

**TRENDING TOPICS:** BIG TECH (/TRENDING/BIG-TECH)**OPINION (/CATEGORY/OPINION)**

THE WOKE POLICE CAME FOR DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

The legendary role-playing game has become “problematic.”

By Ian Miles Cheong (/author/ianmilescheong) | August 26, 2020

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is the standard for modern role-playing games. The game, published in 1974, was first conceptualized as a derivative of miniature wargames, but quickly became a genre of its own. In groups of three or more people, players take on the roles of wizards and warriors, and everything in-between, to battle monsters in dungeons, with a

storyteller (or Dungeon Master) as referee and guide. Like in most role-playing games, the

Aktien Metriken

Aktie vor Neubewertung

ÖFFNEN



objective isn't to win or lose; it's the adventure. Players join each other in raiding coffins slaying dragons, and saying their goodbyes. It's a game that built a huge fan base, had a massive online community of players around it and had such an avid fan base.

D&D has served as inspiration for numerous video games

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Dungeons_%26_Dragons_video_games), films

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_\(film_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_(film_series))), novels

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_\(novels\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_(novels))), and cartoons

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons_(TV_series))), and it has become a cultural

reference for all things geek-related. It's practically impossible to separate D&D from geekdom.

You can't step into a gaming store without seeing toys, miniatures, and art inspired by Dungeons

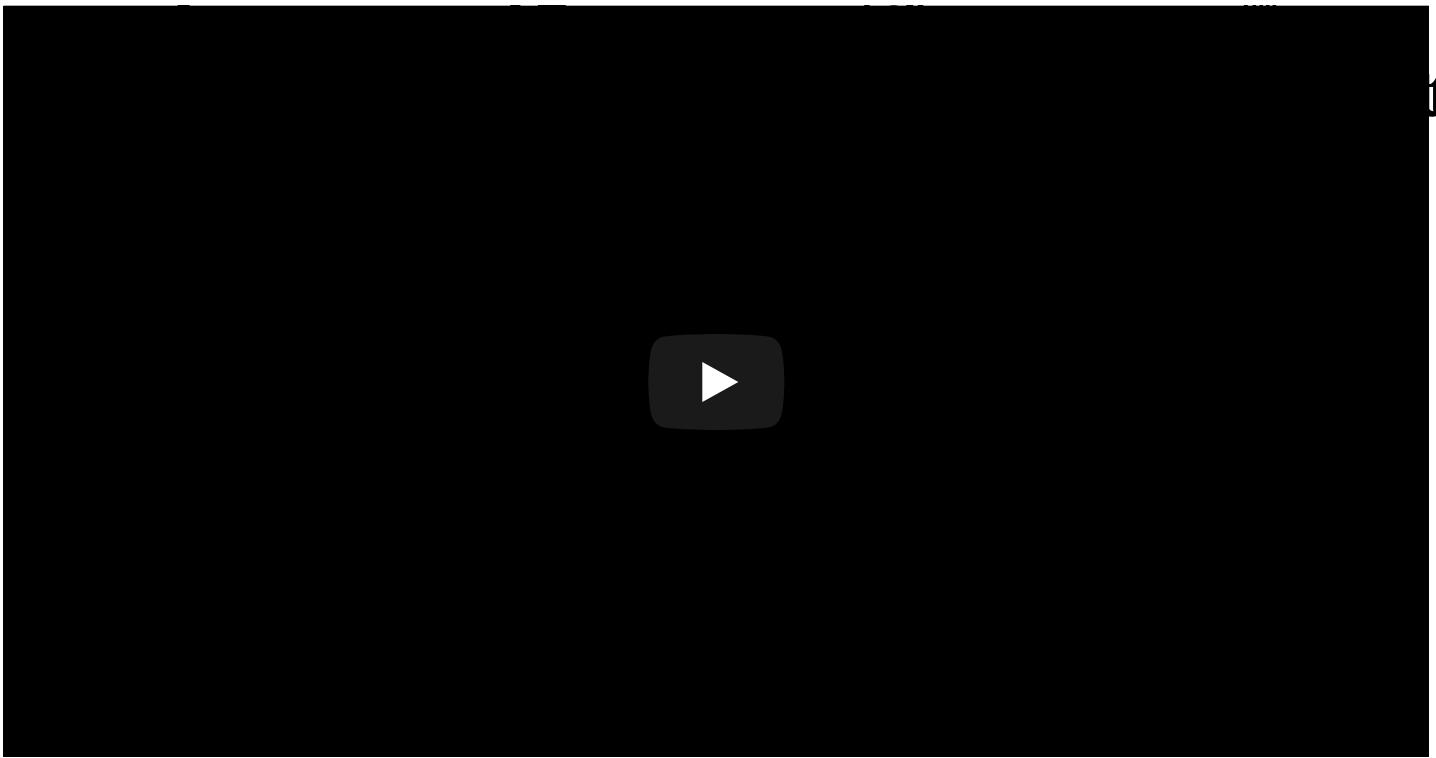
& Dragons.



Report Ad



Yonii



As its popularity grew in the 70s and 80s, so did its notoriety—and with notoriety came controversy. In the 1980s, D&D set off a moral panic

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/18/us/when-dungeons-dragons-set-off-a-moral-panic.html>) with fundamentalist Christian groups that alleged the game promoted witchcraft and devil worship—a template for teenage misbehavior from anything as simple as truancy, all the way up to murder (<https://forensicfilesnow.com/index.php/2017/05/11/dungeons-and-dragons-oh-my/>).

The reason behind this ire was rather mundane: some of the artwork featured naked humanoids in the original D&D manuals, depicting demons and monsters like succubi and harpies. Christian activist Jack Chick, known for his Chick Tracts, fictionalized Dungeons & Dragons

(<https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/11/8/13426962/jack-chick-alt-right-fundamentalism-tracts-catholics-trump>) in a serial comic that depicted the game as nothing short of a guide for satanic behavior. This, along with a movie called Mazes and Monsters

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazes_and_Monsters), based on the novel of the same name and starring Tom Hanks, led to widespread demonization and social ostracization of D&D players, who were depicted in the film as having an inability separating fantasy from reality. Role-playing, it seems, was a concept that the general public could appropriately grasp, at least at the time.

Report Ad



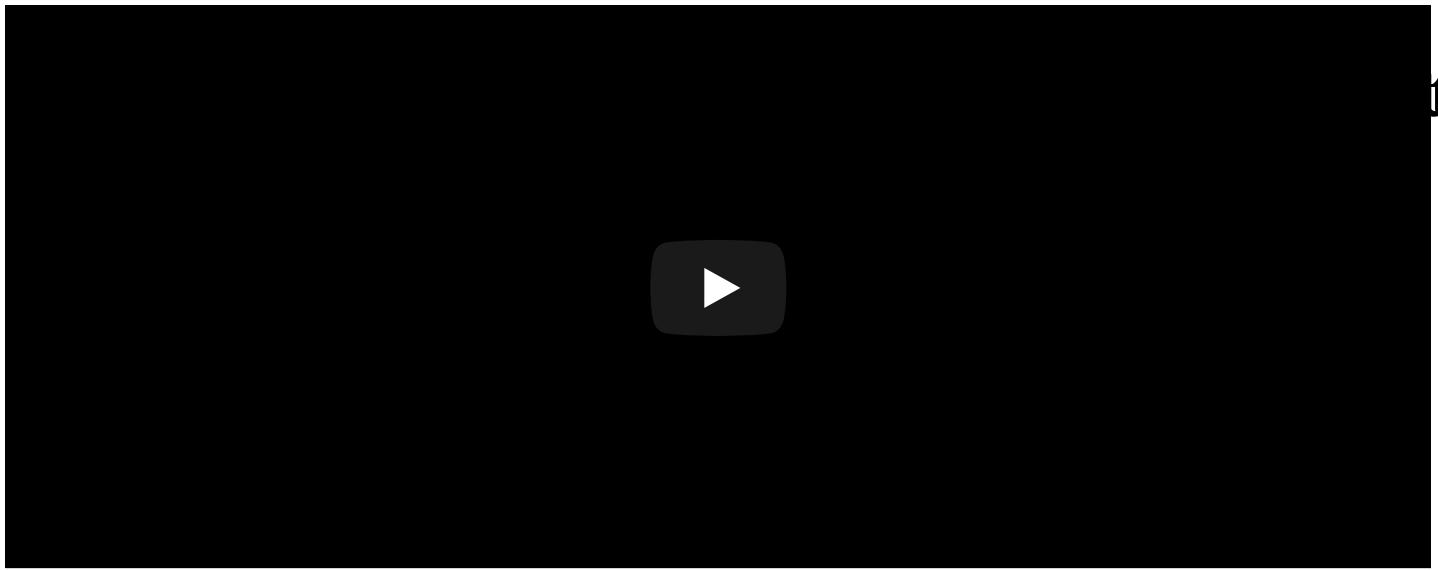
Von



PHOTO: "DARK DUNGEONS" BY JACK CHICK.

In response to the controversy, TSR, which originally developed the game, [removed the references](https://www.enworld.org/threads/jim-ward-demons-devils-not.666876/) (<https://www.enworld.org/threads/jim-ward-demons-devils-not.666876/>) to demons and devils—if only to appease overly concerned parents. (Note: they'd later re-add them (<https://blackjackrants.blogspot.com/2019/10/reviewing-d-monsters-5e-monster-manual.html>) in the game's 3rd edition.)

But Dungeons & Dragons weathered the storm, and its popularity refused to wane. Seeing great commercial success in the late 80s, D&D's continued popularity led to the creation of several multi-million dollar, best selling [video games](http://gametalon.com) (<http://gametalon.com>), which used the license. Without D&D, there would be no Neverwinter Nights and Baldur's Gate—a sequel to which is now in the works. There would also be no derivatives like Pillars of Eternity, Pathfinder: Kingmaker, Dragon Age, and Divinity: Original Sin.



D&D's notoriety among fundamentalist Christians may have subsided, but its continued popularity has continued to earn it a place in contemporary culture, where it has become a battleground for the latest culture war. Known for their negative predisposition towards anything and everything in the media, today's self-righteous culture crusaders are no less appalled by Dungeons & Dragons than their predecessors. They may scoff at the Christians who waged war against D&D, but media criticism, which has a tendency to read way too closely into any given subject to find evidence of nefarious intent, has led these culture warriors to decry D&D as "[problematic](https://www.dicebreaker.com/games/dungeons-and-dragons-5e/news/dungeons-and-dragons-addressing-problematic-races) (<https://www.dicebreaker.com/games/dungeons-and-dragons-5e/news/dungeons-and-dragons-addressing-problematic-races>)." [Attacks against Dungeons & Dragons are also coming from within as newcomers to the game have declared its concept of race to be outdated, demanding changes be made \(<https://www.vg247.com/2020/08/05/dungeons-and-dragons-remove-race/>\) to be in line with the times.](https://www.vg247.com/2020/08/05/dungeons-and-dragons-remove-race/)

As riots rage on across the United States of America, so too does the culture war rage on in the gaming world. With gaming now mainstream and no longer as insular as it once was, gamers no longer have a safe space from which to take refuge from the world outside. The war on D&D rages on in every online community, Discord chatroom, and social media platform.

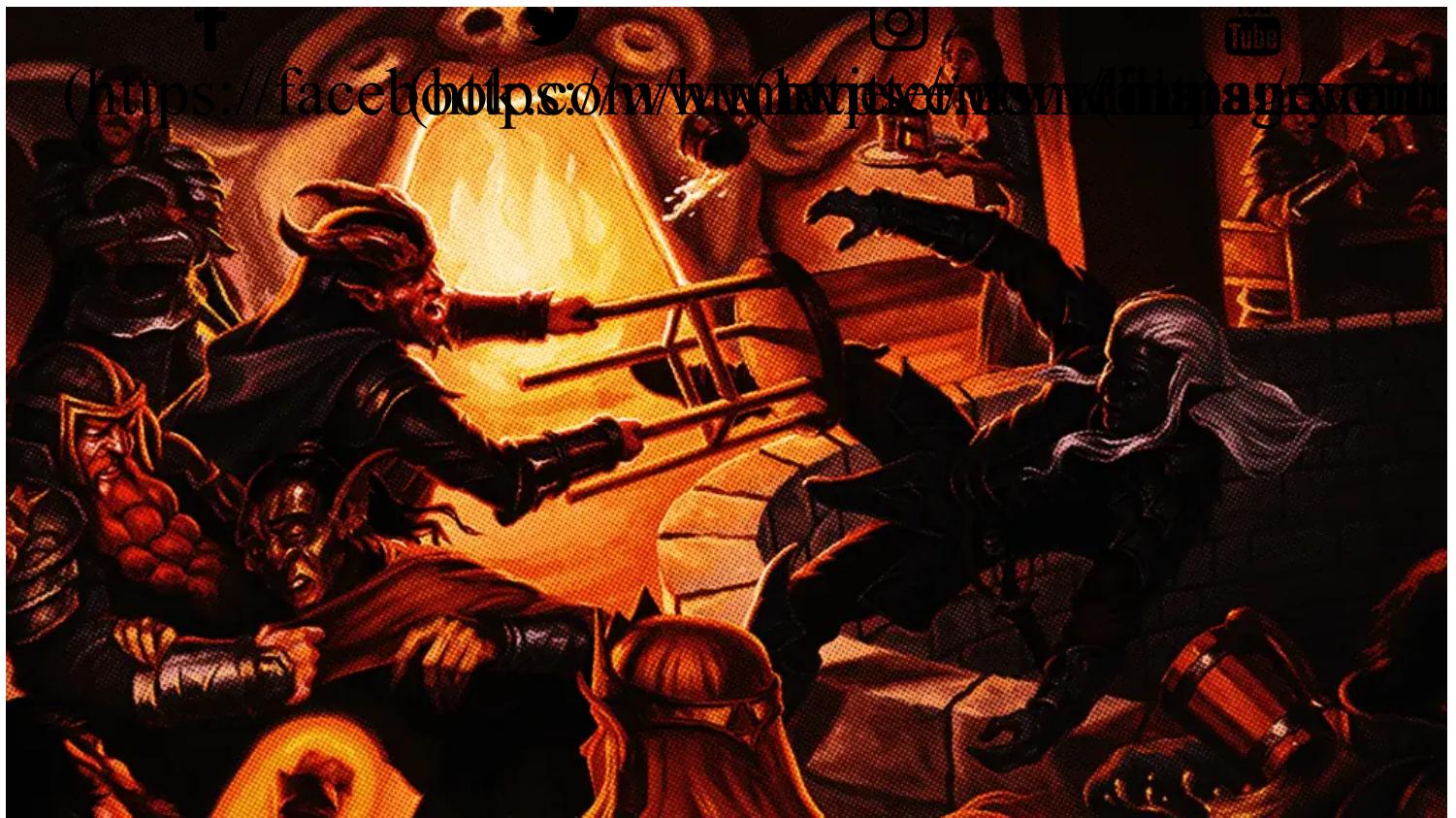


PHOTO: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

OF ORCS AND MEN

It all begins with the problem of Orcs. These fictional humanoids, green-skinned brutes with hides of leather, were conceptualized by J.R.R. Tolkien (<https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Orcs>), at least, in their modern incarnation. More fleshed out than most of Tolkien's mythological monsters (with the addition of an origin story), Orcs, which are based on Northern European folktales, are akin to the Goblin—just bigger, meaner, and much scarier. They serve as a contrast to the lithe and enlightened elves in the Lord of the Rings universe. In *The Fall of Gondolin*, Tolkien writes:

For all that race were bred by Melko of the subterranean heats and slime. Their hearts were of granite and their bodies deformed; foul their faces which smiled not, but their laugh that of the clash of metal, and to nothing were they more fain than to aid in the basest of the purposes of Melko.

Servants of an evil power in Tolkien's books, this characterization of orcs closely mirrors their depiction in Dungeons & Dragons. These servants of a greater evil are usually footsoldiers, Report Ad minions to a dragon, or demon, or an orc chieftain at the bottom of a dungeon. They serve as

fodder for the players, to be defeated alongside undead skeletons and other evil creatures.

(<https://facebook.com/warcraft>)

Just as Dungeons & Dragons inspired the creation of new fantasy franchises, so too did the lore of Orcs expand beyond their brutish but humble origins. In World of Warcraft, for instance, they're depicted as a warlike race (<https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-us/game/races/orc>) with a unique culture of their own, split into different clans. They are more than simply monsters in Warcraft; they're the main characters, led by a warchief who seeks to elevate his people above their barbarism. And while they are still not wholly human, the humanization of Orcs in the media has made them much more empathetic creatures than Tolkien or the creators of Dungeons & Dragons ever envisioned. The evolution of the Orc, based loosely on colonialist tropes of native peoples and European pagans, has made them a ripe topic for the woke brigade that has found a cause in the dehumanization of a fantasy creature *that wasn't even human in the first place*.

PHOTO: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS.

IDENTITY POLITICS

Report Ad



You

The problem of the Orc has grown and metastasized into a crusade against the concept of “race” in Dungeons & Dragons. On the official website of the game, the entry for “Race” (<https://dungeonsdragons.fandom.com/wiki/Race#:~:text=Unlike%20the%20modern%20real%2Dwar>) claims that “race” in D&D refers not to culture or ethnicity, but different types of humanoid creatures (<https://dungeonsdragons.fandom.com/wiki/Race#:~:text=Unlike%20the%20modern%20real%2Dwar>). For instance, a Beholder, which is a large, floating mass of eyes, would be considered a wholly different species from Orcs, Elves, and humans, who are “humanoid” in form, but of different races.

D&D now faces a new round of controversy akin to that of the ‘80s, albeit from a new faction of socially conscious culture warriors. BoingBoing, reporting on the controversy, claims (<https://boingboing.net/2020/08/10/racial-traits-in-dd-are-prett.html>) that using “races” to divide the different human species “feeds into inherently colonialist tropes of race that have long dominated the fantasy genre,” and that its current owners at Hasbro and its subsidiary Wizards of the Coast, have made strides to “disentangle their role-playing games from harmful stereotypes—things like the essential racial traits of Orcs, which peg them as dark-skinned savages that are inherently evil and dumb.” The author refers to the blog *The Public Medievalist*, where Paul V. Sturtevant argues (<https://www.publicmedievalist.com/race-fantasy-genre/>) that Tolkien’s conception of “race” is a “huge problem,” citing another fantasy race, Hobbits, as an example of that problem:

His ideas have been bred into the core of the fantasy genre—not just literature, but films and games too. Contemporary authors have had to work hard to free the genre from this original sin. The core of the problem is that Tolkien conflates race, culture, and ability. Hobbits, he says, are a race, and based upon a combination their hereditary traits and cultural practices, are better at being stealthy than other races.

For Sturtevant, Tolkien’s concept of “race” and the depiction of Orcs as inherently evil presents “a world in which good and evil are so simplistic that an entire culture, race, or species can be inherently evil. If someone were to transpose that way of thinking onto cultures or races today, it could lead to the worst sort of prejudice.” He continues:

[T]his smacks of the worst sort of colonial racism, which sought to make American Indians, Africans, and other people of color not just seem less human, but inherently immoral. Making “evil races” (like the orcs and uruk-hai, as described in *The Lord of the Rings*, and dark elves, in D&D) dark-skinned creates fantasy worlds that are structured along racist lines—and mimicking those

that plague **T**s in the real world. It would be foolish to explain that away as mere coincidence. Whether the creators did this intentionally or not, it's clear that they were influenced by the tenets of white-supremacy: that having dark skin is bad.

Sturtevant goes on to mention the dark elves, another “evil race” in both Tolkien’s books and in Dungeons & Dragons. Much like Orcs, these fallen Elves—dwellers of the underground setting of the “Underdark” in D&D—bear no resemblance to anyone in the real world. They’re depicted not as dark-skinned humans, or even brown-skinned elves, but as ashen gray-skinned elves with white hair. But what they do share in common with the Orc is the “darkness” of their skin.

A Facebook advertisement for a vacation rental. The main text reads "Feiere Silvester im Ferienhaus". Below it is a photo of a festive table with a lit candle, glasses of champagne, and a small Christmas tree. A "Zur Website" button is at the bottom left, and a "Report Ad" link is at the bottom right. In the top right corner of the ad, there are standard social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

[Report Ad](#)

There is a clear lineage between pseudoscientific observations on ethnicity and the depiction of “race” in fantasy settings, but it would be a mistake to equate the Orc in Dungeons & Dragons to people of color. As a fantasy race, Orcs are sufficiently removed from any real-world inspirations that brought them into being—and movies like Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings depicted them not as dark-skinned humans, but as pale-skinned humanoid monstrosities that are very distinctively Orcs. Likewise, the green-skinned, brutish humanoids in World of Warcraft and Dungeons & Dragons are not based on any humans.

To draw the comparison between Orcs and real humans is simply a projection on the part of anyone who sees stereotypically negative human qualities in them. I.e., racists.

[Report Ad](#)



Yonii



(<https://facebook.com/wizardscom/diversityandinclusionpage>)

PHOTO: LARIAN STUDIOS' BALDUR'S GATE 3.

WOKE CAPITAL

Just as the creators of Dungeons & Dragons caved to outrage in the '80s by removing references to devils and demons to avoid controversy, the game's contemporary proprietors are implementing changes to the game to appease the mob. Not only is this a response to the outrage currently brewing over the game, but it's also an opportunity to garner *woke capital* and cater to a new demographic of players.

A post on the official Wizards website (<https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/diversity-and-dnd>) begins with rhetoric akin to Justin Trudeau's statement that diversity is a strength (<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength>).

Dungeons & Dragons teaches that diversity is strength," it begins. "for only a diverse group of adventurers can overcome the many challenges a D&D story presents. In that spirit, making D&D as welcoming and inclusive as possible has moved to the forefront of our priorities over the last six years. We'd like to share with you what we've been doing, and what we plan to do in the future to address legacy D&D content that does not reflect who we are today.

Report Ad



You



For the sake of transparency or virtue signaling (take your pick), the company says that one of its explicit design goals for the game is to “reflect the world’s diversity by depicting characters who represent an array of ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and beliefs.” Keep in mind that this is a fantasy game, with a wide variety of fantasy races, ethnicities, and cultural origins, where players are free to pick and choose to be any manner of fantasy character.

We want everyone to feel at home around the game table and to see positive reflections of themselves within our products. ‘Human’ in D&D means everyone, not just fantasy versions of northern Europeans, and the D&D community is now more diverse than it’s ever been.

(This is to say nothing of the fact that D&D was always an inclusive game—even old advertisements from the 1980s (<https://www.wired.com/2007/01/dungeons-and-dr/>) show that players of various races and both genders were welcome to partake in adventures.)

Wizard’s post states that throughout the game’s 50-year history, Orcs and Drow (better known as dark elves) “have been characterized as monstrous and evil, using descriptions that are painfully reminiscent of how real-world ethnic groups have been and continue to be denigrated.” To that end, the company presents Orcs and Drow in a new light by making them as morally and culturally complex as other “peoples” in the game. Orcs, which were previously considered a different race from humans in Dungeons & Dragons, are now referred to as “people,” a move that begs the question as to whether goblins, giant floating eyes, and the psychic squid aliens called the Illithid are also “people.”

“The changes Wizards is implementing in D&D has little to do with the reality of what the game is: a fantasy role-playing game enjoyed by millions of people of diverse backgrounds.”

The company is also reprinting its old adventures with fixes to what it calls “errors in judgment.” Reprintings (<https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/diversity-and-dnd>) of the books *Tomb of Annihilation* and *Curse of Strahd* had changes made to text that Wizards considers “racially”



insensitive. *Curse of Strahd*, in particular, included a heroine named Ezmerelda from a fantasy race called the Vistani, who had the ability to turn invisible. Wizards has removed the woman. Wizards is working with a Romani consultant to make sure she doesn't offend.

In addition, future books published by the company will be vetted by “sensitivity readers,” who are being incorporated into the creative process. The company also intends to hire diversity consultants to “help us identify our blind spots,” in addition to seeking “new, diverse talent” to join its staff of freelance writers and artists.

The changes Wizards is implementing in D&D has little to do with the reality of what the game is: a fantasy role-playing game enjoyed by millions of people of diverse backgrounds. The game’s depiction of Orcs and Dark Elves as evil fantasy creatures was never a problem before—and, as a [now-banned episode](https://www.buzz.ie/entertainment/netflix-pulls-episode-of-community-with-blackface-scenes-in-it-375973) (<https://www.buzz.ie/entertainment/netflix-pulls-episode-of-community-with-blackface-scenes-in-it-375973>) of the television sitcom *Community* highlights, claims of the game’s supposedly racist tropes were always tongue in cheek. People had a sense of humor once upon a time.

Dungeons & Dragons isn’t racist, nor has it ever been. The inspirations behind the first Orcs may seem problematic when viewed through a contemporary lens, but you’d have to reach far to find any actual instances of racism in the game, and even further to argue that any of its players felt alienated by its depiction of Orcs and other non-human fantasy races.

Millions of gamers felt at home with Dungeons & Dragons, role-playing as wizards and warriors of all manner of fantasy races long before Wizards signaled its decision to make the game more “inclusive.” It’s only those who never sought to understand it in the first place that found something to take issue with. Then again, they always do.



Written By:

(/author/ianmilescheong) Ian Miles Cheong
(<https://humanevents.com/author/ianmilescheong>)



You



Ian Miles Cheung is the managing editor of Human Events.



(https://facebook.com/humanevents?utm_source=flipboard&utm_medium=link)

Share:

Recent Editorials •

NEWS & ANALYSIS (/CATEGORY/NEWS-ANALYSIS)

FDA Delays Moderna Vaccine for Adolescents to Review Rare Side Effect

The FDA is delaying a decision on authorizing the Moderna vaccine for adolescents to deeper assess...

HUMAN EVENTS STAFF

October 15, 2021

(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/15/fda-delays-moderna-vaccine-for-adolescents-to-review-rare-side-effect/>)

(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/15/fda-delays-moderna-vaccine-for-adolescents-to-review-rare-side-effect/>)

NEWS & ANALYSIS (/CATEGORY/NEWS-ANALYSIS)

Lt. Col. Scheller Sentenced to Reprimand, Forfeiture of Pay

Lt. Col. Scheller, the United States Marine who was arrested for posting public criticism of the...

HUMAN EVENTS STAFF

October 15, 2021

(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/15/lt-col-scheller-sentenced-to-reprimand-forfeiture-of-pay/>)

(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/15/lt-col-scheller-sentenced-to-reprimand-forfeiture-of-pay/>)

NEWS & ANALYSIS (/CATEGORY/NEWS-ANALYSIS)

Pennsylvania Votes to Withdraw from National School Boards Association

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is one of 11 state boards that are officially...

HUMAN EVENTS STAFF

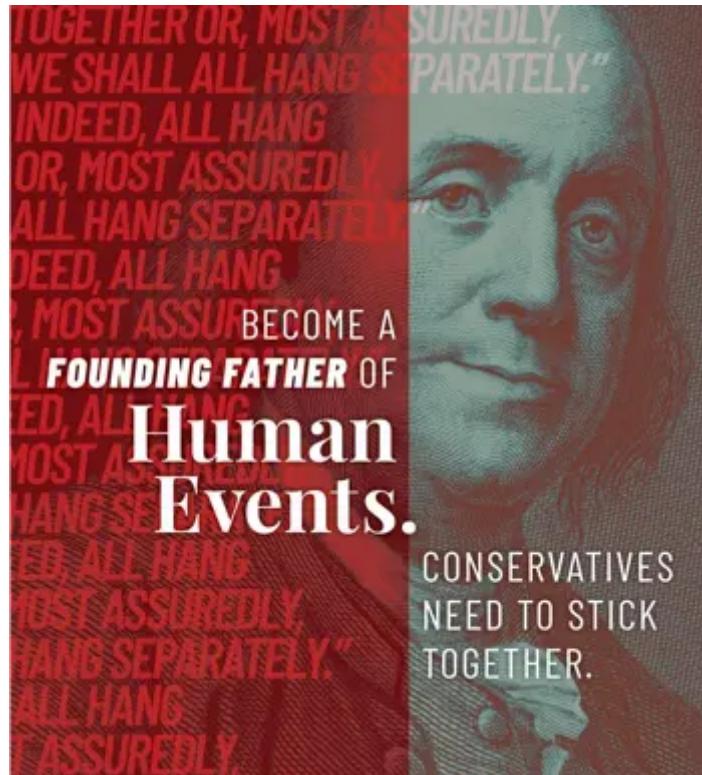
October 15, 2021

Report Ad

(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/15/pennsylvania-votes-to-withdraw-from-national-school-boards-association/>)



(<https://humanevents.com/2021/10/pennsylvania-votes-to-withdraw-from-national-school-boards-association/>) (<https://facebook.com/www.humanevents.com/dispageweb>)



(/members/)

Join the Newsletter

EMAIL ADDRESS

SIGN UP

HELP

- [f \(<https://facebook.com/humaneventsmedia>\)](https://facebook.com/humaneventsmedia)
- [Twitter \(<https://www.twitter.com/humanevents>\)](https://www.twitter.com/humanevents)
- [Instagram \(<https://www.instagram.com/humanevents>\)](https://www.instagram.com/humanevents)
- [YouTube \(<https://youtube.com/humanevents>\)](https://youtube.com/humanevents)

Report Ad



[ARCHIVE](#) / [CATEGORY](#) / [ARCHIVE](#)  [SUPPORT \(HTTPS://HUMANEVENTS.COM/MEMBERS/\)](#) 
<https://facebook.com/humanevents> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/human-events/>
[PRIVACY POLICY \(HTTPS://HUMANEVENTS.COM/PRIVACY-POLICY/\)](#)
[SUBMIT \(HTTPS://HUMANEVENTS.COM/SUBMISSIONS/\)](#)

Copyright © Parallel Media LLC 2021

Report Ad



You