

# S1E13 - Nicholas Leeman

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## SPEAKERS

Elle Billing, Nicholas Leeman

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- E** Elle Billing 00:00  
Hi, my name is Elle billing. I am a chronically ill queer femme, and I'm tired. I'm here this episode and every episode to dig at the roots of our collective fatigue, explore ways to direct our care and compassionate and sustainable ways and harness creative expression to heal ourselves and our world. And welcome to Hoarf Radical care in a late capitalist heckscape. My guest today is Nicholas Leeman. Nicholas Leeman is one of those folks whose career journey took a long meandering path that has not yet ended, currently working for the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts. Nicholas also reviews board games on his YouTube channel GLHF board games, and work summers as a PA announcer for the Minnesota Twins AAA affiliate, the St. Paul Saints. Nicholas makes his home in Minneapolis, Minnesota with his son. I'm excited to have him on the podcast today to talk about all things gaming. Hello, Nicholas,
- N** Nicholas Leeman 01:23  
Elle, How are you?
- E** Elle Billing 01:25  
I am here! how are you?
- N** Nicholas Leeman 01:27  
I am much the same: physically present and eligible to listen and speak. That is the most anyone can ask anybody right now. Yeah,
- E** Elle Billing 01:38  
we are vertical and ventilating.

N Nicholas Leeman 01:40  
Yes. Yes.

E Elle Billing 01:42  
My dad asks how I am and I say I'm peachy. And he's like, ah, inside it's just the pits. Yeah, true story.

N Nicholas Leeman 01:49  
Wow, that is such a classic dad response too, like, yeah.

E Elle Billing 01:55  
Yep. I'm all about the dad jokes. Yep. Yeah.

N Nicholas Leeman 01:58  
I have been telling my friends lately that like when when we ask each other how we are we are understand all of us that we're grading on a curve now. Right? Like, that's the thing? Oh, we understand. Okay, great.

E Elle Billing 02:09  
I read a study one time, or an article about a study that, you know, Americans, US people tend we lie, we say we're fine. And we have really high rates of depression. Russians generally are very honest and brutal. How are you? terrible! But they have actually really low, much lower rates of depression and mental health issues. See now granted, this was quite a while before, like the current situation between Russia and Ukraine and all of that was going on. But it was just a general cultural observation about being honest about how you're doing actually makes things better.

N Nicholas Leeman 02:48  
It's weird. That's not at all what our parents taught us. Is it?

E Elle Billing 02:51  
Yeah, yeah. Funny. Wait, not funny. not ha-ha-funny, kind of the other kind of funny.

N

Nicholas Leeman 02:57

Funny. Strange. Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 02:59

So since we're both doing super great. Yeah. My first question, how have you received care this week?

N

Nicholas Leeman 03:08

Hmm. That is a that's a delightful question. I am sitting here next to my dog Cosmo.

E

Elle Billing 03:15

Cute dog. What a sweetie.

N

Nicholas Leeman 03:17

Yeah, he's a for those of you who are unable to see what this dog looks like. He is a 55 pound Carolina dog, which is a breed I'd never heard of before adopting this one who was the puppy of a rescue. And mom was rescued from Texas. And she showed up to the foster facility and started gaining weight really fast. And they're like, that's weird. Why is she gaining weight? Like, well, there's an obvious explanation. And that was it. So we got a dog. This is Cosmo. And he's been teaching me lately that everything is in the moment. Dogs do not care what is happening an hour from now or a day from now or a week from now. They want treat. They want run. They want sleep. And

E

Elle Billing 04:08

does your dog play with a ball?

N

Nicholas Leeman 04:10

He does? Yes.

E

Elle Billing 04:11

Yeah, my dog is ball obsessed. She obviously can't read a clock, but she can tell time. And so every day at noon and everyday at five she gets really antsy and wants to go outside and wait for my dad to come home because that's what he comes home -- when it's not planting or

harvest. And she will go get the ball and set it on the porch and like wait, and then she just like loses her shit when my dad comes home, and they play ball, and it's really cute.

N

Nicholas Leeman 04:41

And that's that's like there's like a word for that. It's not like Euclidean or eurhythmic because that's the Eurythmics, but there's like an innate sense of like a body feeling right? Like it's not that your dog or my dog is like, Oh, it's 11 o'clock in one hour. I shall be Ready to play like it just there's something about innate incense inside them. That's like now is the time. And so they are completely in touch with how am I feeling at this exact moment, and I'm going to embrace that. I mean, they also lack certain cognitive ability to, to, to guess the future and present themselves in a way that is outside of that timeline. But I have been learning all this is to say, I have been learning from my dog about being present being in the moment. And that is a way that I have received care.

E

Elle Billing 05:30

That's really nice. Dogs are great for that. And is there anything that still needs care? Like, or needs to be held gently? Right now in your life?

N

Nicholas Leeman 05:41

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 05:43

You don't have to get into it. Like really personal, but like, yes. Okay, fine. Moving on. Yes. I think a lot of us are in that position, where there's just a lot going on. Like I feel right now. Like I'm holding a lot. There's just a lot happening.

N

Nicholas Leeman 05:58

Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 05:58

Everybody in my family and my close circle of friends. And it's like, how are we holding so much?

N

Nicholas Leeman 06:04

I don't know. Yeah. Well, warmth and light to you, Elle

**E** Elle Billing 06:08  
and same to you. Which, you know, Groundhog Day yesterday. As of this recording, it'll go out later. But I talked to my niece yesterday, and she said that groundhog saw his shadow, and it's six more weeks of winter, and I am so over it. I want it to be warm.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 06:30  
Same big, same. Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 06:32  
She's like I just so over winter. Well she has to walk to the bus stop every morning.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 06:38  
So I mean, certainly she's done. Yeah, she's done.

**E** Elle Billing 06:41  
Do you have any kind of creative practice? I know, we're both theater students at the--.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 06:47  
Yes.

**E** Elle Billing 06:48  
--Same University, different timeframe. We didn't overlap at all.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 06:51  
Correct.

**E** Elle Billing 06:52  
So are you still involved in improv?

**N** Nicholas Leeman 06:55

I am. Yep, great. I still dip my toe back into that giant lake every once in a while. I also work summers for the St. Paul Saints, which is a triple A baseball affiliate of the Minnesota Twins here in the Twin Cities of mighty Minnesota where I'm from, which is less improv than, you know, for slightly bearded cis white men standing on a stage and asking for your favorite meal and your favorite book, and then proceeding to ignore that information for 45 minutes. That is, it's still it's artistically fulfilling. It is. It's a delightful job. I can't recommend it enough. **And also I have** escape room deal, but there's no escaping. It's just you and your friends come and hang out and participate in game show games for an hour. And I'm hosting that. And it's the life.

E

Elle Billing 07:55

So it's like an escape room you can never escape. You're just stuck there.

N

Nicholas Leeman 07:59

No, it's the opposite of that. It's an escape room you're welcome to leave at any time.

E

Elle Billing 08:03

Oh, see, that's my kind of escape room. Then. Like it's consent based. You get to leave when you want.

N

Nicholas Leeman 08:09

Yeah, I do this whole thing right before we go in where it's like, This is the bathroom. We're walking past right now. You don't need to ask permission. If you want to use it during our hour. You can just go it's fine.

E

Elle Billing 08:20

Oh, that that? That sounds like definitely my kind of like, friend fun event. My brother with a company he used to work for they did, they went on like some team building escape room thing. I'm like, that sounds like the worst corporate work event ever.

N

Nicholas Leeman 08:37

Yeah, yeah. If you ever want

E

Elle Billing 08:40

you have to really want to be around your work friends to do it. And you don't. And you don't want

- N** Nicholas Leeman 08:46  
maybe one if you're lucky one or two that you really like and like would do that separate from, but there's always you know, Steve from the other department who's just ruining it for everybody.
- E** Elle Billing 08:57  
Always Steve.
- N** Nicholas Leeman 08:59  
Yeah, it is. It is.
- E** Elle Billing 09:01  
And there's always a Steve. Like, every workplace has a Steve that you just when it's Mandatory Fun. enforced compliance. You're like, Oh, why am I on Steve's team?
- N** Nicholas Leeman 09:12  
Yeah, and the there Steve One and Steve Two, right? Like Steve One. But Steve One is like, super into it. And like forcing everybody to go along with him.
- E** Elle Billing 09:24  
And like, hypercompetitive.
- N** Nicholas Leeman 09:26  
Yeah, like 100%. And then Steve Two, is like, I do not want to be here and I will ruin this for anyone who comes anywhere near me.
- E** Elle Billing 09:35  
I might be Steve One. Because I don't usually want to go to those things. But once you get your hooks in me, I'm like, ride or die.
- N** Nicholas Leeman 09:44

Alright, well, now we're doing this right. Like I didn't want to be here to begin with. But I'm here now. So here we go.

**E** Elle Billing 09:48

It's like I'm gonna win. I'm gonna prove I'm smarter than everybody. Because I feel threatened when I'm not.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 09:54

Oh!

**E** Elle Billing 09:55

it's like, let's unpack that trauma.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 09:57

Let's I mean, I don't think we have time for that.

**E** Elle Billing 09:59

No, we don't We definitely don't add a forced fun corporate work retreat absolutely. time and a place, Elle. time and a place. Yeah. Yeah. And it's definitely not in an escape room.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 10:12

Well, listen, I just need to find the green marker. I don't really want to talk to you about your mother's expectations of you or

**E** Elle Billing 10:25

Why do I feel threatened by having female supervisors? Oh, wait, oh, wait, I

**N** Nicholas Leeman 10:29

I got there. Oh, yeah,

**E** Elle Billing 10:31

I got there during trivia! So those are your creative outlets. And they're also like paid gigs.



I get there during arrival so those are your creative outlets, and they're also like paid gigs, which is great.

N

Nicholas Leeman 10:40

It's, it's funny, I, you know, I'll tell people that like, I have a lot of jobs. But I like all of them.

E

Elle Billing 10:47

That's great.

N

Nicholas Leeman 10:48

And that's yeah, it's very strange to be in a situation where I used to be, I used to work in a job that I hated and would find other jobs. Because I wanted something to do to sort of occupy my time. And also, you know, keep me in beer money. And now it's just like, I, there are opportunities come up. And I'm just like, oh, I don't think I want to do that... sort of growth mindset of being able to say, You know what, I have enough on my plate. And while that does sound like fun, I don't have the capacity for it.

E

Elle Billing 11:22

Yeah, that's kind of a nice place to be to be able to say, no, not gonna do that. Yeah. So you mentioned like, you're sort of the facilitator for this, like, Game Show gaming place, but you also do game reviews? Are you trying to remember like, Have you developed your own games? You like, no made board games? No,

N

Nicholas Leeman 11:45

we not as at least not available to the general public. Right? Like, right. Yeah. Try this. Yeah. Like, we have designed a couple of fun, what we call experiences. And we'll get to the continuum of what is a game and what is an experience in maybe in a little while. But no, I review board games for a YouTube channel called Good Luck, High Five board games, and that has been going on for three years now.

E

Elle Billing 12:17

Cool, that's fun.

N

Nicholas Leeman 12:18

It is, it is a delightful way to-- that is one of those things that does not pay, right. Like I mean, it, it's like, somewhere between 10 and \$20 a month, which is not like it barely covers any kind of cost. right? I like. let alone paying for it. like even lunch after recording or anything like that. So

...right? Like, let alone paying for it, like even when after recording or anything like that so that is definitely a labor of love and something that I that I enjoy doing. Just because it it provides an opportunity for criticism, which is something that I think I am particularly good at when it comes to board games, specifically, but like I am, so we're a little off topic here. But the thing is,

E

Elle Billing 13:07

It's fine I do that all the time,

N

Nicholas Leeman 13:09

when when you, when you are known as a board game person, right? It is it is the sort of default understanding is that you are good at board games, and that if I play a board game with you, I am going to lose. And that is almost never the case with me like I am, I understand board game mechanics quickly. And like I can sort of look at a situation and be explained the rules and sort of grok or in you know, in Intuit what certain designers are looking for what the experience is supposed to be. But that doesn't necessarily mean I can execute those things quickly or efficiently. Those are two different types of people. So yeah, I always find it interesting that like that is the assumption is that like because I play a lot of board games I must be very good at a lot of board games. Those two aren't necessarily the same, the same skill set

E

Elle Billing 13:59

so since we can we can just jump right into what is the difference between a game and an experience? I mean, how long have you been into games and board games and experiences and just

N

Nicholas Leeman 14:12

Yeah, so

E

Elle Billing 14:13

I'm baby little baby gamer like I mostly game adjacent gamer adjacent gamer adjacent that's nice your I'm gamer adjacent because I do not grok games. Like I went from you know Nintendo NES to like Gameboy and then anything beyond that with more buttons. Like I could not conceptualize it was too complicated for me. And it was very stressful. The most complicated game I think I can play now is maybe untitled goose game. Well, sure. I got frustrated playing because there were two people telling me how to play at the same time. Oh, and my ADHD couldn't. Yeah, it was undiagnosed at the time. But now I know why. Yeah, I just have a really hard time conceptualizing gamespace



N

Nicholas Leeman 14:59

well, and you had if you had three streams of input at that point, because you had the two people telling you and the game itself, like projecting it's

E

Elle Billing 15:06

and we were playing like, duo pair mode. So there were two geese. It was my goose and the other goose. And I was playing with somebody who had played before. And it was just there was so much happening. I was like, I gave my controller to somebody else. Yeah, I really enjoy watching other people play games. Okay. And there are some board games and, like collaborative board games, I really like yep. We played a lot of like, family games when I was growing up. But I would say gamer adjacent is a really good description of me.

N

Nicholas Leeman 15:36

Yeah. So I think that um, so the, the philosophy that my friend group and I have sort of come around to is that you have the difference between a game and experience is not like one or the other. It's definitely a continuum. And I'm holding my hands up. But you can see that on the right side of this continuum, you have an experience, which is something that happens to you. You might be there and you might be acting it out. But you have no agency in the process. It is it is occurring without your influence. And over there, you have like Candyland. Right, like Candyland is not a game. Candyland happens to you. You shuffle all the cards, you reveal them one at a time and you discover the predetermined outcome by the shuffling of the cards. You can't make any choices. You're not making any choices. You're not doing anything you're simply investigating. It's like it's a book, right? In the middle, you have what could be what what appears to be a game, what what can feel like an experience. And in my opinion -- I'm gonna get so much flak for this -- but in my opinion, Pandemic is the exact middle of a game and an experience. So Pandemic, for those of you listening or for you, Elle, who may not know what this is, Pandemic, was one of the very first cooperative board games that sort of relied on asymmetric player abilities to accomplish a goal that was very unlikely to happen. The idea behind this is that you are probably going to lose this game. But the excitement is finding out how and why you are going to lose the game. And again, we come back to the functional mechanic of this game is a single deck of cards that will repeat itself, it's various cities on a world map. And if those cities come up too often, they outbreak and then more and more things happen. So it is possible through good choices, and through a near encyclopedic knowledge of what that deck contains, to be able to mitigate some of the repetition in the cards. However, it is much more likely that an average group of players playing an average game of Pandemic is going to influence it only a little bit, which is to say, you're only going to extend the time that you were there playing it, you will eventually lose. And it will be because of this deck of cards. That has happened to

E

Elle Billing 18:20

hits a little close to home actually.

N

Nicholas Leeman 18:23

It's like,

**E** Elle Billing 18:24

oh, that's a little too real.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 18:26

Yeah, yeah. And then on the opposite side of it, literally the pandemic. On the opposite side of that you have like a true game, which is chess, right, or some other kind of game in which there is no randomness at all. It is 100% even for both players and comes down to the ability to manipulate the board state or the the opponent in such a way that you are going to win because you are the better player. And every game falls somewhere along that line of continuum. But that's sort of the general thrust of

**E** Elle Billing 19:03

that's helpful. Thank you.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 19:05

Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 19:06

So how long have you been involved in games and experiences?

**N** Nicholas Leeman 19:10

Well, I mean, who among us? Right has not played Candyland as a child and right or Monopoly, right? Or like, yeah, somebody's mom or aunt or grandma. It's always a feminine personality in your life that sits down and teaches you cribbage. like that's the that's the first person.

**E** Elle Billing 19:28

My sister and her fiance play cribbage and my dad knows how to play cribbage. I have never learned how to play. my sister-- I didn't know my sister knew how, but I guess it's like a thing she and her fiance do to kind of wind down at night and I thought that was really neat.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 19:40

.....

Yeah, yep. And so you know, I grew up playing that but then like, never really got into hobby board games, which is, you know, anything you won't see and again, five years ago or even you know, three years ago we would say anything you don't find at Target is considered a hobby board game. But now we're getting a lot of hobby board games showing up up in places like Target, and other similar establishments for your more national viewers who are not Midwestern Ride or Die Target fans.

E

Elle Billing 20:09

Can you tell we're from Minnesota?

N

Nicholas Leeman 20:12

Probably for me originally started in or around like 2005. 2005, 2006. Okay, so almost 15, 16 years.

E

Elle Billing 20:23

I just thought of another game we played when I was growing up. The Farming Game was really popular in our house. Have you played that one?

N

Nicholas Leeman 20:30

just a clever way to get you to do your chores? Is that what?

E

Elle Billing 20:32

No like I did surprisingly little farming. Growing up, I'm allergic to everything. But like, I didn't grow up playing Monopoly. I grew up playing The Farming Game.

N

Nicholas Leeman 20:41

Okay.

E

Elle Billing 20:42

When I was describing it to a friend who had never played it, I said it's like Monopoly, except instead of one person winning and making everyone else go broke. Everyone goes broke together.

N

Nicholas Leeman 20:53

Oh, delightful!

**E** Elle Billing 20:55

yeah. I mean, like real life. Yeah. No, that's that was one of my favorite games growing up was The Farming Game, just because it was different. And no one else had ever played it. Yeah. So. So where would you put game like role playing games in the continuum of experience?

**N** Nicholas Leeman 21:16

Yeah, that's a super good question.

**E** Elle Billing 21:17

I'm just in my first campaign role playing game. We're doing index card RPG. So it's a lot, I think easier and beginner friendly than something like d&d, which would be more Dungeons Dragons, which would be probably more recognizable to a broader audience. Because I find d&d intimidating, and I absolutely I wanted to join. I was like, oh, everyone else has like, so much more knowledge than me. But all of us are new at index card. And the rules are a lot more flexible. So and I found out I am much more violent than I thought I was.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 21:56

Given a consequence free environment, you would start solving all your problems with violence.

**E** Elle Billing 22:01

Yeah, I'm given a blaster and a shapeshifting lifeform, at the slightest annoyance I just shoot people in the head.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 22:10

It's like, Oh, who has time for this come on. Yeah. It's

**E** Elle Billing 22:13

like, Oh, come on.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 22:14

I'm hungry. Want some spacefood. Let's go to that.

E

Elle Billing 22:18

Yeah. So yeah, it's a lot of fun. So I think you understand the appeal

N

Nicholas Leeman 22:25

that, so it's going to come down to a lot of different things. And I keep hedging my answers for you. I feel bad about never giving you a straight answer.

E

Elle Billing 22:32

Just for the record, like I said before, I have ADHD. And when I listen back to the recordings, I find I couch a lot of what I say, in multiple parentheticals. Because I'm like, Well, I can't just say a thing. There's multiple levels of like couching it and hedging it and making sure that I've included all the possible caveats to what I'm about to say, Yeah, this is very normal for you just hedge my question. That's fine. Yeah.

N

Nicholas Leeman 23:01

As a as a, as a cis white male, it is sort of incumbent upon me in this the year of our Lord 2023 to always think before I speak. So it is one of those things where I'm always --

E

Elle Billing 23:12

Much appreciated.

N

Nicholas Leeman 23:14

What am I going to say? And am I going to phrase it correctly? So I think that a question to circle back to eight and a half minutes ago, when it was asked was, is like where does a role playing game specifically, like a paper and pencil role playing game at a tabletop role playing game fit on the continuum between game and experience? And my answer to that is, it's going to come down to two factors, the most important of which is who is the GM? Who is the-- in dungeons and dragons to be the Dungeon Master-- who's in charge of the game. And there are certainly game formats and structures and systems that have no GM, right, everybody's just sort of experiencing whatever it is, how it was built, etc, together, and nobody's sort of in charge. But most of these systems have someone who's written the story, someone who's built the dungeon, someone who has gotten several experience levels worth of fights to have in the future and is sort of just letting the players discover that as they go, and dependent upon who that person is and what their appetite is for improvisation and for distraction. I would say it could be very much a game. If you have a Game Master who is willing to be like, This is the story I planned for this group. But this group is far more interested in going over here and talking about or discovering this cave that I only very loosely mentioned, as as a world building

exercise, then, in that case, it's a game right if your game master is willing to let you guide that and provide walls that are far apart but more or less, where around where you want to be, then that's a game. If you have a Game Master who is like, I wrote this, this is what we're doing. Like, I know I mentioned that cave, and you all want to go over there. But when you get there, it's closed off like the tomb of Christ. Okay, well, let's go back over here. Like it's one of those things where it's like, that's not a game anymore. You're reading a book to people, and sort of like letting them interact with it only in as far as you desire. And that's like,

**E** Elle Billing 25:35

choose your own adventure books that we had when we were kids. And like, there's a limited set of outcomes.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 25:40

Yep. Yep. So that would be my answer to number one. That's the number one thing and the second thing would be the system itself. Like, what does the what sort of interactivity or what sort of influence does the system that you're playing and allow for negotiation or moving a plot in different areas? So I would say, yes,

**E** Elle Billing 26:05

yes. Yeah. Great. I love I love answering either-or questions with Yes,

**N** Nicholas Leeman 26:10

yes, question mark.

**E** Elle Billing 26:12

Dungeons Dragons is owned by Hasbro. Yes?

**N** Nicholas Leeman 26:16

Dungeons and Dragons is owned by Wizards of the Coast.

**E** Elle Billing 26:21

Okay.

**N** Nicholas Leeman 26:22



— And Wizards of the Coast is a Hasbro subsidiary,

E Elle Billing 26:26

Hasbro subsidiary. Okay.

N Nicholas Leeman 26:27

Yep.

E Elle Billing 26:28

And then there's like third party stuff, right?

N Nicholas Leeman 26:32

Yep. Yes, exactly.

E Elle Billing 26:34

I tried to read up a little bit on what was going, or what had gone on. So there was third party freedom to create content, right, for Dungeons and Dragons, which allowed a lot of creative liberty for gamers and Game Masters, Dungeon Masters and stuff, right?

N Nicholas Leeman 26:53

Yeah, an unlimited amount of creative freedom, right, like, right creators could make whatever they wanted to using the Dungeons and Dragons rule set. And that sort of freedom, that ability was given to players in somewhere somewhere on or near the turn of the millennium by the Open Gaming License that Wizards of the Coast issued. And the Open Gaming License said that if you took the Dungeons and Dragons rule structure, and you created a magical item, you created a weapon, a creature, a character, a shifted rule set that is based on the DND rule set, but it is your own in whatever way, if you wanted to take the DND ruleset and put it in space, you want to make it about pirates, you wanted to put it under the ocean and make it about Atlanteans. You could do that. And you did not have to pay anybody anything to do it. And you have ownership of whatever you made. And you could do with that whatever you want. And I should say not to bury the lede. But like between when you and I have decided to do this.

E Elle Billing 27:57

I know. Yeah. Yeah. And today,

N

Nicholas Leeman 28:00

it's been awhile back to the start. But yeah, we set our way back machines for January 18. So the in 2000, the OGL, the open gaming license, stated that you could do this. And so what happened was companies like Paizo, PA I Zo, were like, great, we're going to make a business out of this. And they started making d&d Dungeons and Dragons, accessories, miniatures, standalone quests, modified rule sets, like they built a very comfortable business on making this content for this structure. Now, not only that, but you start talking about groups like Critical Role, which is a video podcast that gets together content creators and gaming celebrities together, and they run through adventures on the Dungeons and Dragons rule set. And this is incredibly popular, especially last five years. So about holiday time. So November, December of last year, people started to hear rumors that content creators and high level executives from companies like pi, so we're being invited to d&d headquarters under a nondisclosure agreement.

E

Elle Billing 29:19

Oh, that never, that never turns out well.

N

Nicholas Leeman 29:23

To be fair, this could be any number of things, right? Like D&D is not like due for a new rule set. But like this could very easily be the early stages of a new rule set where Wizards of the Coast is trying to get people to come together and say, you know, what do you want to see in the next thing, well, how can we make your lives better, which is a very optimistic way of looking at what actually happened. So a bunch of people on the internet where people are known to do things started bothering Wizards of the Coast, and we're like, hey, Can you guarantee us that you're not changing the OGL, that you are not going to change the business model of these content creators and these companies? Here's where a very dubious decision was made. Because somebody at Wizards of the Coast came out on Twitter and was like, Nope, we're not touching it. And everybody was like, oh, cool, great, no problem, then! Have a great holiday. And then right around Christmas time ended December, the OGL 1.1, was leaked.

E

Elle Billing 30:34

And it did not match what was said on Twitter.

N

Nicholas Leeman 30:36

It was in fact, the exact opposite of what whatever person was given the keys to the Twitter account said, and it was in fact that the OGL was changing, such that if you made a certain amount of money every year from creating D&D sourced content that you would owe Wizards of the Coast, a portion of that. A lot of it had to do with the fact that people felt betrayed, and they were lied to. Because for all intents and purposes, they were now whether or not wizards right hand was talking to his his left hand and whatever is irrelevant. The fact is, the normal human being does not distinguish between different pieces of the company. Not only that, but

the other thing that really made people angry was that there was a clause in the new OGL, that content creators who made content-- specifically talking about people a critical role, or if you made a podcast, or if you made a video of a playthrough session where you were playing a Dungeons and Dragons rule set. And whatever you did on top of that didn't matter. If you made that content, Wizards of the Coast could take that content and do whatever they wanted with it. Now they couldn't take it away from you. Right? They couldn't, they couldn't say at least according to the rules of the new OGL, they couldn't say you must take that down. But they could like remix it, they could take it and make a sizzle reel of whatever they wanted without asking for permission. Without paying the people who originally made it or verily even without asking, they could just, it was theirs. So they could do whatever they wanted to

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Elle Billing 32:21

gross,

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Nicholas Leeman 32:21

and then that will not stand.

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Elle Billing 32:26

This aggression will not stand.

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Nicholas Leeman 32:30

And they would it the royalty fee was 25% on all revenue in excess of \$750,000. So if you made \$750,000 and \$1 in a year, you would pay a quarter. Now this is all since wizards has backtracked and said no, no, no, no, we're wrong. We were sorry. But like they tried to do this, it got past the trying stage, right. Like if there had not been a significant internet backlash, this would be the reality that we'd be living in, probably within the next 30 days, 30 to 60 days. It's funny to me, because this is a situation where you know, \$750,000 a lot of money. Anybody who's looking at this and is seriously considering getting into content. As I mentioned before, I've made YouTube videos of board games, and I make \$15 a month. So to get up to \$750,000. Right, that's well out of my league. But there is a thing about people who do this, and they want that hope. They see themselves as being someone who is going to get to that level someday. Right? Like this is the same thing that prevents low income people from voting on taxes for rich people. They always see themselves as gonna, they're gonna get there someday. They're one or two really good decisions away. They're one or two lucky things away from being a millionaire themselves. And they're protecting their future interests at the expense of their current and perhaps more likely their their realistic future. So there's that element to this as well, where people were like, but what if I make that money someday? But more importantly, it was it's the fact that like, you lied to us about it. And you didn't ask us to use our stuff. Yeah. And like that. The assumption was that we're going from an open space. We're all friends here. We're all living in these dungeons and these dragons are all ours, too. These are our dungeons and our dragons and you can use them but only under these circumstances.

E Elle Billing 34:32  
Yeah. Yucky.

N Nicholas Leeman 34:34  
The Happy Ending the silver lining the sun rise on the other end is that there are companies who are willing to listen. Yeah, and consumer speak up.

E Elle Billing 34:48  
Well, and also don't mess with gamers.

N Nicholas Leeman 34:51  
I mean that should have been lesson zero,

E Elle Billing 34:53  
like really don't mess with people who spend half their lives on the internet.

N Nicholas Leeman 34:56  
And like, not not for nothing, but like if You're looking to piss off a bunch of people, it should probably not be people who pour over rule sets looking for loopholes 10 hours a day, because they'll find one,

E Elle Billing 35:11  
right and not just that, but like, as a group to meet a collective end, like who worked collectively to meet an end as part of like a campaign?

N Nicholas Leeman 35:22  
Yeah.

E Elle Billing 35:23  
Like, I mean, I'm only the gamer adjacent. And I know that much. Yeah. And like whole point is like to achieve an end together as a group, right? Yeah, small battles to get to the big boss battle, like, Hasbro, you're the big boss, we're gonna beat you.

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Nicholas Leeman 35:41

And I think it's so like, I understand the impulse of a company. Especially when things start exploding like D&D has like roleplay paper and pencil role playing games, the last five years have gotten really, really, really popular.

E

Elle Billing 35:55

Like the reason I even got into it is because my partner plays and they, we play via webcam, but all pencil and paper, via webcams and during the pandemic, like during the height of lockdowns, my partner was staying with me and they have Thursday night game night, and I was listening in and like, this is so fun. Yeah, I think a lot of people needed something to do when we couldn't do other stuff. And like, Okay, let's get into. I mean, we have the technology to do it via distance. Why not do it?

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Nicholas Leeman 36:26

Yeah, yeah. And I think that what happened was, is that Wizards of the Coast saw the explosion, and they're like, we're leaving money on the table. How do we get some of that money back?

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Elle Billing 36:35

Let's monetize the game players. Yeah, I made a gross thing.

N

Nicholas Leeman 36:41

I mean, we've all seen this movie, right. Like Christian Bale taught us in Newsies way back in the early 90s. That like Mr. Hoist, if you charges more per paper, that's not how you do it.

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Elle Billing 36:53

We're gonna sing at you.

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Nicholas Leeman 36:56

Pulitzer and Hearst, you think you got us? Do they got us? No.

E

Elle Billing 37:02

Well, that was a nice call back to our musical theater backgrounds. Yeah. So as theater artists

and gamers, we both tapped into like theater of the mind. You know, art imitates life imitates art. You know, I mentioned before, I'm brand new RPG gamer player, you've been involved in games and experiences for a lot longer than me. But I've kind of noticed in poking a little bit round on the internet. And just in playing a bit that there's a nice corollary between like the roles within the campaign, and like our own roles, in like social justice and resistance work. And I know when we were emailing, you did want me to ask about how words like social justice warrior are, like thrown around as insults, supposedly, on the internet. I was wondering if you could like add to some of that, or add a little bit to my very, maybe naive observations. That's not the word I'm looking for. But cursory surface level observations, you know, we need bards. Not everyone can be a warrior really is what I'm getting at. We need healers, we need artists, we need mages, we need all types to accomplish the thing.

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Nicholas Leeman 38:05

Yeah, and I was so glad when when you were curious about that, because it's very insightful. Like those roles for people who who aren't familiar with role playing games, or for maybe people who play more video games, online role playing games have sort of boiled all of that down into three different types, right, you have a tank, whose job it is to attract attention and keep all the bad guys focused on them. Because they're very resilient, they can take a lot of damage, so that the other two roles can do their jobs. The other role that everybody's familiar with is the damage dealer, right? These are people whose job it is to deal damage. And conversely to the warrior or to the tank, they deal a lot of damage, but cannot take very much themselves. So the tank's job is to keep that that attention focused on them. So the damage dealers can do their thing. And the healers, their job is to make sure that the tank is, is taken care of, because obviously they can't stay there forever. And also should something terrible happen. The the damage dealers also need to have their health reinstated as well. And those roles map very nicely onto social justice and protest work, because you have the people who are high profile whose job it is to stand out in front and be like, Look at me, I know what I'm talking about. And I can bring visibility to this case. Sometimes this role gets problematic in the form of white saviorism, white knighting. And a lot of people who are working towards the best interest but working against the group, they're there to, you know, start up the GoFundMe and then take all the money and run. But for the most part, you need these people who are highly visible, who have the ability to bring a lot of attention to the cause,

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Elle Billing 39:44

but who are also resilient and can handle the negative press as well,

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Nicholas Leeman 39:49

who have the ability to kind of shake that off and be like I'm used to dealing with a lot of attention and so I can deal with that. You have the people who can actually do the work. These are the damage dealers. These are I'm looking at members of the Congressional squad, even Katey Porter to a certain extent, these people whose job it is to actually do the thing to make these things happen.



E

Elle Billing 40:10

These could like also be like the people who are doing the marches. They're the people who are doing the actual physical and educational labor. Yeah, we might not know their names,

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Nicholas Leeman 40:21

Teachers

E

Elle Billing 40:21

but they're the ones who are getting shit done.

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Nicholas Leeman 40:24

Yeah, changing the hearts and minds of people actually doing the work of changing these things, getting signatures, door knocking, like doing all the things that are boring, and time consuming, but have to be done and are much easier to be done, if nobody's like, hounding you while you're doing. And then you have the healers. This is where artists come in. By artists, I don't mean specifically like movie stars, because those are the tanks, right. Those are the people who are like holding the flag and leading the charge. And to a certain extent, you have Sarah McLachlan singing under puppy eyes right there. She's bringing attention to the puppy mills.

E

Elle Billing 41:01

Okay, that's kind of funny. Because just the other night, my mom was like, Danielle, look at the puppies on TV. And I was like, No, the puppies make me sad. Like, I can't look at the sad puppy commercial.

N

Nicholas Leeman 41:11

But you have, you know, the the the artists who are inspiring people who are who are giving people these reasons to do it, who are telling the stories of the people who are actually being affected by this when they can't tell it themselves, always better that they'd be able to tell it themselves. But in situations where they can't, you have these people who are interpreting that and who are bringing motivation, healing and light and care and health, food, money, whatever it takes to the people doing the actual work, and making everything bearable, making it all possible,

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Elle Billing 41:46

also, like actual healers, like street medics, and people with medical training,

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Nicholas Leeman 41:50

and that's like less of an analogy. That's more a more literal translation. But

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Elle Billing 41:54

yeah, actual healers, like the people who run water stations and, and things like that.

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Nicholas Leeman 42:01

Yeah, absolutely. Now, this was I was thinking about this, it was something that I had actually been thinking of, for quite a long time, I was invited to talk to some kids who were working with my wife, you know, they were learning theatre, and they wanted to talk about, you know, what is it as a theatre artist, myself, as someone who makes their living in various different places off of their theater background, they wanted to talk about this. And in the course of conversation, social justice came up and one of the kids is really into dungeons and dragons and I was like, listen, these two things work together. So like, when you ask this question, I was like, yes, we've been talking about that for years. The change that is recent, though, is this model holds up in a game environment, where there is one boss, where there is five mini bosses all fighting in the same area, right? You can have a tank, grab the aggro of five people or have one person and keep them focused. Where it breaks down is we don't live in that world anymore. We live in a world where there is no shortage of antagonists. And they are very, very, very capable of doing more than one thing.

E

Elle Billing 43:14

Yeah, we get so overwhelmed, because there's so many things all the time coming at us.

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Nicholas Leeman 43:19

And these bad actors. It's not like if you shut down one of their Twitter accounts there, you've silenced them, they'll make another one, they'll make 10 more. It is exactly like fighting a Hydra. And we need to find a better way of fighting these fights. And I don't think that that negates this analogy. I think it just needs to change our party structure a little bit.

E

Elle Billing 43:48

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