

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

August 15, 2021



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!](#)

Gaining Advantage 003: Sweet

Charity in TTRPGs (Honey & Dice)

August 15, 2021



Sometimes, it can be hard to #LoveYourYou, but nothing like the support you can get from your gaming group to help with that! We welcome Honey from Honey & Dice to bring you some sweetness.

In our “Playing the Other” segment, we welcome Sebastian Yūe to talk about eating disorders and RPGs.

Content Warning: Eating Disorders

0:28 Introduction & Announcements

4:26 Honey and Dice

17:13 Sebastian Yūe on Eating Disorders

30:00 Wrap-up

Manually captioned. Transcript available at our website.

Honey & Dice links

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/honeyanddice>
- Instagram: <https://instagram.com/honeyanddice>
- www.honeyanddice.com

Sebastian Yūe Links

- Website: <http://sebastianyue.ca/>
- DMs Guild:
<https://www.dmsguild.com/browse.php?author=Sebastian%20Y%C5%Abe>
- itch.io: <https://sebastianyue.itch.io/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sebastianyue>
- Lake of Secrets:
https://www.dmsguild.com/product/319812/Lake-of-Secrets?affiliate_id=1917806

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The Ember Elk □□□ (Accessible Adventure of the Week)

August 15, 2021



The fire is coming. Will you prevent it in time?

It's an old forest with majestic trees so thick that the canopy darkens the forest floor, but a looming danger is coming: the Ember Elk! What will happen to the forest when this flaming deer appears? And what about the goblin woman living in the cottage in the woods – can you save her?

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This adventure includes new stat blocks:

- Monster: The Ember Elk
- NPC: [Arieni Kettlewhistle](#) (Our free Disabled NPC of the Week)

4K Battle Map available [free to subscribers](#) or for [purchase at DriveThruRPG](#)

Make Lives Better through Role-Playing Games

This adventure is one piece of a movement within the D&D community to invite, encourage, and include those who have not been, both in the RPG community and nearly everywhere in real life. Wyrnworks Publishing is dedicated to using RPGs to help you make lives better, to provide tools, training, and a community to this end. We believe that this will extend far beyond the ever-growing RPG community as more and more people learn, grow, and give and receive acceptance.

To that end, this adventure includes disabled NPCs just like in real life, including paralysis and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

This free adventure includes a simplified version for screen readers for the blind and visually impaired, stat blocks and information for two monsters, a new artifact, a village map, and multiple NPCs, plus illustrations of each NPC for your players.

Content Trigger Warnings

This adventure includes topics of violence, death of both people and animals, property destruction, and betrayal.

[Download Free Now!](#)

Arieni Kettlewhistle (Disabled NPC of the Week) now at DMs Guild

August 15, 2021



Arieni Kettlewhistle is a fourth level Ranger (Hunter) halfling who happens to have a paralyzed arm, but she has no problem wielding her hand crossbow and short sword in the other hand! She also has Attention Deficit, so she's easily distracted by interesting plants and fungi, but that hyperfixation makes her a fearsome opponent to vegepygmies and other plant creatures!



Get it free now!

Arieni Kettlewhistle is featured in the Accessible Adventure of the Week, [The Ember Elk](#).

We all have disabled, neurodivergent, and mentally ill people in our lives. Maybe that's you. Doesn't it make sense to have them in our Dungeons & Dragons game, as well? The disabled NPC of the week makes it easy for you to bring characters like that into your game to represent those you care about in real life, to help people become comfortable interacting with people that are different from them, and to normalize disability in all of our lives. Each week, we give you a free NPC with some form of disability that you can plug right into your game, complete with

game mechanics taken from the [Disabilities and Depth](#) book. Sign up for our newsletter at wyrmsworkspublishing.com to get notified of more free weekly content!

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Content Trigger Warnings

This character includes topics of violence.

[Get this NPC free now!](#)

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

August 15, 2021



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.](#)

Avery Penn ☐ (Disabled NPC of the Week) now at DMs Guild

August 15, 2021



Avery Penn is a 20-year-old female human innkeeper. She has very long, curled, dark hair and brown eyes. She has rugged, dirty, brown skin. She stands 172cm (5'7") tall and has a round build. She has a tattoo of a cobra on her right arm and a colorful tattoo of the word fear translated into draconic on her back. Born without a left hand, she has a wooden prosthetic with a leather strap and cam cleat that allows her to hold things with it. She is friendly and self-confident and enjoys listening to the villagers' stories, celebrating with them and being a shoulder to cry on.

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We all have disabled, neurodivergent, and mentally ill people in our lives. Maybe that's you. Doesn't it make sense to have them in our Dungeons & Dragons game, as well? The disabled NPC of the week makes it easy for you to bring characters like that into your game to represent those you care about in real life, to help people become comfortable interacting with people that are different from them, and to normalize disability in all of our lives. Each week, we give you a free NPC with some form of disability that you can plug right into your game, complete with

game mechanics taken from [Limitless Heroics – Including Characters with Disabilities, Mental Illness, and Neurodivergence in Fifth Edition](#).

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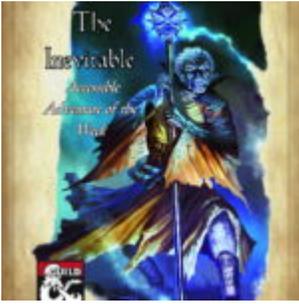
Content Trigger Warnings

This character includes topics of death and family loss.

[Go Get the Freebie!](#)

The Inevitable ☐ (Accessible Adventure of the Week)

August 15, 2021



A one-shot side-quest for characters level 4-6.

Can Peace Be Maintained Indefinitely?

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The village that makes its subsistence on spiced melon and red rye holds a dark secret, and the shoemaker and his wife will upset the perfect peace.

This adventure includes stat blocks for the following, which may be used in other adventures:

- [Avery Penn](#) (Disabled NPC of the Week)
- Deathlok (Lich Patron)
- Undead Wolves
- Artifact: Crystal of Peace

4K Maps are [free for all subscribers](#) or can be [purchased from DriveThruRPG](#)

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To that end, this adventure includes disabled NPCs just like in real life, including a unique prosthetic arm, a character with chronic pain, and more.

This free adventure includes a simplified version for screen readers for the blind and visually impaired, stat blocks and information for two monsters, a new artifact, a village map, and multiple NPCs, plus illustrations of each NPC for your players.

Content Trigger Warnings

This adventure includes topics of violence, death of both people and animals, ableism, and undead people and animals.

This adventure was created as part of the Summer 2021 [Storytelling Collective](#).

[Get It Now Free!](#)

Gaining Advantage 002: Support your local Indie TTRPG (Creators, Assemble!)

August 15, 2021



Welcome to Moni Barrette, Co-Founder of [Creators, Assemble!](https://www.creatorsassemble.org/), a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting indie creators and promoting education through popular culture and gaming. We talk about TTRPGs in education and what they can do for independent content creators! In “Playing the Other,” we welcome Heather Thomas to talk about Executive Dysfunction and Intrusive Thoughts and how those would play out in Dungeons & Dragons or other role-playing games.

Content Trigger Warning: Suicidal Ideation

- 0:14 Introduction
- 3:28 Creators, Assemble! Interview
- 21:27 Heather Thomas on Executive Dysfunction & Intrusive Thoughts
- 39:41 Wrap-up

Creators, Assemble: <https://www.creatorsassemble.org/>

<https://twitter.com/CreatorsAssemb>

<https://twitter.com/MoniBarre>

Heather's Twitch Channel: <https://www.twitch.tv/lyndicat>

Gaining Advantage 001: Dungeons & Dragons & Therapy (Game to Grow)

August 15, 2021



Role-Playing Games are good for mental health, right? Of course! But what happens when it's used for therapy? For our inaugural episode, we welcome [Adam Davis](#) from [Game to Grow](#)!

We also take a look at Reactive Attachment Disorder and how one might include a character with this condition in a TTRPG.

Like what you hear? [Join the movement](#), and get lots of freebies!

- 00:00 Introduction
- 13:22 Game to Grow
- 51:32 Playing the Other: Reactive Attachment Disorder

- WyrmworkePublishing.com (Free newsletter with weekly freebies)
 - [Support us!](#)
 - [@wyrmworke](#) on Twitter
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Disabilities & Depth: Preview Table Edition](#) (Free!)
 - [Game to Grow Newsletter](#)
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We're changing our character class!

August 15, 2021



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.