Measuring the Extent to Which Antisemitism is Rooted in Contemporary Goblin Stories

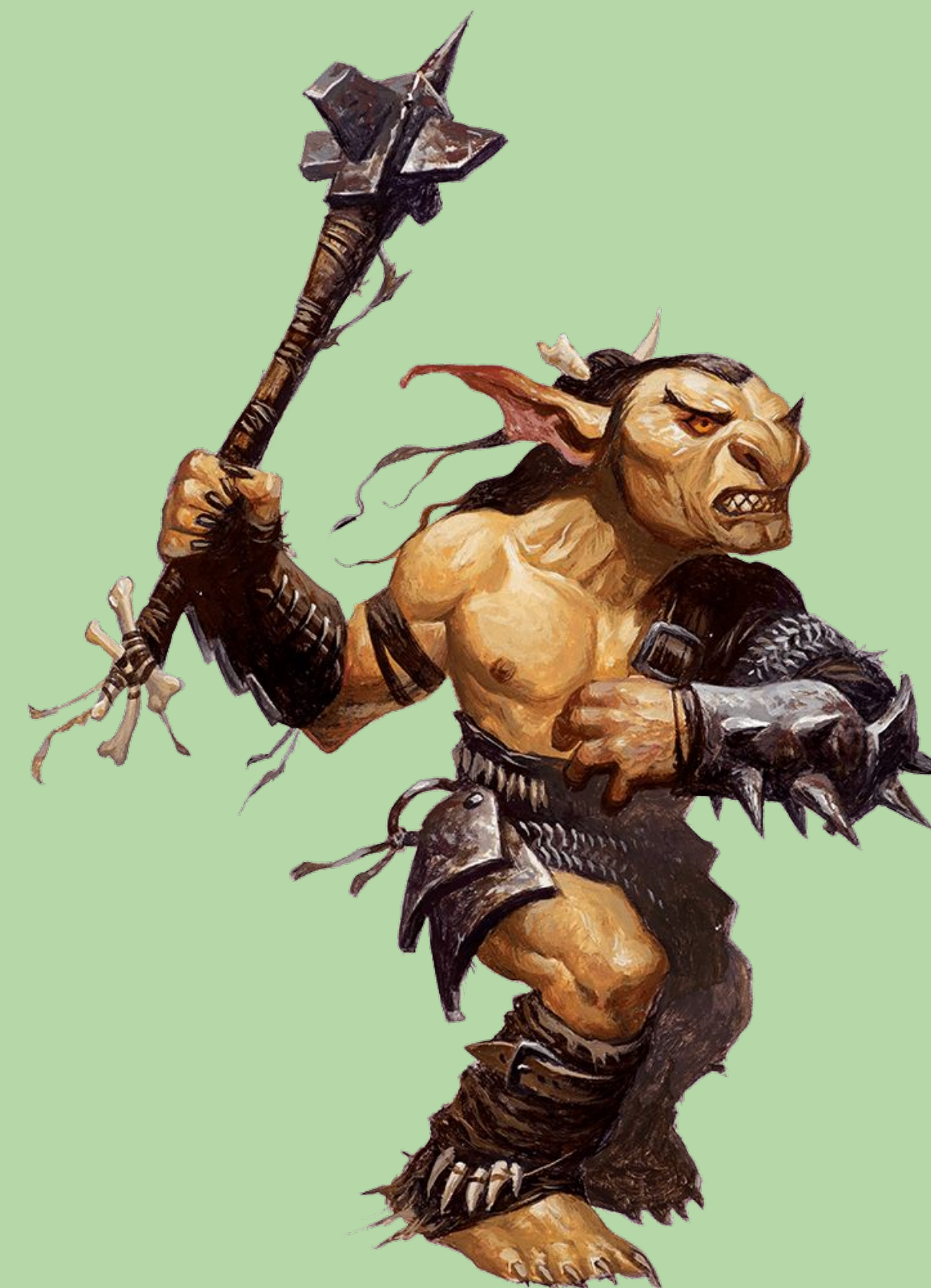By David Felch

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INTRODUCTION

Goblins have had a troubled history throughout folklore. Oftentimes portrayed as villainous, ugly creatures, even used as anti semitic propaganda back in the 1500s, their existence now in fantasy remains a question as they still contain many of the tropes used back in their folklore days for hate. THe question now is how have Goblins developed throughout the years of storytelling? Are they still primarily consistent with their tropes that caused so much harm or is there nuance with how they are used in contemporary fiction?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Five sources were coded and analyzed throughout this process. These sources were aimed to be contemporary, work done in the past 15 years, that encompasses a wide range of fiction. If the scope of this research was bigger, more sources would be selected and from a wider range of media (perhaps even translated from different languages). The sources chosen are as follows:

- The Goblin Emperor (2014): A novel written by Sarah Monette
- The Order of the Stick (2003-ongoing): A webcomic series by Rich Burlew
- Goblin Fruit (2012): A short story written by Laini Taylor
- The Hollow Kingdom (2006): A novel by Clare B. Dunkle
- To Slay a Goblin (2018-ongoing): A flash fiction piece by Dylan Curry

DATA AND FINDINGS

After coding the sources through the lens of World Architecture, Characterization and Humanization, and Role in the Narrative Structure, the results were on average 2 points higher (out of 10) when compared to Tolkeiná Lord of the Rings portrayal of Goblins (and Orcs) through World Architecture, 4 points higher for Characterization and Humanization, and 5 points higher for role in the narrative structure. This means that on average there is a significant difference in the role the fantasy scene sees Goblins fitting, different from the historical stasis theat they previously stook in for folklore stories. While the physical characteristics of the Goblin remain consistent with the Goblins from folklore, the place goblins are in their own respective speculative fiction worlds, the characterization given to them to make them easier to sympathize with, and, most importantly, they have a significantly different role in story structure that is different from their more narrow trickster type chafracter in folklore.

Figure 1, Historic Folklore Goblin — Figure 2, Modern D&D 2014 Goblin — Figure 3, OOTS Webcomic #1208

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

After analyzing contemporary goblin stories, it is clear that while tropes associated with Goblins remain, contemporary authors are far more likely to subvert them to further their own stories rather than to fall back on the tropes and have the narrative focus elsewhere. These more modern Goblin stories paint them often as misunderstood (much like how they have been misused throughout history), oftentimes either as anti-heroes, sidekicks, or even as redeemed heroes themselves. While some researchers may believe that due to their history and their misuse, I believe that since there is an effort and a trend towards nuance and sophistication, they still have a purpose in fantasy. Authors just need to be careful when using them to avoid the negative stereotypes that are associated with them.

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Since there is clearly a cultural shift on how we look at Goblins, I think looking at a more social media centric lens and "goblincore" would be the next key step to understanding the evolution of Goblins from anti semitic to a meaningful storytelling tool.

Figure 4, Tik Tok @DeliaZilla

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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Full citations at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LLEcDv4iAAbAKP7Iq--Bz cgocaOGFnI2FK2p9A5QsBI/edit?usp=sharing

Figure 5, Goblin from Clash of Clans