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

August 3, 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, its 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 3, 2021
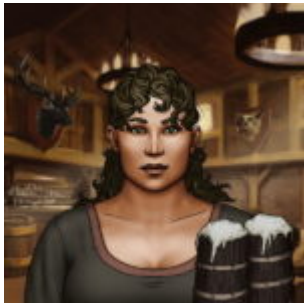
Avery Penn is a 20-year-old female human innkeeper. She has very long, curled, dark hair and brown eyes. She has rugged, dirty, brown skin. She stands 172cm (5'7″) tall and has a round build. She has a tattoo of a cobra on her right arm and a colorful tattoo of the word fear translated into draconic 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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¡sGet It Free Now!

character also includes a description of her inn, The Bronze Mandolin, as

featured in the Accessible Adventure of the Week, [*The Inevitable*](#).

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](#).

Make Lives Better through Role-Playing Games

This character 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. Wyrmworks 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.
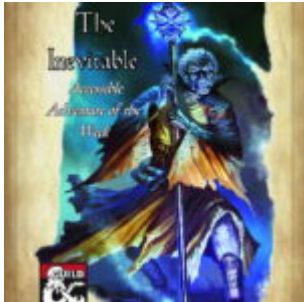
Content Trigger Warnings

This character includes topics of death and family loss.

[Go Get the Freebie!](#)

The Inevitable 🗲 (Accessible Adventure of the Week)

August 3, 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 3, 2021

Welcome to Moni Barrette, Co-Founder of [Creators, Assemble!](#), 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 3, 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

- [WyrmworksPublishing.com](#) (Free newsletter with weekly freebies)
- [Support us](#)!
- [@wyrmworksdale](#) on Twitter
- [Facebook](#)
- [Disabilities & Depth: Preview Table Edition](#) (Free!)
- [Game to Grow Newsletter](#)

Silver Dragon: Draconic Omnibus, Vol. 2

August 3, 2021

[Buy now at the Dungeon Masters Guild](#)

We're thrilled to announce our [first entry on the DM's Guild, *Silver Dragon: Draconic Omnibus, Vol. 2*](#). Look into the world of the "shield dragon", and discover how it fits into your 5e campaign!

This supplement includes:

- Dragon Background Option Charts
- Implied Abilities based on their stat blocks
- Associated Creatures, including 4 new draconic hybrid creatures with complete stat blocks
- Spellcasting
- Lair and Hoard Details, including combat strategies based on age
- 2 New Magic Items
- 2 New Spells
- Ideas for using the dragon in your campaign
  - Dragon as Group Patron
  - And more…
- Ideas for using the dragon with your character
  - Contact
  - Paladin Oath Of Loyalty
  - Druid Circle Of Clouds
  - Barbarian Path Of The Silver Dragon
  - Bard College Of Affinity
  - Monk Way Of The Wind
  - Dragon-Associated Feats
  - Subraces And Variants
  - Dragon-Related Character Backgrounds

Also, get the [additional supplement](#) that includes details to include this dragon in the Caphora: The Divided Continent campaign setting.

All [creature](#) and character options are available in the D&D Beyond Homebrew section. Just search for author: doulos12.

[New Monster Stats](#) also available for Lion's Den's Game Master 5

How well do you really know the dragons? Sure, you've memorized their stat block, but these are intelligent complex beings who affect the world and your characters so much more than a big lizard in a cave! Welcome to the [Draconic Omnibus](), a multi-volume set detailing the canon 5e dragons and some new varieties to round out the set.

Rose Gold Dragon: Draconic Omnibus, Vol. 1

August 3, 2021
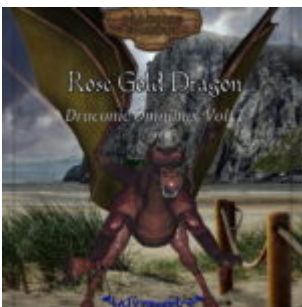
Rose Gold Dragons are known for their love of children. Stories abound of children lost in the wilderness or at sea who are rescued by a rose gold dragon or some other creature of a similar hue.

At the same time, these stories have sometimes grown darker, with suspicion that questions the motivations of these creatures, and anytime a child goes missing in the vicinity of a rose gold dragon layer, the dragon becomes the primary suspect.

Download at DriveThruRPG
This supplement includes:

- Full All-Ages Stat Blocks complete with Legendary and Lair Actions
- Dragon Background Option Charts
- Associated Creatures
- Implied Abilities based on their stat blocks
- Spellcasting
- Lair and Hoard Details, including combat strategies based on age
- 2 New Magic Items
- 1 New Spell
- Ideas for using the dragon in your campaign
    - Dragon as Group Patron
    - And more…
- Ideas for using the dragon with your character
    - Contact
    - New Warlock Patron
    - New Paladin Oath
    - Sorcerer Draconic Bloodline variation
    - New Bard College
    - New Monk Way
    - Dragonborn variation
    - New Character Background

This supplement includes details to include this dragon in the

Caphora: The Divided Continent campaign setting from Wyrmworks Publishing, but it can also be used as-is by changing a few location names in any campaign setting.

All [creature](#) and character options are available in the D&D Beyond Homebrew section. Just search for author: doulos12.

How well do you really know the dragons? Sure, you've memorized their stat block, but these are intelligent complex beings who affect the world and your characters so much more than a big lizard in a cave! Welcome to the [Draconic Omnibus](#), a multi-volume set detailing the canon 5e dragons and some new varieties to round out the set.

Elves and Orcs: Building Cross-Cultural Relationships (Critical Success)

August 3, 2021

In most fantasy literature since Tolkien, elves and orcs live at constant odds with each other. Among other reasons are their cultural differences and their inability to see each others'

viewpoints. Elves typically live for a millennium, whereas orcs have shorter lifespans than humans. Time alive, both how long it's been and how long one expects to have left, changes perspective.

Even on a human level, I see this play out. Teens tend to feel like they have unlimited time, and depending on how their formative years have played out, that can mean unlimited possibilities or a sense of hopelessness. The older I get, I expect to have less years remaining than I've already had, so I feel a sense of urgency to accomplish my dreams, whereas others my age or older have given up.

Either way, we can learn from each other, and that's something I love about my D&D group, which ranges in age from teens to 40's. Unlike many games and sports, D&D and other tabletop role-playing games are cooperative and depend on players working together toward a goal. They have to help each other and use teamwork, and those different perspectives they bring to the table help to give them success.

But more than just success in the game, they build relationships. Teens benefit drastically from multiple positive relationships with adults besides family, teachers, and clergy, not that I'm discounting those by any means. They need adults who choose to spend time with them out of mutual respect instead of perceived obligation. (Yes, parents, teachers, and clergy are usually in those positions in the first place because they care, but that's not always the teen's perception.) Correctly managed, D&D can foster those multigenerational relationships based on the collaborative work and mutual respect that lead to success in the game.

Promoting those relationships is remarkably simple and boils down to two principles: encouragement and common ground.

When a teen experiences encouragement from adults communicating to them that they're lovable, capable, and worthwhile, it builds their self-worth and helps cement those relationships. Adults can communicate this by asking the teens for help and complimenting them on their accomplishments. They also experience support when they find others experiencing the same feelings, even in different circumstances (common ground). At the same time, this helps adults recognize the unique contributions that teens bring. And all of this comes from sincere care and camaraderie.

While I've specifically focused on adult-teen relationships here, these same principles apply to any number of cross-cultural relationships, whether racial, socio-economic, political, or any other dynamic, even if all participants are the same generation.

[Recent publications of D&D materials](#) have moved toward breaking down in-game racial boundaries, which the Caphora campaign setting did from its inception, and if we're to get stronger in real life, we can follow this example. Maybe elves and orcs can respect each other after all.

Arcane Tradition: Biomancer (5e)

August 3, 2021

Like a little mad science in your fantasy? What if Dr. Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau could manipulate the Weave? Where do the hybrid creatures and characters come from in your game? Introducing: the Biomancer.

[Download from DriveThruRPG](#)

Biomancers have learned to use the Weave to manipulate life itself, accessing a form of magic unavailable to most wizards. While other wizards can use Biomancy spells, they lose their proficiency bonus due to the strangeness of the magic.

This supplement includes **4 subclasses**, **11 new spells**, and **3 new backgrounds**.

Some consider biomancy unnatural, but it's the biomancers of Tanmaa who are responsible for many of the hybrid and augmented creatures who fill the Western Division of Caphora, and while biomancers have been blamed for some of the plagues that have struck the continent, they're the first to be called when plague strikes to control it.

Most biomancers are found in the labs of Tanmaa, but some nobles hire them as extremely expensive personal physicians. Some

biomancers are the products of their own labs who have learned, through observation and sometimes deliberate training, to use the very magic that created them.

Biomancers specialize in one of four forms of the craft: **Somaturgy**, **Neuroturgy**, **Amalgamism**, and **Miasmism**. They can use other biomancy spells but prefer their own tradition.

Other Campaign Worlds

While the Biomancer was developed specifically for the Caphora campaign setting, which you can download **free** from our website, it will work with most existing campaign worlds, especially those with a slight "mad science" or steampunk element, gnomes who like to tinker, or campaign worlds with hybrid creatures or characters.

Arcane Tradition: Nullimancy (5e)

August 3, 2021

[Download now at DriveThruRPG](#)

Nullimancers have learned the secret art of tapping into and

manipulating the all-consuming energy of Oblivion. They can generate it and transform it to a variety of effects, all of which destroy matter or energy in some way. This results in new spells and features, and several existing spells have Nullimancy versions that use Oblivion instead of the Weave.

The Nullimancer is a Wizard Arcane Tradition using an entirely new form of magic from the Caphora campaign world, but it can also be used in other settings.

This product contains the **full subclass**, **14 new spells**, and a **new magic item**, all based on nullimancy magic.

All play content is also available in the D&D Beyond Homebrew section so you can easily add it to your campaign in [Subclasses](), [Spells](), and [Magic Items]().