# Epic Games faces backlash after AI-powered Darth Vader NFT erupts in offensive outbursts



The integration of artificial intelligence into the fields of storytelling and interactive entertainment has sparked both creativity and controversy. As AI technologies continue to advance, they enable a new realm of possibilities, from de-aging actors in films to facilitating complex interactions in video games. Recently, a notable example emerged within the gaming world as Epic Games launched an AI-powered Darth Vader NPC in Fortnite, allowing players to converse with one of cinema’s most iconic characters using a blend of real voice samples and AI capabilities. However, this innovation quickly morphed into a crisis, raising ethical questions about the use of AI in popular culture.

Upon its release, the Darth Vader chatbot, leveraging voice samples from the late James Earl Jones—a decision made with the consent of his estate—provided players with a ground-breaking interactive experience. Using Google's Gemini AI technology, the character could engage in real-time conversations across various topics. Yet, the novelty of this experience swiftly led to its exploitation. Players found ways to manipulate the AI into uttering profanity and hate speech, turning the character into an unwitting purveyor of offensive language. This misuse quickly garnered attention online, leading to a slew of videos showcasing the chatbot's downfall. Epic Games responded promptly by issuing hotfixes to curtail the AI's capacity to produce harmful speech, but many observers felt that such a failure to anticipate misuse reflected a troubling lack of foresight about the potential implications of AI in creative environments.

This incident quickly caught the ire of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), which has been vocal in its opposition to the increasing use of AI in the entertainment industry. A few days after the launch, SAG-AFTRA filed an unfair labour practice charge against Epic Games, claiming that the developer had unilaterally altered terms concerning the use of performer likenesses without proper consultation. The union contended that allowing AI to replace voice actors jeopardizes the livelihoods of performers and undermines the ethics of creative employment. The voice acting community voiced similar concerns, fearing that such precedents could diminish opportunities for human actors, particularly as technology becomes more advanced.

The use of AI in character creation, particularly when it comes to iconic figures like Darth Vader, marks a departure from traditional practices in gaming and film. Historically, the likeness of actors has been closely tied to their performances, as seen with Keanu Reeves in Cyberpunk 2077 or the digital de-aging of actors like Mark Hamill in The Mandalorian. In these cases, AI complements the human element, creating a synergistic relationship between voice artists and technology. The situation with Jones, however, where his voice was appropriated posthumously and without real-time performance, sidesteps these traditional values and sets a precarious precedent for the industry.

The notion of turning a beloved character over to players to manipulate raises further ethical concerns. Gamers’ propensity for exploiting systems, as highlighted in incidents within other platforms such as Roblox, underscores the dangers of relinquishing creative control to audiences. While Epic Games had hoped to enhance gameplay through innovation, the outcomes suggest that unchecked audience interaction with AI can lead to reputational damage not only for companies but also for the estates of deceased performers. The legacy of James Earl Jones, for instance, risks being tarnished as a result of his likeness being associated with undesirable language and behaviour generated by an unmoderated AI.

This predicament echoes past issues with AI, such as Microsoft's Tay, which was quickly derailed by users who prompted it to repeat hateful sentiments. The use of technology to replicate human essence—especially in a way that allows for public manipulation—poses significant ethical dilemmas. As AI evolves, it will be vital for studios and developers to establish strict boundaries that protect the integrity of performers and the characters they embody. A simpler solution could be to employ living voice actors, preserving the nuance of human performance while allowing companies to maintain creative control without risking reputational damage. The lessons drawn from the Darth Vader debacle will likely inform how future projects handle the intersection of AI and human artistry, urging creators to tread carefully in this new frontier of storytelling.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/), [[4]](https://www.windowscentral.com/gaming/fortnite-added-an-ai-voiced-darth-vader-people-are-already-tricking-into-swearing-and-saying-slurs-heres-his-location)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/), [[2]](https://www.pcgamer.com/fortnite-added-an-ai-powered-darth-vader-and-surprise-players-immediately-tricked-him-into-saying-slurs/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/627d9adac6d4007b3bc489e511c1beb8), [[5]](https://www.sagaftra.org/sag-aftra-strikes-video-games-over-ai)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/games/2025/feb/12/how-harrison-ford-brought-a-strike-over-video-game-ai-to-worlds-attention), [[7]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ai-james-earl-jones-star-wars-darth-vader-voice-sag-aftra-voice-acting-concerns/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/), [[2]](https://www.pcgamer.com/fortnite-added-an-ai-powered-darth-vader-and-surprise-players-immediately-tricked-him-into-saying-slurs/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/627d9adac6d4007b3bc489e511c1beb8)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/), [[2]](https://www.pcgamer.com/fortnite-added-an-ai-powered-darth-vader-and-surprise-players-immediately-tricked-him-into-saying-slurs/), [[4]](https://www.windowscentral.com/gaming/fortnite-added-an-ai-voiced-darth-vader-people-are-already-tricking-into-swearing-and-saying-slurs-heres-his-location)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/627d9adac6d4007b3bc489e511c1beb8), [[5]](https://www.sagaftra.org/sag-aftra-strikes-video-games-over-ai)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://collider.com/darth-vader-fortnite-controversy-explained/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.pcgamer.com/fortnite-added-an-ai-powered-darth-vader-and-surprise-players-immediately-tricked-him-into-saying-slurs/> - On May 16, 2025, Epic Games introduced an AI-powered Darth Vader NPC in Fortnite, capable of interacting with players using Google's Gemini AI and voice samples from James Earl Jones, developed with his family's consent. However, within hours of its release, users exploited the system, coercing the AI into using profanity and homophobic slurs, raising concerns about the ethical use and limitations of generative AI in public platforms. Epic responded with an immediate hotfix to prevent further misuse. ([pcgamer.com](https://www.pcgamer.com/games/battle-royale/fortnite-added-an-ai-powered-darth-vader-and-surprise-players-immediately-tricked-him-into-saying-slurs/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/627d9adac6d4007b3bc489e511c1beb8> - On May 19, 2025, the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) filed an unfair labor practice charge against Llama Productions, a subsidiary of Epic Games, for using artificial intelligence to recreate Darth Vader's voice in the video game Fortnite without prior union consultation. The union accuses the company of making unilateral changes to terms of employment without giving the union a chance to negotiate, thereby replacing unionized voice actors with AI-generated voices. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/627d9adac6d4007b3bc489e511c1beb8?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.windowscentral.com/gaming/fortnite-added-an-ai-voiced-darth-vader-people-are-already-tricking-into-swearing-and-saying-slurs-heres-his-location> - Epic Games recently added an AI-voiced Darth Vader to Fortnite as part of the game's Galactic Battle update. Players can recruit the iconic Star Wars character by locating him at one of three in-game locations. The AI, designed to mimic the late James Earl Jones’ voice, offers interactive voice chat, creating a novel gameplay element. However, players have quickly exploited the AI's capabilities by tricking it into swearing and repeating slurs through manipulated voice prompts. For example, streamer Loserfruit recorded a viral moment where the AI Darth Vader unexpectedly used profanity. Such incidents have raised concerns, especially given Fortnite's popularity among children. In response, Epic has issued hotfixes to tighten the AI’s safeguards and prevent further misuse. The company also advises parents to disable AI communication features via Fortnite’s Parental Controls if desired. Despite the glitches, the use of James Earl Jones' voice was approved by his family, who expressed their hope that new and long-time fans would enjoy hearing Darth Vader through this collaboration. ([windowscentral.com](https://www.windowscentral.com/gaming/fortnite-added-an-ai-voiced-darth-vader-people-are-already-tricking-into-swearing-and-saying-slurs-heres-his-location?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.sagaftra.org/sag-aftra-strikes-video-games-over-ai> - On July 26, 2024, SAG-AFTRA initiated a strike against major video game publishers, including Activision Productions, Disney Character Voices, and Electronic Arts Productions, over concerns about the use of artificial intelligence in the industry. The union demands fair compensation and the right of informed consent for the AI use of performers' faces, voices, and bodies. SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher stated, "We're not going to consent to a contract that allows companies to abuse A.I. to the detriment of our members." ([sagaftra.org](https://www.sagaftra.org/sag-aftra-strikes-video-games-over-ai?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2025/feb/12/how-harrison-ford-brought-a-strike-over-video-game-ai-to-worlds-attention> - In February 2025, actor Harrison Ford highlighted the issue of AI replication in video games, stating, "You don't need artificial intelligence to steal my soul." This statement brought attention to the ongoing SAG-AFTRA strike, which began in July 2024, over the use of AI in the gaming industry. The union seeks protections for performers against the unauthorized use of their digital replicas and AI-generated performances. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/games/2025/feb/12/how-harrison-ford-brought-a-strike-over-use-of-ai-in-video-games-to-the-worlds-attention?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ai-james-earl-jones-star-wars-darth-vader-voice-sag-aftra-voice-acting-concerns/> - Voice actors have expressed concerns over the use of AI to replicate James Earl Jones' voice for Darth Vader in Fortnite, fearing it could reduce or eliminate job opportunities. The Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) filed an unfair labor practice charge against Epic Games for using AI to recreate Darth Vader's voice without prior union consultation. The union emphasizes the need for informed consent and fair compensation for the use of digital replicas and AI-generated performances. ([cbsnews.com](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ai-james-earl-jones-star-wars-darth-vader-voice-sag-aftra-voice-acting-concerns/?utm_source=openai))