Great Xygag's Ghost! Posthumous power in Role-Playing Games

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines haunting, history and legacy in the mode-defining Dungeons & Dragons; it aims to establish a hauntology of fantasy role-playing which has shaped the tabletop and computer RPG as a mode, and the "RPG elements" that bleed across video game genres.

D&D's creators and pioneers not only shaped the game itself but contributed significantly to its comeback via the Old School Renaissance movement, and have established themselves as a dominant influence in the role-playing mode as a whole. This haunting by the game's founder figures, while beneficial to the longevity of fantasy role-playing, has perhaps a more detrimental effect on gaming kultur as a whole; their tastes, preferences and approaches, presented as indicative of the direction fantasy role-playing could take, have instead become definitive.

The paper considers multiple layers of D&D's complex textuality, including:

- The game's premise as an exploration of abandoned, monster-haunted medieval ruins
- The creation of artificial ruins as something to explore, both within the game's internal fiction and in the pre-game activities of players and developers
- How the game's developers and earliest players continue to "haunt" D&D's fictional worlds and the real-world culture around the game - in particular, the deaths and personality cults of E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson as catalysts for D&D's recent revival
- D&D itself as "haunting" the modern sense of fantasy as a genre, and the role-playing game as a mode.