

What we should have said about DDAL4-01

Yesterday we published an article, [Sensitivity in the Demiplane of Dread](#), in which we talk about some of the depictions of the Vistani and Gur, two nomadic groups of humans that feature centrally in *Curse of Strahd*. What we didn't talk about — and probably should have — is why we're talking about them now, and what it has to do with Shawn Merwin's adventure, [Suits in the Mist](#).

These groups are not new in D&D Lore: the Vistani featured in the original *Ravenloft* (1983), and the Gur are first mentioned in *Heroes' Lorebook* (1996). While most D&D races like elves and dwarves are inspired largely by creatures of folklore, many of the human cultures in the Forgotten Realms take inspiration from historical human cultures. The Gur and Vistani draw much inspiration from a common, romanticized depiction of two groups: the [Romani](#) and [Irish Travellers](#), two distinct cultures whose only common thread is that they are traditionally itinerant, and have been sometimes called by the same ethnic slur.

In the introduction to *Suits in the Mist*, we inadvertently played into some of the common stereotypes about these groups without giving the reader context into the depth of character we had planned for the rest of the season. The result felt hollow and offensive, and we're sorry for that.

Why is this a problem?

Something common isn't always kind. Both groups that the Gur are inspired by have long endured a depiction as charismatic and opportunistic thieves, to be distrusted and feared. They're often treated by media as [Acceptable Ethnic Targets](#) in that playing up hurtful and untrue stereotypes is somehow OK.



Snatch (2000) depicting Irish Travellers in England Chocolat (2000) depicting Romani in France

These stereotypes have had serious consequences. Half a million Romani were killed in World War 2, and today both groups endure political prejudice and persecution.

As D&D players, we know stereotypes

Despite [D&D likely giving you the skills to be a confident and successful person](#), our community is often depicted cruelly as obese basement-dwellers with poor social skills and worse hygiene.



Fear of Girls (2007-2014)

"If you watch, really watch an episode of The Big Bang Theory and pay attention to when the audience laughs it soon becomes clear that what they're laughing at. What Chuck Lorre wants us to find funny is not the jokes which the characters are making, it's the characters themselves. At one point Howard mentions playing Dungeons and Dragons. There is no joke attached to this, it's not the punchline to any set up, however it is treated as one. Howard says the words "Dungeons and Dragons" and the audience laughs. They're not laughing at a joke, they're laughing at the fact that Howard plays D&D."
- [The Problem With The Big Bang Theory...](#) (2012)

So it should come as no surprise to us when others bristle at unflattering depictions of their communities as well. That said, sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in our cultures, so transparent to us, that we're offensive without even being aware of it. But it's a challenge that we're very much aware of, and wish to improve. If you notice we've misstepped, [drop us a line](#). We're listening.

Embracing empathy at the gaming table

Fifth edition D&D is most inclusive version of the game to date. One of my favorite passages of the Player's Handbook is the section on sex and gender:

You don't need to be confined to binary notions of sex and gender. The elf god Corellon Larethian is often seen as androgynous or hermaphroditic, for example, and some elves in the multiverse are made in Corellon's image. You could also play a female character who presents herself as a man, a man who feels trapped in a female body, or a bearded female dwarf who hates being mistaken for a male. Likewise, your character's sexual orientation is for you to decide.

This section affirms what I've always believed: D&D isn't just a game for bros who smite evil and save princesses. It's for everyone, even — maybe especially — for people who sometimes feel like outsiders.

As members of the D&D Adventurer's League, we have a special responsibility to each other. Many AL games bring together groups of strangers from different perspectives and backgrounds. A joke your close friends may find hilarious might come off as hurtful or rude to someone who doesn't know you. Be mindful of what you say at the gaming table.

While I'm not an expert in mindfulness and inclusivity, when someone does point out to you that someone you said was offensive or hurtful, I know it can take a lot of courage. Listen. But definitely don't:

- Tell the person their feelings are unreasonable [because you don't see it](#).
- Justify the thing as being [acceptable or commonplace](#).
- [Deride the person](#) as being oversensitive or irrational.

In our previous discussion of *DDAL4-01: Suits in the Mist*, we did all of these things. We'll work to do better in the future.