

A LOVE LETTER TO THE DISABLED PEOPLE WHO DROVE ONLINE LARP

The first time I played an online larp run by someone from their bed because of chronic pain, I knew something was happening.

The second time that happened, I knew pandemic larp was going to be different. That disabled larp designers were about to open up this medium.

Online larps are uniquely accessible. They can be played from your home, sometimes where no one can see you or hear you. Where you can control your environment. I am frequently told they are not as accessible as everyone makes out. No other medium needs to clarify that it is not magically accessible. Fuck, last year a game was submitted to Golden Cobra where everyone played on their phones in the dark, preferably lying down. That year the judges decided to quietly scrap the “Most Accessible and Inclusive Design”, they’d chosen as a category at the start of the contest because nothing quite fit the bill.

(this is not a callout for the Golden Cobra Judges. They never got the experience what I got to experience. Disabled people writing cool shit for disabled people.)

So many of the online larps that I have seen come out recently are made by disabled and neurodiverse people. Games by talented creators who are not restricted by some of the constraints of larp design in physical spaces. Who create cool stuff while constantly bashing their heads against real-world barriers. Disability inclusion is expansive, not restrictive. You don’t need someone to give you a checklist for how to win at accessibility. They’re out making inclusive games that champion people in a hobby that has previously judged you for how well you can swing a sword or remember numbers or read a bunch of documents quickly. Disabled people write cool, inclusive shit if they’re given the space for their games to be recognised which when we’ve all been online has been a unique opportunity.

The pandemic has not gone away. Some people still haven’t returned to in-person larps or conferences. We need to understand that if governments keep acting the way they do, some people may never be able to stop sheltering in place. We need to recognise that they will continue to contribute amazing stuff to the hobby.

So, this is for you, the disabled and neurodiverse people who drove online larping. Your accommodations are not a burden. You are never too messy, too difficult or too much. In fact, you are a joy to have in the game. I have been so lucky to design and run games for, to play with and to play in your games

This game is for you, you badass fucking disabled wizard.

BADASS FUCKIN' DISABLED WIZARDS

An online game played by 2-5 players lasting 1-2 hours played online about being badass, doing magic shit, and saving the world.

This game is played out in a number of scenes where the team encounters magical problems and must work together using their own supernatural skills to figure out what to do and how to save the world. It is light-hearted and conversation-led.

Setup

- You can use text/voice/video for this game - whatever medium works for your group.
- Any paragraph that starts with READ, I suggest either reading out loud or putting in a chat.

Calibration

READ: Welcome to Badass Fuckin' Disabled Wizards! Together, we are going to be telling a story about a group of disabled wizards, We're here to do supernatural shit and save the world. Both as our characters and as players, we are working together to create cool stories and moments. That means we care about people's needs. So, first thing we're going to do is talk about what we need from the game.

Within the group, you want to get to the bottom of some of these questions.

- What medium is this game going to be in and is there anything we should be aware of within it? Is it on video, voice or text? Are people happy with typing? Do you need to have video on, will you need to have video off?
- Is there any content that we do not want to be in this game? This game is about magic and disability but there may be extra content you do or don't want in the game.
- This game can run from 1-2 hours. Does anyone need a specific break in that time?
- Is there anything else that will make the game easier for you?

Once you've done that, the next step is making a character.

Character Creation

READ: We're going to be creating characters. There are some key things you need to know about the characters that you create. Firstly, the wizards are in a group who are all badass both individually and as a team. Secondly, they're wizards. They have supernatural skills that can do shit that non-wizards would think is impossible. Thirdly, they're disabled. This is a game about disabled wizards and even in a supernatural world, turns out there are still fucking barriers. Do the first stage together then the second two individually (though you can talk about it as you do it!)

1. The Gang

You are part of a group that gets together to solve magical problems but there is something that makes you stick together.

Are they:

- Part of a Wizarding Collective who have organised to create a just world through magic?
- Students at a Wizarding School who must contend with the archaic practices?
- Members of an online forum that brings disparate wizards together?

2. The Wizard

Your wizard does cool supernatural shit through the casting of magic spells.

Can they create objects out of nothing? Make things disappear from sight or completely change their appearance? Lift or break things the strongest non-wizard could not break? Pick something cool that has an effect on the world.

Based on your magical abilities, pick a word that sounds cool. That is your character's name. If you can make things disappear, your wizard name might be Blink. If you can create fire, your name might be Eviscerate.

3. Their disability

Your wizard is disabled in some way. Some people don't like giving characters disabilities they don't have. Remember that disabled people are fucking awesome. This game isn't about talking in depth about their disabilities or trying to figure out what it's like to experience them. It's about solving magical problems.

Do they have low, no or weird vision? Do they have low energy and high pain especially when they are casting magic? Go wild here and remember it's not just someone's body but also how that body interacts with the world.

Gameplay

Scenes

This game is played in a number of scenes. These represent a number of different conversations you have with your group to sort shit out. Each scene starts with a prompt and ends with a key phrase that one character says as a sign to wrap up. This could be something like "I'm tired, let's head to bed" or "Let's fucking goooooo." that you should decide amongst yourselves. You have the choice to both cast spells during the scenes or make plans to do bigger more advanced schemes.

Spells

As wizards, you can cast small spells that have an effect on your local area. However, this is loud and showy and everyone will witness it. You do this by taking an action and waiting for all other members of your group to be silent and to copy you. This could look like putting a finger on your nose, making a unique sound or putting an emoji in chat. Tell people what this action is in advance.

When everyone has done that action or people are no longer speaking, you can announce what spell you have done and what effect it has. This shouldn't have the ability to change someone's body or mind in the group but it can cause as much trouble or good as you want to.

When you are ready, have a break, revise your characters then someone reads out the prompt to begin each scene.

Scene 1 - The Situation

READ: It's time! Your magic skills are needed once more to help your wizarding buddies and the wider world solve some problems. You've each encountered a magical problem that is affecting you. This problem could take the form of "This [SUPERNATURAL CREATURE OR PHENOMENON] is [ACTION]" In this scene, figure out how to solve the problems using your magical ability and what connects all these problems together to make a wider, more world-ending issue.

Scene 2 - The Consequences

READ: Oh no! You all did an amazing job trying to solve those problems but there were UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES. In this scene, figure out what the consequences were, who is to blame, and what weird stuff is happening as a result?

Scene 3 - The Climax

READ: It's the final showdown. You think you've solved all the weirdness you caused in Scene 2 and now it's time to solve the big problem that links all of the magical fuckery together. Figure out ways to solve the problems, help your comrades and make a plan to save the world.

Debrief

The game is over, you've used your magic to save the world and now you are back to being your human people. If you'd like, go round in a circle and everyone has the opportunity to say a few things to end the game. You might like to reflect on how your character felt to play or how you are different from that character.