25. How would you rate your interest in using the Content Creator Badge as part of your third party works?

2

26. Do you have any other comments about Content Creator Badges?

A month ago, I would have given this a 4, proud to have the ampersand on my product (although this one looks amateurish), but now, to have the WotC brand on my product as some kind of endorsement of your company would be hypocritical and a contradiction of our company's stated mission, "Helping you make lives better through TTRPGs." Because this license only makes lives worse.

What other feedback do you have for us (related to the Open Games License or otherwise)?

I was so excited about the future of D&D. Together, we were making the world better, changing lives, and literally saving lives. I haven't been to a movie since before COVID, but I was

eager to go see Honor Among Thieves. I was looking forward to a shared media universe, and I was eager to use that media to introduce more people to the game and the domino effect that would cause. But until Hasbro leadership stops the lies and starts showing some vestige of respect for its fans, my only interactions with WotC products will be words of disappointment and cautionary tales to those who ask for my recommendation.

We just want to play D&D, make cool stuff for it, and be able to support the artists and wordsmiths who dedicate their time and talents to put beautiful wrapping paper on your products without fear of retribution for supporting you.

I truly hope you will rediscover humility and integrity and be the heroes that your media portrays. It's not too late to put down the shovel.

How to Fix a Broken Relationship #OpenDnD

January 30, 2023



Last week, I wrote letters to Chris Cocks, CEO of Hasbro, Dan Rawson, VP of D&D at Wizards of the Coast, and via the Wizards of the Coast support form.

After taking some time to process and listen to others about their announcement Friday, I wrote this follow-up message via the support form.

Hello. Please send this message to the extent of your ability to those in charge of making decisions regarding the future of the OGL, and thank-you for the extra work you have to do because of all this:

Hi, I'm a dad and a commercial OGL content creator dedicated to using TTRPGs (usually 5e so far) to help you make lives better.

This weekend, I spent a lot of time thinking about the future of the OGL and our company's ability to continue our work to improve disability inclusion and accessibility at the tabletop and the rest of the world. And I worried about what it meant for my ability to continue to feed my disabled children.

As our family was cleaning the house over the weekend, I was having trouble keeping my kids on task, and the combined stress eventually led to me yelling at my kids. Especially given my wife's sensitivity to loud noises, yelling only made things worse.

So I sat down, had a cup of tea and a cookie, and apologized to my family. I could've made excuses and claimed I wasn't really yelling or justified my behavior, but none of those would make things better. My family already knew how I was acting and that it was hurting our relationship. The only way to reconcile was for me to apologize.

I've been happily married for 28 years, so I can assure you that a sincere apology goes a lot further than excuses to restore relationships, especially when I demonstrate sincere contrition and change my behavior.

You have hurt the D&D community worse than any past action in its history.

Lies won't fix things. Don't say you were looking for community feedback by sending OGL 1.1 to 20 people under NDA. Don't say you're concerned about D&D NFTs when the OGL already prohibited that, but you've announced Power Rangers NFTs. Don't say you're trying to keep people from producing harmful D&D content after the Hadozee incident and an updated OGL that forbids producing content with accessibility technology. Don't say we all won when truly, we all lost. The whole world, including your company's future, is worse off due to your actions.

But speaking of the Hadozee incident, pay attention to what happened. You apologized sincerely. You changed the offensive content. You implemented policies to keep it from happening again. And while you broke our trust, we're quick to forgive when we believe that you realize the harm you've caused. Forgiveness isn't saying you didn't do anything wrong. It's specifically acknowledging that harm was done but allowing the relationship to continue in spite of that harm.

While this is worse, if you follow the same pattern you did last time, while thousands are understandably too hurt to come back, many of us will. But you need to admit the harm you caused if you want that to happen, nothing like Friday's announcement.

You need to keep the promise you made in the OGL FAQ that was on your website and leave it alone or improve it to show you care about your fan base – add to the SRD, but the only change added to the OGL should be the word, "Irrevocable," to show us you mean it and learned from this. That would be the policy change to keep this from happening again.

That would show that you care about our relationship even if

only as customer and creator.

We as a community have a deep connection to our relationship with D&D, and we hope you want to be a part of that. But you need to show us that you actually care about D&D if you expect to be part of this relationship. We're trying to make it the best it can be. We hope you will too.

Hopefully but skeptically,

Dale Critchley

Wyrmmworks Publishing

If you're willing to communicate your concerns to Hasbro/WotC, you can use the same feedback form.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to [sign the OpenDnD Petition](#). While you're at it, Ryan Dancey, the crafter of the original OGL, has written a petition of his own that's worthy of consideration. [You can read and sign it here.](#)

It takes more than Wizards for a successful D&D Party #OpenDnD

January 30, 2023



DM: As you open the door, a thick green gas billows out but does not dissipate.

Wizard: I cast Gust of Wind to dissipate the gas.

DM: Nothing happens. The feeling you normally experience when you cast a spell is gone. As you reach out to manipulate the Weave, you sense its complete absence, like a magical vacuum. As the gas swirls around you, you notice four bipedal silhouettes approaching quickly. In a moment, their long pointed ears, furry bodies, and grins brimming with confidence and menace take shape as they raise their morning stars to attack. Roll initiative...

Barbarian: I rage and draw their attention. Let's see how well those morning stars match my ax!

Bard: I give Bardic Inspiration to the rogue

Rogue: I use the cover of the mist to hide and prepare for a sneak attack.

Wizard: I...use my dagger, I guess.

The executives at Hasbro have taken the unconscionable initiative to [attempt to eliminate their perceived competition](#), believing that they can play the Dungeons & Dragons game and everything it entails by themselves. [It's not going well](#). But why are standard corporate monetization strategies failing so catastrophically?

Hasbro sees D&D primarily for its intellectual property, as if people will pay just as much for the D&D ampersand on anything as the Nike Swoosh®. But D&D was never about the brand. Yes, its recognition holds substantial power *in the industry*, but its power is ultimately rooted in its core concept. From the free [Basic Rules](#):

There's no winning and losing in the Dungeons & Dragons game—at least, not the way those terms are usually understood. Together, the DM and the players create an exciting story of bold adventurers who confront deadly perils. Sometimes an adventurer might come to a grisly end, torn apart by ferocious monsters or done in by a nefarious villain. Even so, the other adventurers can search for powerful magic to revive their fallen comrade, or the player might choose to create a new character to carry on. The group might fail to complete an adventure successfully, but if everyone had a good time and created a memorable story, they all win.

Basic Rules, p. 3

The TTRPG industry is unlike any I've ever experienced in a commercial industry, because it functions under this same principle. We work together. We don't compete with each other. Cross-promotion is the single most effective form of marketing, as we show others the cool things our "competition" makes, help each other, share tips, and buy and enjoy each other's products. We recognize that we are all one big adventuring party.

Because Hasbro doesn't understand its own product, its executives also don't understand how to market it. They set themselves up as competition in a non-competitive space, thus establishing themselves as the Big Bad Evil Guy (BBEG), at which point an entire industry and their fans who spend their whole lives developing creative solutions to every insurmountable

problem imaginable all roll initiative. We use our diverse skills from every direction and with unique approaches. **The third party publishing community fills in the gaps of unique products for niche needs that a large company like Wizards can't meet due to the difference in scale.** It takes an entire diverse party to succeed at this game, and the action economy, the power of multiple smaller actions against one larger action, will be their undoing.

But more than that, by setting themselves up as our adversaries, they're missing the point that this game is all about fun. It's about community. It's about helping each other out of jams (or oozes...). It's about taking those lessons and applying them to real life, where we don't just find friends, but staunch allies. And it's that fulfillment that keeps bringing us back for more.

What a miserable life to sit alone in your castle as a decaying lich, desperately trying to protect an ampersand-shaped soul cage, while allies fight together and celebrate their victories with songs, drinks, and experience points! Even as they destroy themselves and attempt to destroy everyone around them, I can't help but pity whatever motivates that kind of desperation. As angry as I am that they've chosen to [deliberately remove the promises associated with the OGL from their website](#) so they could [lie about its purpose](#) to betray us, I wish they would go down to their closest FLGS, join in a few games, and experience the true magic of D&D. Maybe the oathbreaker could be redeemed. But until then, we reluctantly raise arms, use memes of Bardic Inspiration to build each other up, and call for the healers to restore those with exhaustion, not until they [declare a winner to try to call off the fight](#), but until the battle is truly won.

10 Steps to Adventuring in a Wheelchair

January 30, 2023



How can a character in a wheelchair be an adventurer in Dungeons & Dragons or other fantasy roleplaying games? While I recently noted that [ramps should be more common than expected](#), no matter how accessible your world is, you'll eventually encounter rough terrain of some kind. Does this make adventuring in a wheelchair impossible?

1. Rough terrain is hard for everyone, thus the name.

Probably the most common question I get: "How can a person in a wheelchair navigate [some kind of terrain]?" This seems to assume everyone else has no problem. It's called rough terrain for a reason. It's difficult for nearly *everyone* to cross. It's like a merfolk asking how you could navigate the ocean with those finless legs. You'd use an assistive device like a boat.

Different environments present different challenges for different people, disabled or not, but it's easy to think from an able-bodied perspective and make assumptions based on our own experiences, calling the difficult "impossible" instead of making it "accessible".

2. Ambulatory wheelchair users exist.

Many people think that anyone in a wheelchair must be paraplegic, but many wheelchair users can walk – it's difficult, painful, or exhausting, but they may well be able to traverse a 10 foot staircase, possibly needing to take a short rest after and find a different means of retrieving their wheelchair from below.

Real-world ambulatory wheelchair users frequently face scorn from people who see them stand up to get something off a shelf or for some other purpose and criticize them for “faking it”. Don't do that, and don't make assumptions about fictional characters' capabilities, either.

3. Are you adventuring alone?

While certain encounters may be difficult for any given individual to navigate, most adventuring parties consist of multiple characters working together. The caster levitates the rogue over the pit. The barbarian protects the caster. The walking party member assists the wheelchair user up the steps. That's the whole point of a balanced party.

I need some LARPerS to demonstrate these. If you do, [contact me](#), and I'll feature you here.

4. Wheelchair users can traverse steps alone.

See for yourself.

5. I present to you the [Ramp](#) spell. (or Floating Disk)

If you have a member of the party who can cast [Floating Disk](#), they can put it under your wheelchair, and it will traverse anything an able-bodied person can. (See #3 above.) If not, I offer this alternative so you can do it yourself.

Ramp

1st-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a wood or stone wedge)

Duration: 10 minutes

This spell creates a plane of force, 6 feet wide, 1 inch thick, and up to 30 feet long, that connects 2 solid objects through an unoccupied space of your choice that you can perceive within range. The plane remains for the duration and can hold up to 500 pounds. If more weight is placed on it, if you move more than 30 feet away from it, or if one of the connected objects moves beyond the length of the plane, the spell ends, and everything on the plane falls to the ground.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the plane length increases by 20 feet for each slot level above 1st.

6. Rope exists in D&D.

You can either have a couple party members tow your chair over the steps or use a grappling hook and [Batman](#) the steps by yourself.

7. Some terrain is easier in a wheelchair.

If you're in a wheelchair, you're not likely to be knocked prone by slippery surfaces, so you're effectively immune to the [Grease](#) spell or other effects that make the ground slippery unless sliding down a ramp, and even then, you probably won't end up prone once you get to the bottom.

8. Heat Metal is a bigger problem for martials than wheelchair users.

I've seen comments that those in wheelchairs are vulnerable to [Heat Metal](#). That assumes the wheelchair is made of metal instead of wood, bone, or some other substance, but even in that case, it probably takes a reaction to push yourself out of a chair until the spell ends. Armor takes 1–5 minutes to doff. The paladin will want help from the wheelchair-using rogue in that case, and is anyone really going to burn a 2nd level spell and their concentration on an escapable wheelchair when they could be turning the fighter into a baked potato?

9. Dodging in a wheelchair.

Can you dodge in a wheelchair? Given that dodging is an action in 5e, there's no reason you couldn't. Paralympians and other wheelchair-using athletes can move with amazing speed and dexterity. Add the superhuman nature of a 5e hero, and players should have no problem imagining this.

10. D&D is a game of creative solutions – that’s what separates it from video games.

I am not disabled, and it took me 20 minutes to compile this list of ideas before researching the details. Were I a disabled adventurer, I’d have a lifetime of ideas how to manage various obstacles. Many people who can’t imagine navigating these obstacles may benefit from honestly attempting to play as a disabled character, to take some time to think and research both accessibility and others’ lived experiences to expand their awareness. Others may choose a magical solution like the hovering capability of the [Combat Wheelchair](#). But it’s D&D – anything is possible, limited only by your imagination and the parameters established at your table.

Castle Curb Cuts: 10 reasons why ramps in D&D dungeons make sense

January 30, 2023



When Jennifer Kretchmer presented the *scandalous* idea of ramps in dungeons in [Candlekeep Mysteries](#), a significant portion of the D&D community couldn't wrap their mental dice bags around such a concept. It seemed incomprehensible to make dungeons more accessible, and I still get *multiple daily* angry or derisive comments to that effect whenever I run Facebook ads promoting our products.

But just as curb cuts, those little ramps in sidewalk curbs, were designed for wheelchairs but benefit strollers, shopping carts, bicyclists, and anyone else who uses wheels, including them in dungeons may be more sensible than stairs, regardless what adventurers may come investigating.

So since I get tired of writing the same responses repeatedly, as do others who fight for accessibility and disability representation, consider these concepts, and feel free to comment below.

1. Are dungeons supposed to be inaccessible?

Dungeons are designed to keep people out!

Are they, though? That depends on the dungeon. It's a generic term that can refer to any number of structures for any number of purposes. Often, a dungeon is a space that has either intentionally or naturally changed purpose over time. Maybe it was once a castle basement used for storage or as a siege shelter. Or a crypt. Or a cave. Or a menagerie. Or a majestic castle. Or a forest in the Feywild. When considering the accessibility of a dungeon (or any other details in its design), the designer must consider its purpose, its owner, its age, its ecology, and many other factors. But while the 10'×10' stone

corridor underground is still a staple, it hardly represents the majority of adventuring environments in D&D.

2. Are dungeons all made from flagstone?

Flagstone, made typically from sandstone or similar materials, is the classic material design for a dungeon, but a dungeon can be packed dirt, a tunnel carved out of a mountain, the alleys in the darker sections of Waterdeep, massive caverns in the Underdark, the City of Brass on the Elemental Plane of Fire, a rickety old wooden mansion, or the rubble of ancient ruins. Each of these presents accessibility challenges to different characters – my tiefling warlock with chronic leg pain will manage a whole lot better than an able-bodied elf druid in the City of Brass, and if the steps in the haunted mansion suddenly become a slide, the walking character will be prone while the wheelchair user holds out a spear and yells, “Charge!”

3. What was the dungeon before it was haunted ruins?

How many people are specifically building dungeons, anyway? They're difficult to make and not particularly practical. Most dungeons used to be something else (or still are). The dragon isn't going to build human-sized steps into its lair. A xorn digging through the Elemental Plane of Earth will create smooth tunnels. Water eroding an ancient cavern won't erode at jagged 90° angles. An ancient dwarven mine would never have stairs (and may even have cart tracks or elevators). And the [inside of a crashed spaceship](#) will have smooth hallways and elevators. That doesn't preclude the possibility of steps, a stone cliff (which is difficult for anyone but the rogue or monk to climb), or

other obstacles, but if you can creatively find a way to cross that pit filled with a gelatinous cube, you can bet that a seasoned adventurer has some tricks up their sleeve to overcome occasional rough terrain.

4. Have you ever tried carrying an occupied coffin down stairs?

Many dungeons were or are still crypts designed either for a wealthy family or to keep an ancient evil contained. If the current occupant came into that crypt in a pine box, you can bet there's a ramp. I've attended and conducted dozens of funerals, and there's a reason modern morticians use carts for coffins – they're heavy, especially with a body in them! (And the bigger the corpse, the heavier.) So if you're carrying that coffin to its (hopefully) final resting place, guiding a cart into an underground crypt on a ramp with a rope will save you a whole lot of effort, even if there's also steps beside the ramp, either permanently or in the form of nearby removable timbers. A party coming to investigate a restless spirit would likely find the accommodations designed by the architect or implemented by a past undertaker.

5. What size creature were your stairs designed for?

Stairs are designed for the people using them, so modern stairs are designed for a human range of heights and foot sizes. But if a dungeon occupied by both a clutch of kobolds and a family of ogres will either require the kobolds to bring climbing gear to scale ogre-sized steps or the ogres to walk sideways up the steps, even then with a lot of foot pain. A ramp easily solves this problem, not to mention making it easier to drag in fresh

meat from a successful hunt or drag out bags of bones of unsuccessful adventurers.

6. How do you feed your monsters?

Speaking of dragging carcasses, you need to feed that hydra that's somehow in a chamber with only 10'x10' corridor access and dispose of its waste. While I recommend an underground river or other sewage drain for the latter (which can be its own security problem when kobolds find it), unless you have a city's worth of *really gullible* bullywugs that are willing to go investigate the noises that you insist are coming from a carnival with [dragonfly ripple ice cream](#), you're going to need to kill something and transport it into those snapping jaws, and you'll have a much easier time pushing it over a ramp than stairs.

7. How did all those stones, trap mechanisms, and monsters get down there?

You know that big treasure chest full of gold and jewels? Yeah, it's probably a mimic. But if it's not, good luck lugging that thing down steps into the deepest chamber. Add tons of flagstone, support timbers, cages filled with monsters, chests of potions bottles, or whatever else you're storing down there. Put those containers on wheels down a ramp, and your building process will be a lot easier.

8. Which lasts longer in treacherous

environments, stairs or ramps?

As noted above, flagstone is usually made from sandstone. Sandstone erodes. That's how sedimentary rock forms. If that ancient staircase is as ancient as you describe, it's probably a ramp by now, albeit irregular, which would be even easier to navigate if it has some landings.

9. Dwarves had specific skills to detect ramps as early as 1st Edition.

In AD&D, dwarves could, "Detect grade or slope in passage: 1-5 on 1d6." In other words, ramps in underground passages aren't some new 5e concept – they're *oldschool*. Some were gradual, thus the check, and some were more obvious, but they had this skill in the first place because when you're digging a mine or underground city and need to move a lot of rock and goods around, slopes make a lot more sense than steps. And elevators, even better. And purple worms don't burrow in straight lines.

10. It's fantasy but makes the real world better.

All this fantasy talk is fun, but real lives are the most important factor. Discussions of "realistic" in a world where a spoken word can transform steps into a ramp or a mudslide or a mimic or a dimensional gateway, what matters most is the effect on our players. Even if a disabled player doesn't want to play a disabled character, including disabled NPCs and the effects of their existence in your world tells your players, "I don't want to imagine a world without you in it."

Improvements in TTRPG Inclusion

January 30, 2023



When we launched [Limitless Heroics](#), we said, "*Limitless Heroics is more than an RPG book. It's a petition.* Back this project, and you communicate to *every game publisher on earth* that disabled people exist and can easily be included in their games, that the customers want that representation, and that accessibility and representation are necessary core features for future products." Some scoffed at that. Others called it virtue signaling. But we truly believe that these small actions have a ripple effect on the industry and the world.

Efforts toward inclusion have definitely improved over the years. Third party products like [Ancestry & Culture](#) and [An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby](#) offer suggestions for better representation and an alternative to the bioessentialism that has had such a prominent role in Dungeons & Dragons throughout its existence. Wizards of the Coast began making changes with [Tasha's Cauldron of Everything](#) and took racial representation to the next level with the announcement of [Journeys through the Radiant Citadel](#), and we applaud these efforts and see the leader

of the industry providing a positive example for racial representation.

But what about disability representation?

The first well-known effort to better represent disabilities in role-playing games came from the viral [Combat Wheelchair](#), followed closely by the inexplicably controversial "ramps in dungeons" adventure in [Candlekeep Mysteries](#), but note that the latter, while published by Wizards of the Coast, was only designed to be accessible by its author, Jennifer Kretchmer, not by direction from the company, which is obvious in that that's the only adventure in the collection that includes any deliberate accessibility. (GURPS and the Hero System also include disabilities, but [it does more harm than good.](#))

Besides a handful of very small games floating around itch.io, Accessible Games produces [Psi-Punk](#) and [Survival of the Able](#), and Evil Hat's [Fate Accessibility Toolkit](#) was the first deliberate representation publication by a second tier publisher, and it's still considered the best of its kind in the industry, and while it's brilliant, it's also the best because it's the only one of its kind until [Limitless Heroics](#) finishes production.

Other third party offerings have stepped into the D&D system with examples like [Adventures in ADHD](#) and our own [Accessible Adventures of the Week](#), but those examples remain rare.

Proof that Tony Stark Has a Heart

But now Marvel has thrown down the Infinity Gauntlet of accessibility with the [Marvel Multiverse RPG](#), [including limited but deliberate disability representation](#). Disney/Marvel by no

means leads the TTRPG space, but they're the first company to enter it in recent years with the potential to challenge WotC on their home turf. While Marvel's past TTRPG offerings haven't challenged D&D for dominance, that's not necessary even now to see more inclusion. (No, I have no illusions that *Limitless Heroics* influenced this decision.)

As more publishers, especially media companies whose reach extends beyond the TTRPG sphere, implement disability inclusion in their game systems and campaign worlds, the more it becomes expected. Imagine how odd a campaign world of all white characters would seem today thanks to the civil rights movements and the ongoing work of millions to demand racial representation. In the same way, games and other media without a broad range of orientations and gender expressions are becoming increasingly expected.

The more we see accurate and positive disability representation throughout different forms of media, the more it becomes a standard. I look forward to the day when the *lack* of disability representation becomes noticeable.

Should you have disabled PCs in your TTRPG? (Part 2 of 2)

January 30, 2023



In my [previous post](#), I discussed whether you should have disabled characters in your Dungeons & Dragons or other tabletop role-playing game. I won't rehash that discussion, so if you haven't, [read it first](#).

So people have said, "Sure, disabled (non-player) characters make sense, but adventurers?" Let's take a look at the most common arguments against disabled PCs.

Again, it's not a question of what you should do, but whether this is harmful or beneficial. It's a question of whether it will benefit your players and you as the DM. It's a question of whether having disabled PCs in your party will make a difference in the real world. It may seem like a fantasy game wouldn't make a difference in the real world, but when we play in interactive fantasy worlds, it affects our real world minds – players are affected by their characters.

Why would a disabled character choose to be an adventurer?

"Why would they choose a lifestyle that's likely to get them killed?" This question has two erroneous assumptions:

1. Adventurers usually choose to be adventurers as a career path.
2. Disabled characters are more likely to get killed adventuring than non-disabled people.

We'll address #2 below, but look at your characters' backgrounds. How many of them *chose* to be adventurers? How many of them *were chosen*, either by desperation or some other external event or circumstance?

In most fantasy worlds, adventurers are relatively rare. Most people never travel farther than a few miles from home their entire lives, needing to stay close to the family home, farm, or business, where multiple generations have lived. While fame and fortune are appealing, until the invention of the internal combustion engine, people didn't usually travel unless compelled to by catastrophe, persecution, governmental obligation (i.e. military or diplomatic), or religious pilgrimage unless they had a lot of money.

A character beginning their adventuring career disabled might do so for multiple reasons related to their disability, such as the catastrophe that caused their disability or rejection by their ableist village or family. But they also might do so for any of the other reasons that lead people to think their chances in life are better staring down the smoking maw of a dragon, like rescuing a loved one, growing in their understanding of the arcane, the "cause of righteousness," or revenge. Because they are persons, they begin with all the potential reasons for a person to become an adventurer. Because they have disabilities, they have even more potential reasons. A complex character would have multiple reasons that culminated in their decision.

Why would a party put up with a disabled character?

People with disabilities are people, not burdens. Any suggestion to the contrary indicates more about you than about disabled people. People are to be valued, not tolerated, regardless of

any of their characteristics.

But are disabled adventurers a liability to the party? Everyone has strengths and challenges. Often, our challenges strengthen us. Other times, they're just extra challenges. In Dungeons & Dragons fifth edition, characters have opportunities to add depth to their characters with characteristics like bonds and flaws, and a character with a loose tongue or short temper is more likely to cause a problem for a party than a character with a disability.

How could a disabled adventurer survive?

Everyone has strengths and challenges, so everyone learns to use their strengths to compensate for their challenges. If you live in poverty, you learn to stretch your funds. If you work far from home, you get a vehicle that helps you get back and forth efficiently. If you're blind, you learn to use your other senses to navigate the world using cues from your other senses.

We use tools like swords to compensate for a lack of natural weapons, mail for a lack of natural armor, or a walking stick for lack of vision, wheelchair for a lack of being able to stand or walk a long time, or ear plugs for a lack of tolerance for loud noises.

And we depend on each other. Most adventuring parties have a wide range of abilities, whether martial prowess, skill specialties, or spell casting. A dragonborn may consider lack of natural armor as any physical, mental, or emotional disability, and to the average dungeon-delver, that same sighted dragonborn without Darkvision is at a much greater disadvantage than a totally blind human, but both need help from the rest of the

party.

Why wouldn't a disabled PC cure themselves?

In a world full of healing magic, while a player who is disabled in real life may want to play a character like themselves who overcomes obstacles, what in-game reason would a character have for eschewing healing magic to fix them?

Aside from the general rarity of high level clerics who can cast *greater restoration*, which still doesn't work on congenital disabilities, this question fails to recognize the perspective of many people with disabilities. When a person has had a disability for many years, they get used to navigating the world with it. Many deaf people who could get a cochlear implant choose not to and feel perfectly whole without it. Many people with autism are terrified of having a hypothetical cure forced on them. While a non-disabled person can't imagine choosing to keep a disability or neurodivergence, that stems more from our fear of the unknown or needing to adapt in new ways than the overall change in quality of life.

It's difficult for the DM

Accessibility is inherent in good adventure design, adapting the campaign for the Player Characters. If a ranger has fiends as a preferred enemy, the Dungeon Master needs to make sure to include fiends as enemies. If a warlock has The Fathomless as a patron, the Dungeon Master needs to make sure to include some seafaring adventures. Depending on the trait, disabilities are even easier than class features. Disabilities put more responsibility on the rest of the party than on the DM, as the party needs to work together to support each other just as the

barbarian usually takes the lead in battle, and the wizard typically stays back.

So is it beneficial?

Having established that playing a disabled or neurodivergent character isn't detrimental to a party, so there's no reason *not* to include them, do players have a good reason to play them? Is it beneficial?

Given that disability is the largest minority in the world, every player will encounter members of that demographic and likely become part of it eventually. By playing that role and learning firsthand how people navigate the world with disabilities, they will develop empathy and respect, they will learn firsthand to dispel rumors, and they will be more welcoming to a wider variety of people.

If you'd like help introducing disabled characters into your game, I encourage you to check out [Limitless Heroics!](#)

Should you have disabled characters in your Dungeons & Dragons game? (Part 1 of 2)

January 30, 2023



On the release of our first [Accessible Adventure of the Week](#), the question arose, as it always seems to, “Why would I play a disabled character? They wouldn’t last 10 minutes in a dungeon!” While this led to some interesting discussions, it’s a question people will ask, whether openly or in their minds. So as we prepare for not only many more of these adventures and [NPCs](#), but also the [Limitless Heroics](#) book that will provide fifth edition game mechanics for nearly every trait in existence, the question is worth asking and exploring.

Personally, I’m not a fan of “should” or any sense of moral superiority (not that I’m innocent of it – it’s a tempting trap), but I’ve come to see the world and decisions in terms of “harmful” and “beneficial” (and certainly some decisions are neutral as they’re neither of the former). (Maybe this paradigm could help with all the hand-wringing about alignment in D&D – probably not.)

So then are disabled characters in D&D beneficial? (For brevity, when I say, “Disabled,” I’m referring to all matters of disability and illness, whether physical, mental, or emotional, and all varieties of neurodiversity.) My bias is obvious, but then *why* is it beneficial?

- **Representation.** People want to be able to play someone like them and have characters appear in the game that communicate, “You are welcome here. You belong.”
- **Encountering the Other.** Role-play is a powerful teaching tool that allows us to experience and walk through various

life situations with minimal consequences that will allow us to avoid negative consequences when we encounter an analogous situation in real life. So when we learn to interact with a disabled character in-game, we're learning to interact with a disabled person in real life and become more comfortable around them, but if we accidentally say or do something harmful, we can learn from the mistake without actually harming someone (or at least less so – players are real people).

- **Experiencing the Other.** By playing a disabled character, we can get a small taste of the challenges someone with those traits experiences (a very small taste, since we can turn it on and off at will and only imagine the experience), but if we play them with complexity as we would any other character, we learn to see disabled people as complex people, not cardboard stereotypes or [inspiration porn](#).
- **Cooperation.** One of the most important lessons I've personally learned in the writing of *Disabilities & Depth* is the benefit that I as a non-disabled person can be to disabled people. We all need each other – independence is a harmful lie. Shorter people ask me (6'3") to get items off top shelves at stores. Blind people may ask you to describe something for them. Having a slight hearing impairment, I often ask, when the TV captions are unreliable, "What did they say?" D&D is an inherently cooperative game, and learning how best to cooperate with disabled people in-game will help us be more sensitive and helpful in real life.
- **Acknowledging the reality.** It's easy for non-disabled people to wish away disabilities, and when it's not part of every moment of every day or a significant amount of any given day, it's easy to forget that disability exists – it's not something non-disabled people think about. And

when we're not considering the *existence* of disabled people, we're not considering the *needs* of disabled people, which leads to ableism through ignorance. The more we recognize that disabled people are part of our world, the more we expect to see them in all representations of existence without it seeming odd, just as a world lacking women would seem odd (and probably the main point of the narrative or campaign world). Think about that – a fantasy world without disabled people should have, “Where are all the disabled people?” as a primary narrative. If that's not the point of the story, ask yourself why you chose to alter that aspect of reality and what that decision means.

But then we need to consider the converse: is excluding disabled characters from D&D beneficial, harmful, or neutral?

I just showed how, at the very least, it's odd. It doesn't make sense. Even in a world with healing spells, at the very least, even [greater restoration](#) can't restore a limb that was never there in the first place. Plus, clerics and other healers are rare. Not every clergy is a cleric. And not every cleric is high enough level to cast more than a daily [cure wounds](#) or two. There's simply not enough healing magic for every injury and illness, especially when plagues sweep through. And then there's socio-economic factors. (The king doesn't want people camping outside the castle so the high priestess can come through and select some for healing each day – she should save those spell slots for ~~him~~ emergencies!)

Is it beneficial in the sense of escapism? When you play D&D, you're going to a fantasy world that doesn't have real world problems, right? Because that green dragon is nothing like your conniving boss? That bullying ogre is nothing like your obnoxious coworker or classmate? If you play D&D for the power fantasy, how does the presence of disabled people interrupt

that? These questions are not accusations – they’re questions for self-reflection.

Is it harmful to exclude disabled people from your game world? What about excluding people with dark skin? What about excluding women from adventuring roles? Like any other people group, it’s beneficial for your own self-awareness to ask yourself, “Why does my fantasy world include the kinds of people that it does and exclude the kinds that it does? Why did I make that decision, even if it wasn’t a conscious decision? What have I learned about myself?” It also begs the question, “When I have the opportunity to be beneficial at little or no cost to myself and choose not to, is that inherently harmful?”

How does using disabled characters relate to the goal of D&D?

When I was in high school, our D&D group was at a church lock-in (overnight party). During free time, we found an unused room and played D&D. People would stop by and listen in and invariably ask, “Who’s winning?” All the players would point at the DM and say, “HE IS!” But in reality, we were all winning. We were having a great time. We were bonding with each other, learning teamwork, practicing math, and benefiting in all the ways D&D is beneficial. To me, the goal of D&D is to have fun, regardless whether we complete the quest as expected.

That said, there’s a sense of satisfaction in completing the quest, in powering up, in gaining loot or recognition or all the many goals players have for their characters. But does disability detract from that?

There’s a reason each character class has limitations – the game is no fun if you can literally do anything. Were that the case,

you wouldn't need dice (and could give them all to me!). No, the game is about facing challenges and finding creative solutions to those challenges with help from your allies. But isn't that the life of a disabled person? If anything, a disabled character who still uses class abilities is the quintessential D&D character – someone with disadvantages and challenges who isn't helpless and can achieve their goals, not *in spite of* their challenges, but *regardless of* their challenges, because while their challenges are part of them, they don't define them.

So then should we pressure or require disabled characters?

Again with the “should” – what is harmful or beneficial? Forcing someone to play a disabled character would not be beneficial. It would not be fun. They would learn the wrong lesson.

I've also learned that moral pressure to do *anything* is harmful – it leads to resentment or self-righteousness, and either way, it never lasts or actually changes hearts and minds.

Rather, the more we introduce disabled characters as NPCs or through other players who would like to do so, the more we offer and demonstrate the benefits of doing so, but that's only possible when we normalize the presence of competent and capable disabled characters in the game world.

I welcome your thoughts in the comments below. If you, like me, would like to include the benefits of disabled characters in your game, I invite you to sign up for our newsletter so you don't miss our resources that will help you do that, many of which are free.

Note: This is the first of 2 in a series. [Read Part 2 Here.](#)

We're changing our character class!

January 30, 2023



It's been a while since we posted new content, but that's not because we've been using downtime to kick back at the inn! Since *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* says we can change class & subclass when we level up, we're taking her up on that opportunity! We've been training & working on some new magic that will be a *massive* level up!

You may have noticed the [Patreon links](#) around here. Fly over there, and you'll see what's coming. Here's a short list of *some* of it:

- **Major change in focus to using RPGs to make people's lives better**
- New book with instructions for adding disabled characters to D&D with ~300 pages of tables, descriptions, game mechanics, magic items, and more.
- Complete website overhaul to be as accessible as possible
- Random generators
- Podcast with interviews discussing using RPGs to make people's lives better
- Training for individuals and organizations in how to use

RPGs to make people's lives better

Note that the Wyrmling [Patreon level](#) gives free access to every product we produce, and the Young Dragon level gives a lot more, with access to prerelease content *literally as it's being written*, the ultimate look behind the curtain.

And finally, we plan to *exponentially* increase our content output as Patreon support buys more time away from other commitments to focus on the work of helping you make people's lives better through RPGs. If you would like to be a part of making this happen, you can do so for as little as \$3/month.

Expect a major public launch once our modrons get everything in place. That will happen sooner the more support we get from our patrons now. If you'd like to get this adventure started, [please consider helping make it happen](#) so we can help you make people's lives better through RPGs.