

***STORYTELLING
BEYOND
SIGHT
INCLUSIVE
HANDBOOK***

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the handbook "STORYTELLING BEYOND SIGHT," a comprehensive guide designed to bridge the gap between the world of roleplaying games (RPGs) and the unique experiences of blind and visually impaired (BVI) individuals. This handbook is crafted to serve as a valuable resource for game masters, players, youth workers, and anyone interested in inclusive and accessible nonformal education.

Module 1: Understanding RPGs and Their Potential

In the first module, we delve into the idea and concept of role playing games, highlighting their benefits for all players. This section introduces the world of RPGs and their significance in fostering creativity, collaboration, and inclusivity. RPGs provide a platform where players can embark on thrilling adventures, solve mysteries, and forge unforgettable narratives together. We cover the mechanics of RPGs, character creation, skill-checks, party dynamics, challenges and encounters, and the length and complexity of games.

Additionally, this module references online resources for non experienced RPG players and future game masters, making it an excellent starting point for newcomers.

Module 2: Classification of RPGs for Inclusive Play

The second module explores a variety of RPG systems, including the d20 system, the storytelling system, the Fate Core system, the PPTA system, the Fiasco system, and others. This section provides a comparative analysis of different systems, helping readers understand the unique features and mechanics of each, enabling them to choose the most suitable system for their needs.

Module 3: Characteristics of the blind and visually impaired players

In the third module, we provide a basic overview of several key concepts, including Braille proficiency among BVIs, accessibility, assistive/adaptive technology, and the classification of blind individuals using the functional model of disability. This section serves as a foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities in making RPGs accessible to BVI players.

Module 4: Inclusive Facilitation Techniques

The fourth module focuses on specific methods, techniques, and strategies to enhance the RPG experience for BVIs. It discusses the strengths and limitations of ordinary rulebooks, game mechanics, and other essential materials for successful RPGs, providing alternative accessible options and tips for game masters to overcome these challenges with BVI players collaboratively.

Module 5: Real-world Examples and Research Results

This module is dedicated to sharing good practices of inclusive and accessible roleplaying. It highlights initiatives such as the Knights of the Braille Community, the study on card gaming experiences of BVIs, and the therapeutic role of RPG methods used by the NGO “Game to Grow” among others. These examples serve as inspiring models for creating inclusive RPG experiences. Moreover, this module provides an overview of this project’s research, offering insights from focus groups held in North Macedonia and Greece with youth workers and BVIs. This section presents valuable findings and recommendations based on real-world experiences, contributing to the ongoing conversation about accessibility in RPGs.

Glossary

The final part of this handbook is the glossary, which includes essential terms for every reader of this handbook. It serves as a quick reference guide to ensure clarity and understanding of the key concepts discussed throughout the modules.

Who is this Handbook For?

This handbook aims to be a valuable tool for various audiences:

Youth Workers: Essential for those working with BVI youth, providing insights and practical advice for inclusive gaming experiences

Storytellers and RPG facilitators: Most likely to be interested in Modules 3 to 6, focusing on accessibility and inclusive practices.

Blind and Visually Impaired Individuals: Will benefit from reading the entire handbook to understand how RPGs can be tailored to their needs.

General Audience: Anyone interested in non-formal education and accessibility for people with visual impairments will find this handbook informative and engaging. Exploring the concepts, strategies, and good practices detailed in this handbook, we hope to foster a more inclusive and creative RPG community that welcomes and supports players of all abilities.

Welcome to the Storyteller's Inclusive Handbook, a comprehensive guide crafted to facilitate inclusive RPG (Role-Playing Game) sessions for visually impaired youth. This handbook is the culmination of extensive research, practical experiences, and a passionate commitment to making the world of tabletop roleplaying accessible to all.

Our mission is to break down barriers and ensure that everyone, regardless of visual ability, can partake in the rich, imaginative, and collaborative storytelling that RPGs offer. The content within this guide addresses the unique challenges faced by visually impaired participants, offering tailored strategies to enhance their gaming experience.

This handbook provides a detailed exploration of various RPG systems, highlighting those that are particularly suited for inclusive play. We delve into the mechanics, pros, and cons of each system, offering a nuanced understanding of how they can be adapted for visually impaired players. Additionally, we cover practical aspects such as the availability of braille handbooks, the use of assistive technologies, and innovative approaches to character sheets and dice.

Our goal is to equip youth workers, storytellers and game masters with the knowledge and tools they need to create an engaging, supportive, and fun environment for all players. Whether you are a seasoned storyteller or new to the world of RPGs, this handbook will guide you in fostering inclusive adventures that everyone can enjoy.

Understanding RPGs and Their Potential

What are the RPGs?

Role-playing games (RPGs) represent a multifaceted genre of interactive entertainment that transcends traditional gaming boundaries. At their core, RPGs revolve around participants assuming the roles of fictional characters within elaborate storylines and settings.

RPG mechanics form the backbone of these experiences, encompassing various rules, systems, and frameworks that govern gameplay. These mechanics often include character creation, progression systems, combat resolution, and world-building elements. By providing structure and guidance, RPG mechanics facilitate immersive and engaging gameplay experiences while allowing for flexibility and creativity.

Integral to RPGs are the elements of play, where participants delve into their roles, interact with other characters (played by fellow participants or the game master), and navigate through dynamic storylines and challenges. This interactive storytelling aspect fosters collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, as players must strategize, problem-solve, and negotiate with others to progress in the game. Moreover, RPGs offer a unique platform for social interaction and community building. Participants come together to collectively craft narratives, explore imaginary worlds, and overcome obstacles as a team. In doing so, they develop interpersonal skills such as communication, empathy, and cooperation. RPGs also provide a safe space for self expression and exploration, allowing players to experiment with different identities, perspectives, and roles within a supportive and inclusive environment.

The potential benefits of RPGs extend beyond entertainment, with research suggesting positive impacts on cognitive development, emotional well-being, and social integration. By engaging in collaborative storytelling and problem-solving, participants enhance their cognitive abilities, including creativity, critical thinking, and decision-making skills. Additionally, RPGs can promote emotional resilience and mental well-being by providing an outlet for self-expression, stress relief, and social support.

In summary, RPGs offer a rich and immersive experience that goes beyond mere entertainment, providing a platform for social interaction, creative expression, and personal growth. Through their unique blend of mechanics, storytelling, and communitybuilding, RPGs have the potential to foster inclusive communities, promote positive social values, and empower individuals to explore new horizons.

In this section, we introduce the world of RPGs and their significance in fostering creativity, collaboration, and inclusivity. RPGs provide a platform where players can embark on thrilling adventures, solve mysteries, and forge unforgettable narratives together.

We'll emphasize the versatility of RPGs in accommodating diverse players and creating immersive experiences that transcend physical limitations. Whether you're exploring ancient dungeons, navigating futuristic worlds, or delving into supernatural mysteries, RPGs offer endless possibilities for storytelling and engagement. Let's jump into the world of RPGs.

The Storyteller

Imagine a world where towering citadels pierce the sky and dark forests whisper secrets of forgotten lore. This is where the storyteller takes the stage, spinning tales of wonder and intrigue to captivate the players' imaginations.

-Storyteller: "As you venture into the heart of the enchanted forest, ancient trees loom overhead, their branches casting eerie shadows. A sense of foreboding hangs in the air. What do you do?"

Players then immerse themselves in the narrative, interacting with the world and shaping their destiny:

-Phillip (playing Gareth): "I want to search for signs of recent activity. Are there any footprints or clues?"

-Amy (playing Riva): "I'm keeping watch for any hidden dangers. Do I notice anything out of the ordinary?"...

Game Mechanics

In the vibrant world of roleplaying games, game mechanics form the backbone of the experience, providing structure and rules that guide player actions and storytelling. Game mechanics encompass a wide array of elements, including character creation, skill checks, combat systems, and interaction with the game environment. Understanding these mechanics is crucial for creating an inclusive and engaging RPG experience for visually impaired players.

At the heart of any RPG are the characters, each with their unique attributes, skills, and abilities. Characters are typically defined by a set of statistics or attributes, such as strength, intelligence, dexterity, and charisma, which influence their proficiency in various tasks. Skills represent specific areas of expertise, ranging from combat abilities to knowledge in arcane arts, and are often linked to these core attributes. When a character attempts an action where the outcome is uncertain, such as picking a lock, deciphering an ancient text, or persuading a stubborn NPC (non-player character), a skill check or similar mechanic comes into play.

A skill check usually involves rolling dice and adding relevant modifiers based on the character's skills and attributes. The result is then compared to a predetermined difficulty level or an opposing roll, determining the success or failure of the action. This mechanism ensures that the narrative

is dynamic and that character abilities play a pivotal role in shaping the story. In crafting inclusive RPG experiences, it is essential to consider how these mechanics can be adapted for visually impaired players. This includes providing alternative ways to access character sheets, ensuring dice rolls and results are accessible, and utilizing descriptive storytelling to convey environmental details effectively. By thoughtfully adapting game mechanics, storytellers can create immersive and enjoyable experiences for all participants, fostering a truly inclusive gaming community.

-Storyteller: "Phillip, make a Perception check to search for tracks."

-Phillip (rolling a d20 and adding his survival skill score): "I got a seven."

-Storyteller: "You scan the forest floor but find no trace of recent activity."

Creating Characters

In RPGs, players create unique characters, each with their own backstory, skills, and motivations. These characters band together as a party, facing trials and triumphs as they journey through the storyteller's world. Meanwhile, the storyteller crafts adventures tailored to the character's strengths and weaknesses, presenting challenges that test their resolve and ingenuity. Whether unraveling ancient mysteries or forging alliances with unlikely allies, every session is an opportunity for storytelling magic.

Adventures in RPGs

In the realm of general RPGs, adventures are the lifeblood of the game, offering players a chance to delve into fantastical worlds filled with mystery and danger. Each adventure, also called a campaign, is a story in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, crafted by the storyteller to captivate the players' imaginations.

Adventure Settings

Whether exploring underground dungeons, ancient ruins, bustling cities, or sprawling wilderness, adventures in RPGs unfold in rich and immersive settings. The storyteller paints vivid landscapes and populates them with a colorful cast of player - and non-player controlled characters.

Party Dynamics

A successful party in RPGs consists of characters with diverse abilities and skills that complement each other. Cooperation is key as adventurers band together to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

Challenges and Encounters

Adventurers face various challenges throughout their journey, from combat encounters with fearsome creatures, environmental obstacles, and complex social interactions with NPCs. These encounters test the players' strategic thinking, problem solving skills, and teamwork. Every decision and action not only shape the course of the adventure but also reveal new layers of the story, leading to moments of triumph, unexpected twists, and profound discoveries.

Length and Complexity

Adventures in RPGs vary in length and complexity, ranging from short, single-session quests to sprawling epics that span multiple sessions or even entire campaigns. Regardless of length, each adventure is an opportunity for players to immerse themselves in a captivating narrative and shape the destiny of their characters. These adventures can explore diverse themes, from heroic quests and dark mysteries to political intrigue and personal growth, allowing players to experience a wide range of emotions and challenges as they navigate through the game world. Whether a quick one-shot or a long-term campaign, each adventure offers unique opportunities for storytelling, character development, and memorable experiences.

The Three Pillars of Adventure

Exploration, social interaction, and combat form the three pillars of adventure in RPGs. These elements work together to create a dynamic and immersive experience for players.

Exploration:

Players navigate treacherous landscapes, uncover hidden secrets, and discover new locations. This pillar encourages curiosity and a sense of wonder, as players map out unknown territories and delve into mysterious dungeons. Every corner turned can reveal a new challenge or a valuable treasure, making exploration a crucial aspect of the adventure.

Social Interaction:

Interacting with NPCs is vital for gathering information, forming alliances, and advancing the storyline. Through dialogue and negotiation, players build relationships, uncover motives, and influence the world around them. Social interactions add depth to the narrative, allowing players to engage with the game world on a personal level.

Combat:

Engaging in thrilling combat encounters tests the strategic thinking and teamwork of the players. Combat scenarios range from skirmishes with minor foes to epic battles against formidable adversaries. This pillar provides excitement and tension, requiring players to utilize their characters' skills, abilities, and resources to overcome challenges and emerge victorious.

Each aspect of exploration, social interaction, and combat contributes to the richness and depth of the storytelling experience, making every adventure a memorable journey.

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule for tabletop RPGs is simple yet paramount: **Have fun**. Every gaming group is unique, with different preferences and playstyles. Some revel in strategic combat encounters, meticulously planning every move, while others prioritize immersive storytelling and character development, delving into the depths of emotions and relationships. However, regardless of the approach, the overarching objective remains the same: to ensure that everyone at the table enjoys themselves. Whether you're navigating treacherous dungeons, engaging in epic battles, or unraveling intricate plots, the key is to create a welcoming and entertaining environment where laughter and camaraderie flourish. So, embrace the diversity of gaming experiences, cherish the moments of triumph and defeat, and above all, remember the Golden Rule: Have fun.

Example of an RPG session

The Storyteller describes the setting, initial situation, and objective to the players. Players decide their plan of action. Perhaps they'll first talk to townsfolk for clues or head straight into the forest to search for the thief's hideout. As the story unfolds, players encounter challenges, such as deciphering a riddle to find the thief's location, battling woodland creatures, or navigating tricky magical traps. The Storyteller narrates outcomes based on players' actions, decisions, and dice rolls.

Title: "The Missing Jewel of Zarnath"

Setting: A bustling town in a fantasy world where magic and mythical creatures exist.

Objective: A priceless jewel has been stolen from the town's museum, and rumors suggest a notorious thief hiding in the nearby enchanted forest is responsible. The players, each taking on roles like the brave warrior, cunning rogue, wise wizard, or skilled archer, must work together to retrieve the jewel.

Gameplay:

-Storyteller: "Dawn breaks and the town of Zarnath is abuzz with whispers. As you all gather in the town square, an old man approaches you, his face wrinkled with concern.

'Adventurers,' he says, 'the Jewel of Zarnath has been stolen! We need brave souls to retrieve it. What say you?'"

-Player 1 (playing a brave warrior): "I step forward, my armor gleaming in the morning sun. 'Fear not, old man. We will retrieve the jewel. Where was it last seen?'"

-Storyteller: "The old man points towards the grand museum, its doors ajar. 'In the central chamber. But be warned, the thief has left behind traps.'"

-Player 2 (playing a cunning rogue): "I smirk and say, 'Traps, you say? Sounds like an interesting challenge. Let's investigate the museum.'"

-Player 3 (playing a wise wizard): "Before we go, I'd like to cast a spell of 'Awareness' to sense any immediate magical traps around us."

-Storyteller: "You close your eyes, and a soft glow emanates from your staff. The area is clear of any immediate magical threats."

-Player 4 (playing a skilled archer): "Let's head to the museum and unravel this mystery."

-Storyteller: "The heavy doors of the museum creak as you push them open. Dim light filters through the stained-glass windows, casting colorful patterns on the marble floor. A series of display cases line the hallways, most of them undisturbed, except for one smashed case in the central chamber."

-Player 2 (the rogue): "I cautiously move ahead, keeping an eye out for traps. My rogue skills come in handy in situations like this."

-Storyteller: "A few steps forward, you notice a thin, almost invisible wire running across the floor, leading to a concealed compartment in the wall."

-Player 3 (the wizard): "That looks like a trap. Can I use my magical senses to determine its nature?"

-Storyteller: "Focusing on the wire, you sense an intricate magical construct designed to release a burst of flame when triggered."

-Player 1 (the warrior): "Let's not touch it then. Rogue, can you disarm it?"

-Player 2 (the rogue): "With pleasure." *skill check* "With a deft hand, I carefully cut the wire, ensuring it doesn't trigger the trap."

-Storyteller: "The tension in the air dissipates as the trap is disarmed successfully. Moving further into the central chamber, you find a parchment lying beside the smashed case. It has a drawing of the enchanted forest with a specific path marked."

-Player 4 (the archer): "Looks like our thief wants to play games. But this lead points us straight to the enchanted forest. Our quest continues there."

-Storyteller: "With the museum's mysteries unraveled and a lead in hand, your group gears up for the journey to the enchanted forest, wondering what challenges lie ahead."

Classification of RPGs for Inclusive Play

In the vibrant world of roleplaying games, inclusivity is not just a goal but a fundamental principle. As we delve into Module 2 of our exploration, we embark on a journey to discover RPG systems specifically crafted to ensure that players of all abilities can fully participate and enjoy the magic of collaborative storytelling.

In this section, we spotlight game systems, recognizing the importance of accessibility and representation in the realm of tabletop gaming. All RPGs offer boundless opportunities for adventure, creativity, and camaraderie, yet accessibility remains a crucial consideration for inclusive play. While the imagination knows no bounds, the limitations of physical access to game materials can present barriers to participation for some.

Accessibility and adaptations for inclusive play will be explained in greater depth in the third and fourth chapters of this handbook.

From the iconic fantasy realms of Dungeons & Dragons and Pathfinder to the narrative-driven mechanics of Fate and Fiasco, each game offers a

unique avenue for players to embark on epic adventures, forge unforgettable characters, and weave captivating narratives together. Through verbal descriptions, tactile feedback, and shared imagination, visually impaired participants can explore limitless possibilities, conquer daunting challenges, and create cherished memories within the boundless world of tabletop RPGs.

As we delve into the diverse landscape of RPGs for inclusive play, this section highlights the power of storytelling to unite players of all backgrounds and abilities in a shared quest for adventure, camaraderie, and enjoyment. By exploring various RPG systems designed with accessibility in mind, we aim to demonstrate that while all RPGs can be adapted for inclusive play, ensuring accessibility is crucial to unlocking the full potential of tabletop gaming for every participant. This section underscores the importance of making RPGs accessible to visually impaired players, showcasing how thoughtful adaptations can create an inclusive and engaging gaming experience for all.

Exploring Role-Playing Game Systems for Visually Impaired Players

In the vast tapestry of tabletop role playing games (TTRPGs), diversity is not just a notion but a cornerstone. As we delve deeper into the realm of RPG systems, we confront the challenge of accessibility, particularly for visually impaired (BVI) players. While TTRPGs offer boundless opportunities for storytelling and adventure, the lack of accessibility features in many systems can present significant barriers to participation for BVI individuals.

In this comprehensive investigation, we scrutinize several core RPG systems, examining their suitability for inclusive play and highlighting both their strengths and limitations in accommodating BVI players. It's important to note that while there is a wide range of TTRPG systems available, few, if any, are fully accessible out of the box for BVIs. However, there are solutions and adaptations that can be made to enhance accessibility, which will be explored in detail in the following sections.

The landscape of TTRPGs is rich and multifaceted, boasting a plethora of systems catering to diverse preferences and genres. From the venerable d20 System, popularized by Dungeons & Dragons, to the innovative Storytelling System pioneered by White Wolf Publishing, each system

offers a unique gameplay experience with its own set of mechanics, themes, and challenges. Yet, despite the myriad choices available, accessibility remains a pressing concern. It is important to state clearly that, as of now, there is no fully accessible TTRPG out of the box for visually impaired (BVI) players. This lack of braille editions of core rulebooks and essential gaming materials presents significant barriers.

However, there are various solutions and adaptations that can be made to enhance accessibility, ensuring that BVI players can fully participate in and enjoy the magic of TTRPGs. These solutions include custom braille printing, digital tools, and community resources, which will be explored in detail in the following sections. By addressing these challenges head-on, we aim to provide practical guidance for creating more inclusive and accessible gaming experiences.

The D20 System

In the realm of RPGs, the d20 System stands as a prominent and influential system, rooted in the legacy of Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). Its popularity has significantly shaped the landscape of tabletop gaming for decades.

Pros: The d20 System is notable for its inclusivity and diversity. Its widespread adoption has led to the creation of numerous games, each offering unique experiences in various settings, from classic sword and sorcery to the distant galaxies of Star Wars. The familiarity of d20 mechanics among players fosters a sense of community and ease of play. The standardized rules make it accessible to newcomers, inviting them to join the world of tabletop adventuring.

Cons: However, the d20 System has its drawbacks. Its mechanics are heavily focused on combat, with a significant portion of gameplay dedicated to battles. This emphasis may be less appealing to those seeking a more narrative-driven experience. Additionally, the reliance on visual aids such as maps and miniatures can pose challenges for visually impaired players. The complexity of the rules and mechanics can also be overwhelming, requiring frequent consultation of guidebooks and compendiums. The lack of accessible rulebooks further disadvantages visually impaired players.

In conclusion, while the d20 System offers extensive opportunities for adventure and creativity, it also presents challenges that require thoughtful adaptation. By embracing inclusivity and making necessary adjustments, players can navigate the complexities of the d20 System and fully enjoy its potential.

Storytelling System

The Storytelling System, originally developed in 1991 as the Storyteller System and later updated and rebranded in 2003, serves as the foundation for all games published by White Wolf Publishing. Central to its mechanics is the use of ten-sided dice (d10), where the number of successes rolled determines outcomes, with successes outweighing failures in a final tally.

Pros: The World of Darkness games, built on the Storytelling System, have a sizable player base, making it relatively easy to find fellow enthusiasts. While its adoption outside of White Wolf Publishing is limited, the range of games offered within this system caters to diverse preferences, particularly those drawn to supernatural themes. Additionally, the system encourages immersive roleplaying experiences rather than focusing solely on combat mechanics. Many abilities and powers emphasize mental and social interactions, encouraging players to engage in dialogue and intrigue. While combat mechanics exist, they are often complemented by narrative depth, reducing reliance on visual aids.

Cons: The games within the Storytelling System share a distinct aesthetic, predominantly centered around the World of Darkness universe. This may restrict options for players seeking diversity in themes such as high fantasy or science fiction. Additionally, despite its emphasis on roleplaying, the system incorporates various mechanics, skills, and spells that require memorization or frequent reference to handbooks. This complexity can pose challenges for players with visual impairments, as accessing and navigating rulebooks may be less intuitive.

Overall, the Storytelling System offers both advantages and challenges for players interested in roleplaying games. Its basis in verbal narration and emphasis on immersive roleplaying experiences make it appealing to a wide audience, with numerous games available within the World of Darkness universe. However, its limited aesthetic variation may deter those seeking diverse themes, and the system's complexity could pose difficulties for players with visual impairments. Potential players should consider their preferences and needs before engaging with games built upon this system.

Basic Role-Playing

The Basic Role-Playing (BRP) System, developed by Chaosium Inc in 1980, is a testament to simplicity and versatility in the realm of tabletop

RPGs. Designed to distill the essence of role-playing into its purest form, BRP has become a cornerstone for various genres and settings.

Pros: The BRP System offers a diverse selection of games, catering to various genres from high fantasy to eldritch horror, ensuring that players find settings that suit their tastes. Its intuitive mechanics, built on seven attributes and percentage based skills, are straightforward and accessible to both newcomers and seasoned players. This simplicity allows for creativity and innovation, while verbal description of mechanics makes the gameplay inclusive for BVI players, enhancing their overall experience.

Cons: The BRP System faces challenges in community size, with many games beyond Call of Cthulhu having smaller player bases, making it difficult to form full adventuring parties. This limitation can be especially isolating for BVI players, who may already struggle to find inclusive gaming groups.

Additionally, while the system's simplicity is an advantage, it can also be a drawback. The sparse rules and guidelines may leave players uncertain during gameplay, requiring more improvisation and adaptation. For BVI players, the lack of accessible rulebooks and screen reader-compatible resources exacerbates this issue, necessitating additional support and creativity in navigating the game.

In Conclusion, the BRP System is a beacon of simplicity and versatility in the vast expanse of tabletop RPGs, offering a path to adventure for those bold enough to tread its hallowed halls. Yet, amidst its virtues lie challenges and obstacles to be overcome. While the system's straightforward mechanics provide a solid foundation for adaptation to meet the needs of BVI players, the limited availability of accessible materials and smaller community size can present significant hurdles. Nonetheless, with creativity and determination, the BRP System can be made more inclusive, allowing all players to forge bonds of fellowship and fortitude that endure across the ages.

Fate Core System

The Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA) system has redefined narrative-driven gaming since its inception with Apocalypse World in

2010. This system has influenced many RPGs, offering a versatile and innovative approach to storytelling.

Pros: PbtA games offer a wide range of settings, catering to diverse tastes with options spanning from post apocalyptic worlds to fantasy realms. Each game within the system presents a unique set of "moves" tailored to its specific setting, enhancing the narrative and providing clear actions for players. These moves, determined by rolling two six-sided dice (d6), dictate success levels that drive the story forward, whether through total success, partial success, or a compelling failure that adds depth to the narrative. Moreover, the system's minimalist mechanics prioritize creativity and storytelling over complex rules. This simplicity allows players and narrators to immerse themselves deeply in the narrative without being burdened by extensive mechanics or the need for visual aids. PbtA's emphasis on verbal interaction and imagination makes it particularly accessible to BVI players, as it relies heavily on descriptive storytelling rather than visual components.

Cons: The system's reliance on the storyteller to guide the narrative can be both a strength and a challenge. The storyteller must balance narrative cohesion with player agency, ensuring the story progresses smoothly while allowing players to influence the world around them. This can be demanding, especially for less experienced storytellers, and may affect the overall gameplay experience.

In conclusion, the Powered by the Apocalypse system showcases the power of collaborative storytelling, offering rich, immersive gameplay experiences. Its minimalistic mechanics and focus on narrative make it accessible and engaging, particularly for BVI players. However, the dependency on a skilled storyteller to maintain the flow of the story can be challenging. Ultimately, PbtA provides a flexible and creative platform for those seeking deep, narrative-driven adventures, with the choice resting on the players' preferences and adaptability.

Fiasco & Dread

Fiasco

At the forefront of unconventional TTRPG experiences lies Fiasco, a game that defies traditional rules and dice mechanics. Unlike conventional systems, Fiasco operates without stringent rules or dice,

instead embracing a fluid narrative structure akin to a cinematic experience. Players step into the shoes of characters in a gripping tale, weaving together a narrative tapestry through collaborative storytelling. Scenes unfold organically, guided by the whims of the players as they navigate a web of intricate relationships and unfolding drama.

Ideal for quick sessions lasting 3 to 5 hours, Fiasco promises a whirlwind of excitement and suspense as players delve into the depths of their characters' motivations and desires. However, for BVI individuals, the reliance on physical cards for prompts and twists presents a unique challenge. While creative solutions like braille cards or text-to-voice software may offer alternatives, they are not readily available out of the box, underscoring the need for inclusive design in gaming experiences.

Dread

In contrast to Fiasco's narrative freedom, Dread immerses players in the horror genre with intense gameplay. Dispensing with traditional rules and dice, Dread thrusts participants into a tale of suspense and survival. Its main mechanic revolves around a Jenga tower, symbolizing impending doom. Each character action risks toppling the tower, creating a tension-filled atmosphere.

Many visually impaired players appreciate Dread's tactile interaction with the Jenga tower, finding it immersive. The palpable tension and looming threat of collapse enhance the experience. However, the game's enjoyment heavily relies on group dynamics and the narrator's mood, making each session unique.

In summary, Dread and Fiasco showcase the varied experiences in TTRPGs, from collaborative storytelling to immersive horror. While they pose challenges and opportunities for visually impaired players, their inventive mechanics and engaging narratives continue to captivate audiences globally, crafting memorable adventures.

Characteristics of the Blind and Visually Impaired Players

Before we move on to the more specific strategies on facilitation techniques and needs for adaptations, we would like to give you some basic general knowledge on the characteristics of the blind and visually impaired RPGs players and share with you how these people function in

life, so you could have greater confidence to include them as players, as well as, to further modify the proposed adaptations and strategies in this handbook which will tailor the roleplaying experience for the blind and visually impaired individuals you will be playing with. So, with that being said, let's start, beginning with the most important characteristic about this group of players, the blindness spectrum.

Visual impairment spans a broad spectrum, encompassing individuals with varying degrees of vision loss, from complete blindness to near perfect vision with minor impairments. Understanding this spectrum is crucial for creating inclusive RPG experiences that cater to the diverse needs of visually impaired players.

On one end of the spectrum, we find individuals who are completely blind, relying primarily on their heightened senses of hearing, touch, and spatial awareness to navigate their surroundings. These individuals often use canes or guide dogs for mobility assistance and may prefer alternative formats such as braille or auditory materials for accessing information. In RPGs, completely blind players depend heavily on verbal or tactile cues provided by game masters and fellow players to engage with the game world. Additionally, they may utilize adaptive technologies, specialized software on their phones or laptops, to access character sheets, rules, or other game materials in formats compatible with their needs. Tactile dice sets and braille rulebooks can also enhance their participation in the game by providing tangible references.

Moving along the spectrum to the much larger group of visually impaired individuals, we encounter varying degrees of visual acuity and limitations. Some may only require minor adaptations, such as stronger color contrast, to fully engage with the game.

However, others with more severe vision loss may need additional accommodations, such as handheld magnifiers to read dice or rulebooks, or the use of technology for zooming or magnifying game elements. For some, large print materials or even braille or tactile equipment may be necessary to facilitate their participation in the game.

Understanding the diverse needs of visually impaired players is essential for creating inclusive RPG experiences. Game masters and fellow players should be flexible enough so together with the blind players, they can jointly prepare the necessary adaptations and accommodations to ensure

that all players, regardless of their level of vision loss, can fully participate and enjoy the game.

Note: in real life blindness is sometimes combined with other types of disabilities, such as hearing impairment, dyslexia, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment ETC. This is not very common, however it is worth to mention here that the different types of disabilities sometimes do overlap, so for those players to be included in the game further adjustments might be needed, which will depend on their secondary disability.

This handbook from here onwards will be focused on blind and visually impaired, however you, as a reader, should keep this in mind in case additional adjustments are needed. You can consult the internet for more information and strategies on how to make those extra adaptations

The Blindness spectrum

Adaptive technology for blind and visually impaired individuals refers to tools or systems designed to make daily tasks and activities more accessible and manageable. These technologies often utilize special features or adjustments that cater to the unique needs of individuals with visual impairment, allowing them to interact with digital or physical environments more effectively.

In the realm of adaptive technology, there exists a spectrum of proficiency among blind and visually impaired individuals. On one end, there are those who are highly skilled and proficient in using technology, having undergone extensive training and possessing their own assistive devices. These individuals are adept at navigating digital environments, utilizing screen readers, magnification software, and other assistive technologies to access information and engage with digital content.

During RPG sessions, they may seamlessly integrate their assistive devices, leveraging them to enhance their gaming experience and participate fully in the game.

Conversely, on the other end of the spectrum, there are individuals who have limited or no experience with technology and face challenges when attempting to use digital devices. For these individuals, even basic tasks may pose difficulties, and they may require additional support and guidance to navigate technology effectively. During RPG sessions, they

may encounter barriers when attempting to engage with digital game materials or utilize assistive technologies, leading to frustrations and limitations in their participation.

The spectrum of proficiency in adaptive technology highlights the importance of considering individual needs and abilities when designing inclusive RPG experiences. Game masters and fellow players should be mindful of the diverse skill levels among visually impaired players and be prepared to offer support and accommodations as needed. Whether it's providing alternative formats for game materials, offering assistance with technology, or adapting gameplay mechanics, fostering inclusivity means recognizing and respecting the varying abilities and experiences of all players.

The braille proficiency spectrum

It's important to recognize that while braille is a valuable tool for many blind individuals, not all visually impaired individuals use or read braille. In fact, only around 10% of visually impaired individuals utilize braille as their primary means of reading and communication. Within this subset of braille users, there exists a spectrum of proficiency, ranging from proficient readers who can read braille as quickly as sighted individuals read print, to those who may struggle with reading braille at a slower pace.

This variation in braille proficiency has implications for gameplay in RPGs. While tactile or braille dice sets may be a suitable solution for some blind players who are proficient braille readers, they may not be accessible or practical for others who either do not read braille or read it at a slower pace. Therefore, it's essential to ask the blind player for their braille proficiency beforehand to determine the most appropriate adaptations for gameplay.

For blind players who are proficient braille readers, tactile dice sets may enhance their gaming experience, allowing them to independently roll and interpret dice rolls. However, for those who are not proficient in braille or prefer alternative methods of accessing information, alternative adaptations may be necessary. This could involve using mobile apps or digital tools that simulate dice rolls and announce their value audibly, or assigning another player the role of verbally announcing the dice values when rolled.

By understanding the diverse needs and abilities of visually impaired players, game masters and fellow players can work together to create inclusive RPG experiences that accommodate varying levels of braille proficiency and ensure that all players can fully participate and enjoy the game.

Bonus

Visually impaired individuals, much like their sighted counterparts, bring with them a rich tapestry of backgrounds, experiences, and interests. It's crucial to acknowledge and celebrate this diversity, recognizing that their visual impairment is just one aspect of who they are. Just as sighted individuals have varied backgrounds shaped by factors such as culture, education, and life experiences, visually impaired individuals also come from diverse backgrounds that influence their perspectives and interests. Some may have grown up in urban environments, while others hail from rural areas. They may come from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds, each contributing to their unique outlook on life and approach to gaming.

Furthermore, visually impaired individuals have diverse interests that extend far beyond their visual impairment. Some may be avid readers, passionate about literature and storytelling. Others may have a keen interest in music, sports, or technology. Just like anyone else, they have hobbies, talents, and aspirations that shape their identities and enrich their lives.

It's essential to avoid making assumptions about visually impaired individuals based solely on their visual impairment. While their vision may influence how they navigate the world, it doesn't define their capabilities or interests. Assuming that all visually impaired individuals have the same abilities, preferences, or limitations overlooks the richness and complexity of their experiences.

Instead, approach visually impaired individuals with an open mind and a willingness to learn about who they are as individuals. Take the time to understand their unique perspectives, interests, and needs, and avoid imposing stereotypes or preconceived notions onto them. By embracing

diversity and fostering inclusivity, we can create welcoming and supportive communities where all individuals, regardless of visual impairment, can thrive and be valued for who they are.

Facilitation Techniques

Ensuring Accessibility and Inclusivity

This section delves into essential facilitation techniques aimed at ensuring accessibility and inclusivity within RPG sessions for visually impaired participants. Creating an engaging and inclusive gaming environment involves more than just providing alternative formats for materials; it requires deliberate facilitation strategies that consider the diverse needs and experiences of all players. In this section, we will explore various techniques to set the scene effectively, adapt game mechanics, provide inclusive descriptions, and handle sensitive topics sensitively. By incorporating these techniques, game masters can cultivate RPG sessions that not only accommodate visually impaired players but also enhance the overall gaming experience for everyone involved.

Setting the Scene

Creating an immersive and inclusive gaming environment begins with setting the scene effectively, whether in person or online. For visually impaired participants, the game master plays a crucial role in establishing the atmosphere, surroundings, level of accessibility, and inclusivity of the game. This involves addressing aspects of game mechanics, use of adaptive equipment, and social interactions to ensure a level playing field for any blind player. To achieve this, game masters can employ a variety of techniques and must understand the specific needs and characteristics of the blind or visually impaired player, as discussed in the previous section, and adjust the game accordingly.

The game master should engage directly with the blind or visually impaired player to understand and assess their perspective and the tools they need to effectively participate in the game. This can be achieved through a simple conversation, where the game master asks the player about their preferences and requirements.

Questions can include:

- Can you describe your level of vision loss? Are you completely blind, or do you have some usable vision?
- What visual aids or tools do you use in your daily life, and how can we help you to utilize them most effectively during the game?
- Do you use any screen readers or magnification software?
- Do you have any specific adaptive technologies that you prefer for accessing digital content?
- Do you read braille? If so, how proficient are you with it?
- Would you prefer to play with the help of braille materials, or are there other formats that work better for you?
- Do you have any preferences for how dice rolls are handled? Would you like to use tactile dice sets, or do you prefer a digital dice roller with auditory feedback?
- Are there any specific adaptations you need for accessing character sheets or rulebooks?
- Which online platforms do you find easiest to use for voice or video calls?
- Are there any particular platforms or tools you would recommend or prefer for ensuring a smooth online gaming experience?
- How can we best communicate during the game to make sure you're fully included in the experience?
- Are there any specific challenges you anticipate that we should be aware of?

Some of these questions are obvious, some not so much. For instance, on asking the blind player how could the game master best communicate to ensure a smooth playing experience, that is a question with a broad spectrum of answers that will be very dependent on the blind person. For instance, if you play with physical dice, some players may prefer to use

braille or tactile dice and read the result of the rolling themselves, while others may not even bother with such dice and be happy rolling normal dice and have the game master read the results of their rolls.

For online RPG sessions, accessibility extends to the choice of platform and tools used. The game master should ensure that voice or video calls are conducted on an accessible platform. While this often comes down to personal preference, asking the blind or visually impaired player about their preferred platform is crucial. Popular platforms like Zoom, Discord, or Skype offer varying levels of accessibility features, and the player's familiarity and comfort with a particular platform should guide the decision.

Additionally, it's important to make sure that the blind player has access to accessible dice rolling tools and rulebooks.

Discord, for example, offers rolling dice in channels, so your party could have a dedicated channel in the server on which you play dedicated just for dice rolls. The website roll20.net also offers online dice rolling with the results being visible to multiple people.

Access to accessible rulebooks is the only factor out of control of the game master or blind player. This will very much depend on the game in question, and the format in question. Popular games will usually sell official digital or print copies, and these will require different strategies for approach based on the book format.

The best that a blind or visually impaired player may expect is that the rulebooks are available in a digital format, be it PDF, on a Kindle, etc. Partially sighted players should be able to utilize magnification software to be able to read the books, and blind players proficient with screen readers should be able to also do the same. It is important to mention, however, that even though a book may sometimes be available in a digital format, that does not mean that it is accessible. There are certain standards for digital documents such as the PDF.

Universal Accessibility that in theory should be followed, but in practice are often ignored. In this case, just work with the player, and ensure that they know that you are there to help with any issues they encounter on the way.

In the case of inaccessible PDFs, especially those with images, OCR software such as ABBYY Fine Reader may be utilized to convert it to readable text. Note, however, that more often than not, the formatting of such a document is completely changed, and the converted document, although containing the text from the inaccessible document, may not look the same as the original, or be accessibly formatted for that matter. A blind player, however, will be able to get the jist of the text and be able to read the rules of the game.

Another resource that blind players could consult is bookshare.org, an online repository of digital books for persons with print disabilities. 2If there is an adapted digital copy of a rulebook, it is most likely to be here. If not, consider buying it on Amazon, the game's official website or other alternative copies online.

Adapting Game Mechanics

Game mechanics in an RPG refer to the rules and systems that govern gameplay, including how characters interact with the game world, resolve actions, and progress through the game. Making these mechanics accessible is essential to ensure that blind and visually impaired players can fully participate and enjoy the game. Here are some key components of game mechanics and strategies for making them accessible:

Character Creation and Management

Character creation and management typically involve the character sheet, which tracks a character's abilities, stats, and progress, as well as the specific skills and abilities the character can use within the game. Popular online character sheet builders such as Roll20 and DND Beyond, while a solution to most players, may pose some challenges for blind screen reader users due to the fact that they are not very accessible.

A solution to this problem, therefore, should be to make things as simple as possible. Using Google Docs, for instance, works great in terms of accessibility, and for collaboration. The blind or visually impaired player is using an accessible service, and you as the game master have access to the player's character sheet and could help directly if needed.

Dice Rolling

Dice rolling is a fundamental part of many RPGs. To make this aspect accessible, consider the following options:

Tactile Dice: Some players may prefer to use tactile dice and read the result themselves. These may be 3D printed or purchased from vendors that offer braille dice. Please find links to 3D printing models ready to print in the compiled list of accessible resources.

Digital Dice Rollers: Online platforms like roll20.net offer digital dice rollers with results visible to all players, useful if playing online. Accessible iOS apps such as Roll The Bones provide auditory feedback for dice rolls. Additionally, as mentioned previously, if playing online, Discord offers rolling dice in channels.

Verbal communication: Some players may be happy to have the results of the dice rolls being read out to them by the game master or a fellow player, therefore, no special adjustment would be necessary in this case.

Adaptive Maps

Maps are an essential tool in many RPGs, helping players visualize the game world and navigate their surroundings. When it comes to ensuring accessibility for visually impaired and blind players, there are two primary approaches: using the "**theater of the mind**" technique or employing adaptive physical maps.

In the "**theater of the mind**" approach, the game master (GM) describes the environment verbally, allowing players to imagine the scene without relying on visual aids. This method naturally accommodates blind and visually impaired players, as it relies on detailed verbal descriptions rather than physical maps. No special adjustments are necessary, making it a flexible and inclusive option for RPG sessions.

When the group prefers to use physical maps, additional adjustments can make the environment more accessible for all players:

Adaptive Physical Maps For Visually Impaired Players

- **High-Contrast Maps:** Use high-contrast colors to create maps that are easier to distinguish. For example, employing bold lines and bright, contrasting colors can help visually impaired players better see the details.
- **Large Print:** Ensure any text on the maps is in a large, clear font to enhance readability.

For Blind Players

- **Tactile Maps:** Consider creating tactile maps using materials that players can touch and feel. One effective method is to use clay or play doh to model the map's terrain. This allows blind players to physically explore and understand the layout of the environment.
- **Embossed Maps:** Another option is to create embossed maps with raised lines and features, similar to braille. These can be crafted using special paper and embossing tools or ordered from services that specialize in tactile graphics.
- **3D Printing:** If available, 3D printing technology can be used to produce detailed, tactile maps. These maps can include raised features representing terrain, buildings, and other significant landmarks.

Additional Resources

- **Knights of the Braille Blog:** The Knights of the Braille community has a blog post on creating an Accessible Mega-Dungeon, which includes innovative approaches to document structure and navigation to make maps unnecessary. This blog covers considerations such as heading structure and document coordinates to enhance accessibility for screen reader users. A link to this resource will be included in the compiled list of accessible resources.

Inclusive Descriptions

Inclusive descriptions are essential for creating an immersive and engaging RPG experience for visually impaired and blind players.

Detailed and thoughtful verbal descriptions can help players understand and visualize the game world, characters, and actions, ensuring they are fully included in the narrative. Here are some strategies and practical tips for providing inclusive descriptions:

General Techniques

- **Descriptive Language:** Use clear and vivid language to describe scenes, characters, and actions. Include sensory details such as sounds, smells, and textures to enhance the immersion.
- **Consistent Terminology:** Maintain consistency in the terms and descriptions used throughout the game to help players build a mental map of the game world.
- **Sequential Descriptions:** Describe scenes and actions in a logical sequence, starting from the general overview and moving to specific details.

Maps

- **Collaborative Descriptions:** Encourage players to collaborate in describing the map. Sighted players can assist by providing additional verbal descriptions to blind and visually impaired players.
- **Consistent Orientation:** Always describe the map with a consistent orientation (e.g., north at the top) to help players maintain their bearings.
- **Simplified Layouts:** Keep the layout simple to avoid overwhelming details, focusing on key areas and important features.

Character Descriptions

- **Appearance and Clothing:** Describe characters' appearance, clothing, and distinctive features. Mention any significant items they carry or wear.
- **Voice and Mannerisms:** Include details about a character's voice, mannerisms, and behavior to bring them to life.
- **Emotional State:** Describe the character's emotional state and body language to convey their feelings and intentions.

Environmental Descriptions

- **Setting and Atmosphere:** Describe the setting and atmosphere, including the time of day, weather, and ambient sounds.
- **Objects and Obstacles:** Mention any significant objects or obstacles in the environment that players may interact with or need to navigate around.
- **Spatial Relationships:** Explain the spatial relationships between different elements in the scene to help players understand the layout.

Action Descriptions

- **Movement and Actions:** Clearly describe characters' movements and actions, including how they interact with the environment and other characters.
- **Combat and Challenges:** Provide detailed descriptions of combat and other challenges, including the sounds, impacts, and outcomes of actions.
- **Consequences and Feedback:** Always describe the consequences of players' actions and provide feedback on their decisions and interactions.

Rolling Dice

- **Announcing Rolls:** Verbally announce the purpose of each roll and the results clearly.
- **Describing Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of dice rolls in a way that highlights their impact on the game, including successes, failures, and any narrative consequences.
- **Player Involvement:** Involve players in the rolling process by using tactile dice, digital dice rollers with auditory feedback, or having the game master announce the results.

Using Inclusive Descriptions

- **Check for Understanding:** Regularly check in with visually impaired and blind players to ensure they understand the descriptions and are following the game.
- **Encourage Questions:** Encourage players to ask questions if they need more information or clarification.
- **Be Patient and Flexible:** Be patient and flexible, adjusting the level of detail and pacing based on the needs of the players.

Handling Sensitive Topics

Handling sensitive topics in RPG sessions is highly dependent on the individual players involved. Just like people in general, blind and visually impaired players have varying levels of comfort with different subjects. Some may be comfortable discussing certain topics, while others may have areas they prefer not to engage with. The key to navigating these differences is open and ongoing communication.

Key Points

- **Individual Comfort Levels:** Understand that each blind or visually impaired player has their own unique comfort levels and boundaries. What is acceptable for one person may not be for another.
- **Open Dialogue:** The most effective way to handle sensitive topics is through open dialogue. Directly talk to the blind or visually impaired player to understand their preferences and limits.
- **Avoid Assumptions:** Never assume what a player is comfortable with based on their blindness or visual impairment. Always ask rather than make assumptions.

Practical Tips

Before the game starts, have an open conversation with the blind or visually impaired player about their preferences and any topics they would like to avoid.

Ask questions like

- Are there any topics you are uncomfortable discussing or engaging with during the game?
- How would you like sensitive topics to be handled if they come up in the game?
- Are there specific triggers or themes you want to avoid?

Emphasizing Communication

Keep the lines of communication open throughout the campaign. Check in regularly to ensure that the player's comfort levels have not changed and that they feel safe and included.

Always respect the boundaries set by the player. If a sensitive topic arises, handle it with care and be prepared to change the narrative if needed. Consider holding a "Session Zero" before starting the campaign. This session allows all players to discuss boundaries, themes, and expectations, ensuring everyone is on the same page.

Consider providing content warnings for potentially sensitive topics that may come up in the game. This allows players to prepare themselves and opt out of certain scenes if necessary. Potential thing to discuss during the Session 0!

Asking questions and seeking clarification is always better than making assumptions. If you are unsure about something, ask the player directly.

Practice active listening, ensuring that you fully understand the player's needs and preferences. Validate their feelings and experiences, showing that you take their concerns seriously.

Again, this is all highly subjective and will vary from player to player. Some players might feel overwhelmed if you constantly check in on them, while others might not appreciate being asked repeatedly about their comfort. Many blind and visually impaired players are very independent and may prefer minimal fuss. It's crucial to communicate openly and ask about their preferences and boundaries. As emphasized in the previous section, not all blind or visually impaired people are alike, and the worst thing you can do is to assume that every person with a visual impairment acts, thinks, and feels the same way. Always prioritize open dialogue and tailor your approach to each individual's unique needs and comfort levels.

Real-world Examples and Research Results

Good Practices

Our initial goal was to find other occasions that tabletop role-playing games (TTRPG) had been used to help socially integrate blind or otherwise visually impaired (BVI) individuals. However, most of the literature was focused on mental barriers to societal integration, such as individuals with autism or ADHD or other social issues such as anxiety. Several books have also been authored about that very subject. Some touched on the merits of TTRPGs for helping members of the LGBT community, while others the effects that those games had on individuals during or after incarceration. We didn't find one that focused on our target group.

It is worth mentioning that there was a small-scale study from Carleton University in Canada, that studied BVI individuals but it was focused on Board and Card games, and while those can have some overlap with TTRPGs, as far as cooperation and community building is concerned, it was what we were looking for. Even RPGResearch, a non-profit organization that first started collecting research in 1983 and shared it online since 2004, that focuses on the effects of all forms of role-playing didn't have any relevant information on BVI individuals.

While specific studies aren't readily available, most of the RPG communities are making the effort to adjust their games in order to accommodate a player who is BVI. Some have also taken to creating braille dice which are often used in TTRPGs, such as the non-profit DOTS RPG Project or an individual Kickstarter.

Having that in mind, here are some examples and good practices that are related closer to our subject:

Knights of the Braille:

Exciting progress is afoot within the tabletop roleplaying community. On January 24, 2024, the Knights of the Braille Community TTRPG embarked on a commendable endeavor: the development of a new roleplaying system prioritizing accessibility. This grassroots initiative, driven by volunteers, holds the potential to address many of the challenges encountered by the visually impaired community, promising a more inclusive and enriching gaming experience for all.

Understanding Tabletop Games Accessibility: Exploring Board and Card Gaming Experiences of People who are Blind and Low Vision - Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

This study conducted 15 semi-structured interviews to explore the tabletop gaming experiences of individuals who are blind or low vision (BLV), identifying key themes around the properties and outcomes of both accessible and inaccessible games. Participants highlighted the need for multimodal interaction, emphasizing the importance of tactile, audio, and simplified visual elements to enhance accessibility. The study stresses adopting inclusive design principles, advocating for a co-design approach with the BLV community to ensure games are enjoyable without imposing the responsibility for adjustments on the players. Recommendations include creating accessible rulebooks, integrating multimodal information, promoting player autonomy, and ensuring high-quality, durable materials for tactile game components. The findings underscore the significance of involving BLV individuals throughout the game design process to create universally accessible and engaging tabletop games.

Therapeutic Role-Playing Games for Individuals with Disabilities

One notable example of best practice in using role-playing games (RPGs) to benefit individuals with disabilities is the work of Game to Grow, a non-profit organization that leverages tabletop RPGs like Dungeons & Dragons to support the social and emotional development of youth with autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, social anxiety, and other challenges. By engaging in structured gameplay, participants enhance their social skills, self-confidence, and emotional regulation in a safe, collaborative environment.

Through these RPG sessions, individuals with severe social anxiety gradually become more comfortable interacting with peers, and those with autism improve their ability to understand and interpret social cues. Game to Grow's approach exemplifies how RPGs can be powerful tools for therapeutic purposes, providing a creative and supportive platform for personal growth and social connection.

Exploring Rulebook Accessibility and Companionship in Board Games via Voice-based Conversational Agent Alexa - Carleton University, Canada

This study explores the potential of voice-based conversational agents, such as Amazon Alexa, in enhancing the accessibility of board games for blind and visually impaired (BVI) players. Through interviews and user testing, researchers found that Alexa could significantly aid in rulebook navigation, remembering complex rules, and providing quick answers to game-related questions. The study suggests that integrating voice-based assistants in RPG sessions could offer BVI players an easier way to access and recall game rules, thus improving their overall gaming experience. This approach reduces the reliance on other players for rule-related assistance and enhances the player's autonomy. The findings recommend that RPG developers consider the use of voice assistants as a tool to make games more inclusive and accessible.

Critical Review of Disability Representation in RPGs by Elsa S. Henry

In her critical exploration of disability representation within role-playing games (RPGs), specifically the World of Darkness setting, Elsa S. Henry highlights significant shortcomings in how disabilities are portrayed. Through her analysis of games like *Changeling: The Dreaming* and *Vampire: The Masquerade*, Henry points out the problematic practice of reducing disabilities to mere "flaws" that are quantified in point systems, which fails to reflect the complex realities of living with a disability. As a disabled gamer herself, Henry advocates for a transformation in game design that portrays disabilities as integral, nuanced parts of characters' identities rather than as hindrances or narrative afterthoughts. Her work challenges the gaming industry to shift from tokenistic portrayals to genuine inclusivity and nuanced representation, arguing for game systems that meaningfully integrate disability into gameplay.

"Dungeons & Disabilities" by Gabriel Leão

Gabriel Leão's article "Dungeons & Disabilities: Can tabletop RPGs redeem their problematic portrayal of disability?" delves into the representation of disability in tabletop RPGs, focusing on *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D). Reflecting on his experiences from the late '90s, Leão critiques the historical portrayal of disabilities in D&D, where disabled characters were often relegated to roles of NPCs or villains, and the concept of a disabled hero was nearly inconceivable. The article brings forth insights from disabled gamers like Erin Hawley and Allison Alexander, discussing the often negative stereotyping of disabilities in games and the outdated game mechanics that treat disabilities as

conditions to be cured. Leão calls for meaningful changes within the RPG community, including the use of sensitivity readers, the employment of disabled content creators, and more inclusive game designs such as the introduction of combat wheelchairs in D&D 5E by Sara Thompson. His work is a call to action for the gaming industry to improve accessibility and representation, making RPGs a more inclusive space that reflects the diversity of its players.

Based on the current good practices and advancements in accessibility for RPGs, the future promises even more inclusive and supportive gaming experiences, especially with the rise of AI. AI models, such as ChatGPT, and voice assistants based on advanced AI models, are expected to significantly enhance the gaming experience for disabled players, including BVI individuals. Imagine a scenario where a player can simply ask an AI assistant, "Hey, am I allowed to do this?" instead of wasting time scrolling through hundreds of pages in a rulebook. In the future, AI-driven tools could not only save time but also empower BVI players, first-time players, and anyone who might find searching through a massive rulebook daunting. By providing instant access to specific rules and clarifications, AI assistants would make the game more approachable and enjoyable, reducing the intimidation factor and allowing players to focus on the gameplay experience rather than navigating complex rulebooks. These AI-driven tools could provide instant, accurate answers and facilitate seamless gameplay, ensuring that all players, regardless of their abilities, could fully engage and enjoy the game.

Insights from Focus Groups

The gaming community has long been a bastion of creativity, storytelling, and social interaction, yet accessibility remains a significant hurdle for visually impaired (VI) players. This section examines insights from three focus groups— youth workers from North Macedonia, youth workers from Greece, and blind RPG players from North Macedonia - highlighting the current landscape, challenges, and opportunities for creating more inclusive RPG experiences.

Summary from Youth Workers in North Macedonia

From the discussions with Macedonian youth workers and game enthusiasts, several key themes emerged. Firstly, while participants acknowledged the existence of adaptations in some games, there was uncertainty regarding their effectiveness and utilization by VI players. There was a consensus on the importance of gaining a deeper

understanding of the unique experiences of blind players to better tailor adaptations to their needs. Despite this uncertainty, the narrative nature of RPGs was highlighted as particularly adaptable for VI players.

Challenges related to the accessibility of RPGs for VI individuals were also discussed. High production costs and the limited market size were identified as significant barriers to the development and dissemination of accessible RPG materials. However, participants proposed potential solutions, including collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the utilization of existing adaptive equipment to minimize costs and expand accessibility.

Despite these challenges, there was a palpable interest among participants in exploring adapted RPGs with VI players. Many expressed a willingness to engage with existing resources and experiment with adaptations to make gaming experiences more inclusive. Recognizing the importance of education and preparation, participants emphasized the need for training sessions and reading handbooks to better understand the abilities and needs of blind individuals.

Furthermore, RPGs were viewed as valuable tools for promoting social inclusion among VI individuals. Participants highlighted the potential of RPGs to boost confidence, facilitate social interaction, and foster a sense of belonging within the gaming community. Practical considerations such as organizing games in accessible venues and leveraging online platforms to facilitate connections were also discussed as means to enhance inclusivity in RPG gaming spaces.

Summary from Youth Workers in Greece

During the focus groups with Greek youth workers, a range of insights emerged regarding the challenges and opportunities for enhancing RPG participation for visually impaired (VI) individuals. Participants highlighted accessibility issues, including the adaptation of materials for VI players and the logistical challenges of scheduling inclusive sessions. Effective communication was identified as a critical factor for successful RPG sessions, emphasizing the importance of clear and respectful interaction among participants.

While many of the Greek youth workers had limited direct experience with VI players, they engaged in discussions on adaptive technologies and alternative gameplay methods to better understand the needs of VI individuals. The implications for creating inclusive RPG sessions were underscored, with a focus on accessibility, physical access,

communication methods, and the integration of adaptive technologies to accommodate diverse needs.

Moreover, RPGs were recognized for their potential to promote social interaction and creativity among participants. Participants stressed the importance of inclusivity in maximizing these benefits, highlighting the need for accessible and inclusive gaming environments. Solutions to overcoming challenges and barriers included the development of alternative game material formats, flexible scheduling options, and training programs on inclusive facilitation techniques.

VI players provided invaluable insights into the accessibility challenges and potential solutions within RPGs. Combat maps were identified as particularly complex, leading to a preference for "theater of the mind" gameplay. Digital solutions, such as digitizing character sheets and utilizing accessible formatting in documents, were suggested to enhance accessibility. Participants also expressed openness to new adaptive technologies that maintain the core gaming experience while addressing accessibility needs. Challenges with traditional games, including card recognition and the lack of Braille components, were highlighted, prompting suggestions like clay modeling for tactile maps.

Given logistical challenges, VI players favored online gaming platforms, although they acknowledged the value of live gaming for social interaction. Inclusive design, both in physical and digital environments, was emphasized as essential for creating accessible RPG experiences.

In conclusion, the insights from these focus groups underscored the critical need for inclusivity in RPGs for VI players. Key recommendations included increasing awareness and training among game developers and facilitators, leveraging existing technologies, collaborating with NGOs, promoting inclusive design, providing flexible gameplay options, and enhancing social interaction opportunities. By implementing these recommendations, the RPG community can work towards a more inclusive future, ensuring that VI players can fully participate and enjoy the immersive experiences that RPGs offer.

Glossary

Accessibility: The design and creation of environments, products, and services that can be used by all people, regardless of their disabilities. In the context of RPGs, this means ensuring that games are playable by individuals with various impairments, including visual impairments.

Adapted Technology:

Technologies that have been modified or specifically designed to assist individuals with disabilities. In gaming, this might include tactile dice, Braille materials, or software designed to be compatible with screen readers.

Assistive Technology:

Devices or systems that help individuals perform tasks they might otherwise be unable to do or find difficult to accomplish. For visually impaired RPG players, this could include screen readers, magnification software, and audio description tools.

Blind Person (Functional Perspective):

An individual who has no functional vision and relies entirely on other senses (such as hearing and touch) and assistive technologies to perceive their environment and perform daily tasks.

Braille:

A tactile writing system used by people who are visually impaired. It consists of patterns of raised dots that represent letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, allowing blind individuals to read and write through touch.

Campaign:

An RPG campaign refers to a series of game sessions that are linked by a continuous storyline. It can span multiple sessions over days, weeks, months, or even years.

Character Development:

As characters progress through an RPG campaign, they grow and change. This evolution can be in terms of skills and abilities, as well as personal growth and narrative arc.

Inclusion of People with Disabilities:

The practice of ensuring that individuals with disabilities can participate fully in all aspects of life, including social, educational, and recreational activities. In RPGs, this means creating environments where players of all abilities can engage and contribute equally.

Inclusive/Universal Design:

The design of products, environments, and communications to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. In gaming, this includes creating RPGs that are accessible and enjoyable for both sighted and visually impaired players.

One-shot:

A one-shot is a standalone game session or adventure that is not part of a longer campaign and is intended to be completed in a single session. Unlike campaigns that span multiple sessions and may continue for months or even years, one-shots are self-contained stories. They're often used to introduce new players to RPGs, to test out new game mechanics, or simply to tell a story that doesn't require the long-term commitment of a campaign. One-shots can vary in length, from a couple of hours to a full day, but the common feature is that the story begins and concludes in that time frame.

Role-Playing Games (RPGs):

RPGs are games where participants assume the roles of characters and collaboratively navigate stories. These stories often unfold based on both a structured set of rules and spontaneous decisions made by the players and a Storyteller.

Screen Reader:

A software application that enables visually impaired users to read the text displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or Braille display. This technology is essential for navigating and interacting with digital content, including online RPG platforms.

Storyteller:

The Storyteller (also known as Game Master in some games) is the game organizer and participant in charge of creating the setting, enforcing the rules, and narrating the story. They act as both the storyteller and referee.

Storytelling:

At the heart of every RPG is a narrative. Whether it's a pre written scenario or a spontaneous tale, storytelling drives the game forward and

determines the context for players' decisions.

Theater of the Mind:

Unlike board games, many RPGs don't rely on visual components. "Theater of the Mind" refers to the imaginative space in which players visualize the game's events. It emphasizes storytelling, imagination, and verbal description over tangible pieces or visuals.

Visually Impaired Person (Functional Perspective):

An individual who has reduced vision, even when using the best possible corrective lenses. This includes a spectrum of visual impairments, from partial sight to low vision, where the person still relies significantly on visual aids and assistive technologies.

World-building:

Many RPGs feature intricate settings, sometimes entire fictional universes, complete with their own histories, cultures, and rules. World-building is the process of designing these settings.

DISCLAIMER

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