

Role-Playing Games as Art: An Examination of *Dungeons & Dragons* to Determine If RPGs Qualify as Art

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Culture critic and academic Camille Paglia asserts art is many things and performs many tasks. Paglia argues that art may fix an audience in its seat, place a book in someone's hand, and stop movement so someone may contemplate an image. They argue that art helps define a culture (Paglia). However, not every expressive mode has recognition as art.

Popular culture is a manifestation of a culture's appetites, ethics, and interests according to Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*. They further state that a culture generates and consumes pop culture endlessly. Some of this production is art, but not all. According to them, it is worth consideration what production reveals about the larger culture all of these materials and activities. This includes social phenomena (such as soccer hooliganism), social bric-a-brac (such as *Hustler* magazine), and even actual art objects (such as the *Mona Lisa*).

The text considered in this essay is the Fifth Edition of the *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) rules set. D&D has remained in publication for more than 40 years. This fantasy game inspired the creation of the entire role-playing game (RPG) hobby, influenced the development of computer games, inspired movies, and triggered political movements according to Aaron Trammel and their history of the hobby. The game is a part of American popular culture, with an impact difficult to measure (Trammell). The question is, can RPGs—as typified by *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition*—be considered an art form unto themselves?

Syncretism is the best term for describing the effect of the overlapping modes involved in D&D. The *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition* books, and RPG books in general, are home to graphic design, visual images, writing, and should

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encourage group performances by the participants; each of these are medias of art. Visual images and written work are well established, and even amateur performance and effective graphic design requires skill and guides the eye across a page are relevant. Therefore, RPGs are understandable as a singular art, through a convergence of graphic design, visual art, and writing designed to encourage improvisational performance.

The goal here is to define the RPG as an artform, to locate its legitimacy – legitimacy as a sanctioning agent. The status of art for any mode of expression means that mode has achieved a level of respectability and social acceptance. For that matter, art helps to define a society (Paglia). Art serves as a means for people to communicate in important ways and prevents us from becoming more savage than we are already (Tolstoy). Morris Weitz argued that art is an open concept. New modes, and new movements, arise constantly and demand decisions on the part of those interested about including the new mode in the larger concept of art (Weitz). RPGs are newer than other modes of art such as painting, literature, theater, cinema, and even comic books (Peterson).

The general public, academics, and consumers each care about art and express that interest with research and purchasing power. Have RPGs achieved the same status? Are RPGs a part of the social phenomena that is art? By comparison, comic books find acceptance as an art form and already have academic journals dedicated to their study (Lopes). RPGs should receive a similar consideration. The possibilities of mainstream critical consideration are more likely with recognition and acceptance of the role-playing game as an art form.

There are hundreds of pen-and-paper RPGs available on the market. *Dungeons & Dragons* was selected because it had the first sustained mainstream success, success that enabled the other RPGs to enter the market, in turn had the greatest cultural impact across the decades and remains the most recognizable to the general public (Peterson). The D&D rules-set involves three primary rulebooks: *The Player's Handbook*, *The Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *The Monster Manual*. *The Player's Handbook* provides rules for the players, a description of the powers available to player characters, and discusses the broad flow of the game (Crawford). *The Dungeon Master's Guide* provides rules for the Dungeon Master, who runs the game and acts as referee, contains information on running a game, and discusses various specific rules and potential concerns (Perkins, Wyatt and Crawford). *The Monster Manual* provides information on a myriad of creatures for the Dungeon Master to utilize and player characters to oppose (Mearls and Crawford). This

examination includes these books, though there are many other books, officially sanctioned and otherwise, that can be utilized within a given game session.

The purpose of this research is to consider *D&D Fifth Edition* by artistic standards. First I present the different theoretical approaches I will use in my analysis: academic definitions of art via symbolic convergence perspective. Then I apply each approach to D&D, using examples from the text and discourse to support the defining of D&D as art. Then I extend my argument from D&D to consider RPGs in general.

Theoretical Approaches for Analysis

Art is an elusive concept. Navigating the concept from a historical perspective will be critical for this examination. Therefore, I will consider multiple sources for their respective definitions. That there is no standardized definition for art accepted in academia or the public sphere complicates this effort (Novitz 154-5). In terms of traditional art, great works of art exist, suffice it to say: the plays of Shakespeare, the paintings of Donatello, and the music of Elvis Presley, etc. They are all examples of the best among their modes of expression (Harrington and Bielby). Although it is a social construct, art exists. The disputes about the definition of art do not change this fact. The argument here will emphasize five approaches: the Dickie institutional theory, the Levinson historical definition, the aesthetic definition Monroe Beardsley provides, Arthur Danto's final and essential formulation, and a Wittgenstein-Paglia cluster. It is the process of debate and discussion over the merits and weaknesses of artistic theories and definitions that are important (Weitz 6). Therefore, a syncretic approach will be developed here, and this research will explore if it is reasonable to consider *D&D Fifth Edition* as art within the definitions developed here.

I draw on symbolic convergence perspective (SCP) as Thomas Endres discusses the approach in *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture* to develop this syncretic approach. Deanna Sellnow, the editor of *Rhetorical Power*, states that this rhetorical approach examines the shared reality of those who buy into certain texts and ideas (Sellnow 109). This methodology will consider art and *Dungeons & Dragons* with the terminology of Endres and Ernest Bormann. The essay does this with the four parts of SPC; one, is there a shared group consciousness about the subject; two, is there evidence that provides authentication for the vision; three,

does the subject speak to the rhetorical skill of its creators; four, how well do elements work within the rhetorical vision.

The contentious concept of art is also the product of culturally shared terminology and narrative (Dessoir 468). Art does not exist outside of people who share an understanding of the concept of art: a shared understanding best explored with SPC for the purposes of this research. This raises the question: is there proof of a rhetorical community and audience buy-in (Sellnow 114)? The existence of fine art is primarily for the sake of contemplation, by scholars and consumers. Dozens of academic journals are dedicated to the fine arts and performing arts, including the *Oxford Art Journal*, the *International Journal of Art and Art History*, and more. These journals demonstrate the shared community of scholars. Playwrights and musicians create plays and music for the sake of active performance—the intent is use—and both those categories are performing arts. While performing arts may be of greater interest to consumers, the long history of art demonstrates the audience for such pieces exists and shares overlaps with art scholars. Thus, with fine art and performing arts, a shared rhetorical community exists.

The same could be said for RPGs. The goal for creators of RPGs does not end at contemplation of the product, and RPGs are therefore not a fine art. The term “game” in role-playing game is best understood as a verb and does not allow a straightforward ending (Crawford 4). Further, individual games share a particular narrative fantasy with a collection of participants who co-created the active performance (Crawford 4). Thus, the RPG audience is not completely analogous to fine arts or performing arts audiences.

However, a clear historical and shared group understanding of D&D exists. The game grew out of the war-gaming hobby. Participants reenacted historical battles through use of rules and miniatures of military units and armaments in the war-gaming hobby. Gary Gygax met Dave Arneson through this hobby. Working with Arneson, Gygax later changed the rules to accommodate small groups and material inspired by the writing of H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and J.R.R. Tolkien. This developed into the original version of *Dungeons & Dragons* in the early 1970s. D&D has gone through five rules updates, survived considerable controversy, and has never been out of print in the forty years since (Peterson). The success of the game is why *D&D* and RPG are cultural terms, and that success allowed D&D to inspire computer games, movies, music, and television programming (Trammell).

Gygax himself allegedly dismissed the notion of RPGs as art. And yet, creations may outgrow the creators. Successful game designers Mark Ren-Hagan and Monte Cook both affirm RPGs as art. However, both acknowledge this requires an unconventional understanding of art (Riggs). Lead designer for the company that owns the D&D brand Mike Mearls writes D&D has inspired many artists and writers. They further state that gamers should be “able to create anything” with good play and that it is the people who bring a game to life (Crawford 4). The collective understanding of RPGs—and thus D&D—is mostly a social analogue, with a dose of the pragmatic.

Physical RPG sales grew 40% from 2014 to 2015, with sales moving from \$25 million a year to \$35 million a year. The *D&D* rule set held the top position on the list of bestselling table-top RPGs in 2014, 2015, and 2016 (ICv2). More than 20 million people have played the game since it appeared during the 1970s according to a report by BBC News (Waters). The average group of players conducts games weekly or every other week, and a standard game last between three and four hours (Shea). *D&D* held the top spot of sales involved in that \$35 million worth of transactions. Lastly, players are willing to spend between eight and 16-hours engaged in play a month—that is a considerable time investment. On a related note, art sales in 2016 exceeded \$68 billion (Kinsella).

It is possible to understand a work of art only if human life permeates the art; as such, it is not possible to eliminate living experience from the meaningful content of a true work of art (Dessoir 465). Crawford, Gygax, Mearls and the others involved in the creations of D&D across its iterations expressly designed it to facilitate a group in creating shared aesthetic experiences (Crawford 4). Art is a fantasy theme. It is more than information when shared with others who possess a common understanding of the term (Bormann). The same is true of mercy, justice, duty, and for that matter, the tooth fairy. That does not mean these terms, or symbols, lack social value. It is arguable humans need these symbols to be human (Pratchett). Indeed, Tolstoy wrote that art serves to nourish the human condition (Tolstoy).

Scholars and consumers, then, care about art and express that care with journals and considerable purchasing power. Consumers obviously care about D&D given their support of and continued playing of it. What of authentication of the vision: what evidence can be examined to understand the shared vision of the community? Sellnow demands evidence of the senses that provides authentication for the vision (115). An image is the representation of the form of a person, thing, or object, such

as a painting or photograph. Several hundred images exist in the three core books of *D&D Fifth Edition* (Crawford). Writing is the process of producing words in a form permitting reading and comprehension: writing in *D&D Fifth Edition* is used to convey difficult concepts (such as elf society and the shape of alien dimensions) in the three core books mentioned above. Graphic design uses existing information, such as images and text, to construct messages and convey meaning to the intended audience. It can help shape the creation of ideas and the understanding of material (Laing and Masoodian 1199-200). Graphic design features in the three core books (Mearls and Crawford). Society and academia, as noted at the beginning of this essay, accepts images, writing, and performances as art forms and graphic design is important to organize and convey ideas and meaning.

Thus, an overlap between art and RPG exists in the form of these representations and writings. Do these symbols represent the skill of those who created them? Sellnow offers a framework for how subjects speak to the rhetorical skill of and communication competence of the creators (Sellnow 115). Endres discusses the subset of the comparative standard and the absolute standard (Sellnow 115). The comparative standard would contrast *D&D* against other RPGs, such as *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Achilli, Bailey, McFarland, and Webb) or *The Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen, Willis and Mason). This would not provide any insight into the question of if RPGs can qualify as an art unto themselves. The absolute standard examines *D&D Fifth Edition* on its own merits. A Google search for “*D&D Fifth Edition* review” returns 670,000 results. To look at reviews not entirely inside the RPG hobby scene, *The Players Handbook* received a 4-star review from *The Escapist* magazine. The three books hold 4½-star reviews at Amazon.com. The books have enjoyed a bestselling status in RPG circles for years. Fans of the games are willing to invest considerable time in the games. This speaks to the success of the game’s designers. But regardless of such designs’ financial success, would they be considered as an artistic success?

At this question I start considering more the academic approaches to qualifying a text as art. Sellnow discusses how well individual elements work within the larger rhetorical vision to create the shared framework for the community (Sellnow 115). The research question is how closely *D&D Fifth Edition* can fit into the definition of art. The books are home to images that meet a dictionary definition of paintings and illustration. The writing helps clarify dense concepts. The graphic design helps with ideation. But to understand if these features qualify *D&D* as art, the larger

shared vision of what constitutes art needs to be applied. The following sections draw on these varying definitions of art from academics to define D&D as such.

Defining D&D as Art

James Carney writes that “the extension of the term 'art' is determined by the theories of art held by the artworld” (Carney 201). The academics and professions that compose the artworlds reject some art theories based upon the perceived unintentional consequences of the theory (Carney). The theory preferred depends on which consequences people choose to tolerate because all theories have consequences. Many contemporary theories about art largely descend from John Stewart Mill and Ludwig Wittgenstein. These ideas come from the philosophical legacy of the men because neither directly proposed a formula for defining art. To be art an object must meet most of the criteria on a proverbial checklist in the Wittgenstein model. To be art an object apparently must meet all of the criteria on a shorter checklist in the Mill model (Carney 192).

George Dickie, writing in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, used the early ideas of Arthur Danto to formulate his institutional theory of art. Dickie writes that only an art world—that is, people involved in producing, commissioning, presenting, promoting, and criticizing art—may define art. Dickie’s definition allows for internal flexibility in the Mill model. So, a mural would qualify as a painting even though it is not on a canvas, and a Jackson Pollock work would be a painting even though it does not depict an image. All this to say, the recognized and established art world has the final say on what is legitimate art (Dickie 254-6). The theory implies multiple artworlds exist for the multiple recognized modes of art, including literature, fine arts, music, and so on.

However, a particular artworld is only equipped to judge its own mode of expression: the art world for the fine arts is not functionally qualified to sit in judgment of music, for example (Davies). There are apparently no contemporary considerations of *D&D Fifth Edition*—or other table-top RPGs—in the scholarly journals on art. The space in those journals is devoted to accepted art modes, such as painting, literature, cinema, etc. (Novitz 153-4). This lack of scholarly analysis arguably undermines the ability of the institutional theory of art to be applied to RPGs.

Jerrold Levinson generally eschews institutional theory for an anti-essentialism position. Writing for the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Levinson defines art in

relation to the art that has come before it. They argue that in all cases determining if an artifact is actually art depends on weighing the artifact against an archetype or historically and widely recognized example of that mode of expression. Levinson writes that

The historical definition of art also casts a useful light on the fact that in art anything goes, but not everything works... The reason not everything works is that regarding some as a work of art necessarily involves bringing the past of art to bear on what is being offered as part in the present... (247)

D&D has no singular or clear artistic precedent (Trammell). As mentioned above, Gygax was inspired by Tolkien, Howard, Lovecraft, Burroughs and similar writers (Peterson). Thus, D&D draws on different artists, both from literary and visual fields.

Danto provided a definition of art that would shape the institutional definition of art early in his career, yet offered an essentialist definition of art by the end of his career, specifically in his book *What Art Is*. They write, “I then declared that works of art are embodied meanings” (Danto 37). Danto states that art must stand at a remove from reality. This distance requires art to embody an internal meaning. Further, the embodiment might be anything from a dancer pantomiming ironing clothing to a painting to a set of artificial Brillo Boxes (Danto 129-30). *D&D Fifth Edition* helps “You and your friends create epic stories filled with tension and memorable drama. You create silly in-jokes that make you laugh years later... Your collective creativity will build stories that you will tell again and again, ranging from the utterly absurd to the stuff of legend” (Crawford 4). In this way, the text provides a promise of adventure, story making, joke telling, and collaborative fun that creates an alternate reality within the game’s magic circle.

Monroe Beardsley avoided the term art, and having to define it, in the first edition of his book *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. They provided a definition only in the second edition of the book. Beardsley then defined art as “an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character” (Beardsley 299). Beardsley avoided the use of the term experience and substituted the term gratification elsewhere in the book. They write aesthetic gratification primarily involves attention to a unity and the qualities of a complex whole. Beardsley also writes that the aesthetic value of a particular piece of art depends on the degree of aesthetic gratification it provides. They expressly link artworks and aesthetics (Beardsley).

An aesthetic experience is the process of achieving gratification for the purposes of this research. The simple reason for the pop culture success of D&D is how it facilitates collaborative storytelling, experiences of joy and sorrow, bonding experiences, and the creation of stories among participants and establishing friendships. “The friendships you make around the table will be unique to you. The adventures you embark on, the characters you create, the memories you make—these will be yours. D&D is your personal corner of the universe” (Crawford 4). This description of the emotional resonance of a successful D&D game also serves as a description of the aesthetic experience and gratification generated by the game.

The Wittgenstein model for art is a disjunction of features. A particular artifact such as a painting, performance, or an RPG game is denoted a work of art if it possesses most of the features. Unfortunately for this project, the Wittgenstein model is favorable for this research because it permits conditions for new art categories. The features, or what constitutes a criterion, which satisfy a Wittgenstein model are not specifically established (Carney 191). None of the individual features are essential for an artifact to qualify as art but the artifact must possess a combination of a majority of the criteria to qualify as art. This research will employ the features Paglia discusses in *Sexual Personae*.

The most salient art features as defined by Paglia are presented here for how they apply to D&D. First, “Art is spellbinding. Art fixes the audience in its seat, stops the feet before a painting, fixes a book in the hand” (Paglia 29). The participants of a D&D game usually remained seated for the duration of an hours-long session. Some games progress for days, weeks, months, and even years as players repeatedly return to their collaborative storytelling. Further, the participants read and reread the involved books (Miller).

Second, “Art is order” (Paglia 29). *D&D Fifth Edition* is home to a dense rule system that imposes order on the game. The *Players Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* each possess 320 pages, while the *Monster Manual* possesses 352 pages, for a total of 992 pages. Rules are provided for character creation, the difference between humans, elves and orc, the function of the dice, the use of multiple forms of magic, combat, and 300 different monsters (Crawford, Mearls, Perkins, and Wyatt). Crawford writes that the books provide rules for how the game plays and “Exceptions to the rules are often minor” (Crawford 7). D&D provides an ordered structure in which to experience the collaborative storytelling.

Third, “Art is sacrificial” (Paglia 29). D&D demands sacrifice of money and time on part of the participants. Each of the three core books carries a cover price of \$49.95 in 2020 (Crawford, Mearls, Perkins, and Wyatt). Amazon lists the price of a set of polyhedron gaming dice as \$9.99. This puts the material price for starting around \$160. As noted above, the average group of players conducts games weekly or every other week, and a standard game last between three and four hours (Shea). Participants are willing to sacrifice \$160 or more and between eight and 16-hours

a week on the form. Their collaborative work requires an investment of time, money, and emotions.

Fourth, “Art has nothing to do with morality. Moral themes may be present, but they are incidental, simply grounding an art work in a particular time and place” (Paglia 29). The rules are amoral and the settings usually require the players to be the moralizing force in the fictional world. “Humans, dwarves, elves, and other humanoid races can choose whether to follow the paths of good or evil, law or chaos. According to myth, the good-aligned gods who created these races gave them free will to choose their moral paths” (Crawford 122). Each player brings something of themselves and their own morality into the collaborative storytelling.

Along with this inherent amorality: fifth, art is aggressive and compulsive (Paglia 29). Quests full of combat with monsters lie at the heart of any D&D campaign. Players can compete with each other for loot, and they can work together or alone in combat as they describe the violence of combat. The *Player’s Guide* is home to an entire chapter on the subject (Crawford 188-98). Sixth, “Art, I said, is full of crimes” (Paglia 34). Game participants sometimes refer to player characters as murder hobos because of their tendency towards vagrancy and homicide. The term first appeared in Usenet discussions where participants observed that D&D primarily supports a play style in which all of the characters are transients unattached to communities, and solve problems primarily by killing, theft, and sometimes property crimes (Wiktionary).

Seventh, “Art is scandalous” (Paglia 35). D&D would not entirely emerge from the various 1980s scandals for 15 years (Trammell). Some of these scandals involved the unfortunate cases of Irving Pulling and James Dallas Egbert. Both cases involved young men dealing with emotional issues leading to their suicides, but the idea that D&D had a motivating role in the deaths gained media traction and shaped public perception of the game for years (BBC News).

Perhaps more obviously: eighth, “Art makes things” (Paglia 30). For purposes of this research things includes the three core books and the specialized dice required to play the game (Crawford, Mearls, Perkins, and Wyatt). Participants are also expressly encouraged “to aspire to create, to have the courage of someone who is willing to build something and share it with others” (Crawford 4). D&D at its heart is about making things, both virtual and physical, from the collaborative storytelling to characters, from dungeon maps to miniatures. Also, ninth, “Art involves contemplation and conceptualization” (Paglia 29). *D&D* play involves conceptualizing impossible situations, such as battling dragons with magic, and contemplation about character actions and the results of those actions.

Tenth, “Art, no matter how minimalist, is never simply design. It is always a ritualistic reordering of reality” (29). The fictional construct of a *D&D* game session, in terms of both the world and its people, represents a stark reordering of reality to permit the impossible. The players and game runner participate in this

joint, fictional, reordering of reality. Which leads to: eleventh, “Art requires space and creates a transformative place” (29). Playing the game requires a physical space for the participants. And helps to shape experience: twelfth, “Art involves an attempt to tame aspects of reality, life and nature” (29). The success of *D&D* involves its ability to combat the natural and anaesthetic experiences, to borrow Danto’s terminology, of boredom and tedium (Danto 144).

Thirteenth, “Western art involves sexuality” (Paglia 39). Paglia would demand this be included among the disjunction of art features. However, *D&D* as a game possesses a deliberately naive asexuality. An artifact must only fulfill most of the disjunctions in the Wittgenstein model. *D&D Fifth Edition* fulfills twelve of the thirteen art criteria discussed by Paglia.

Are RPGs Art?

Overall, drawing on these frameworks, are RPGs, as typified by *D&D Fifth Edition*, a legitimate art form unto themselves? Dickie’s institutional definition would never concede any place or consideration for RPGs because that definition cannot concede any consideration or place for anything produced by popular culture. The point is that the institutional definition of art is an understanding of art limited to the traditional arts as understood by the people of a closed system. Levinson’s historical definition also cannot agree to extend the definition of art to *D&D*, and thus to RPGs. The game involves many modes and it does not resemble or possess a historical precedent to any particular mode because it involves many modes. Levinson writes that “in art anything goes, but not everything works” (Levinson 247). In this case, *D&D* becomes one of the latter.

Beardsley’s aesthetic definition, however, would permit the extension of art as a concept to *D&D* and thus to RPGs in general. Seeing art as “an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character” (Beardsley 299) aligns with *D&D* and RPGs in both form and function. Both as a game and a potential art object, *D&D* relies on the interrelation of its components, including rules text, illustrations, graphic design and the use to which it is put. Danto’s essentialist definition would extend the concept of art to RPGs and *D&D*. They defined art as embodied meaning (Danto 149). Again, as noted above, *D&D Fifth Edition* embodies the promise of adventure, story making, joke-telling, and collaborative fun (Crawford). The Wittgenstein-Paglia anti-essential cluster would also extend the concept of art to *D&D* and thus to RPGs. As noted above, an artifact must only fulfill most of the disjunctions in the Wittgenstein model. *D&D Fifth Edition* fulfills 12 of the 13 art criteria discussed by Paglia.

With these five academic approaches, a majority favor extending the definition of art. However, the definition of art, and the academy, does not function as a democracy. It is not a matter of votes. The institutional, and to a lesser degree the

historical, definitions of art hold the most power in the academy (Matcham 277). Neither of those may extend the definition of art, leaving D&D out of the artworld's rhetorically shared vision. However, it can be reasonably argued that aesthetic, essentialist, and anti-essentialist definitions of art should include D&D.

Conclusion: A Final Session

In *Artistic Judgment*, Graham McFee asserts that a recognized status as art creates ways of explaining an artifact's value. This means that "action with respect to some particular works not merely confers art-status on those works but also creates categories of art, bringing with them a 'universe' of discourse" (159). Academic legitimacy would open, and encourage, avenues of research and exploration in terms of the games' composition, intent, and consumption by exploring a new universe of discourse (Matcham 276-8). All of this to say that extending the definition of art to include *Dungeons & Dragons*, and role-playing games in general, will likely be contentious where it is not simply dismissed out of hand for traditionally legitimate reasons.

The same was once true of the modes of cinema and comic books. The appeal of D&D is the vicarious freedom, agency and power the game offers. This is arguably best expressed as what Friedrich Nietzsche referred to as "the will to power" or *wille zur macht* (Gilsdorf). *D&D*, and by extension other RPGs, may be judged by how effectively it compels the creation of open-ended stories among the participants. As a material thing, it does this through a syncretism of images, writing, graphic design, and encouraging performance (Crawford). Art compels contemplation, and contemplation is magic. No matter how minimalist, art is never simply just design. It is an attempt at imposing order and meaning on reality, and even drawing a line on a page is an attempt to tame some part of reality (Paglia 29). The intent behind D&D is to, at least in part, tame boredom (Robson).

One central aspect of *Dungeons & Dragons* that sets it apart from other modes is the call to action. An RPG never stops at contemplation. The purpose of D&D is use: to be a played game. Yet, other forms of art intended for action and performance, such as music and theater, are closed systems. For example, Hamlet will always die at the end of Act V no matter what the audience wants. However, what happens to the player's character is never as fixed. RPGs place agency and the responsibility for the fates of the characters in the hands of the participants more than in most other forms of expression. As noted above, the appeal of the game is Nietzsche's will to power. RPG books inspire opened ended stories of fire and blood, and that is worth consideration for whether they qualify as art that helps impose order unto reality.

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