Dimitri Myers

3/2/19

Trevor Dodge

*D&D till Death Do Its Part*

*Dungeons and Dragons* commonly known as D&D began as an inkling in Gary Gygax’s head back in 1972 but wasn’t officialized until after he met Kaye Arneson in 1973. The following year the duo decided to form a partnership they called Tactical Studies Rules also known as (TSR) and the two quickly began sketching out the early drafts of D&D. It wouldn’t be published until 1974, by 1975 TSR had sold 1,000 hand-drawn and printed sets of D&D. The initial design for the box was a woodgrain with three booklets entitled *Men & Magic, Monsters & Treasure,* and *Underworld & Wilderness Adventures.* Within six months TSR sold 2,000 more copies, and another 1,000 before the year was over totaling in at 4,000 copies. In 1976 they switched the box out for a white one and sold another 5,000 copies. Over the next four years TSR really picked up creating their *Monster Manual, Players Handbook* and their *Dungeon Masters Guide* and were selling 12,000 *Basic Sets* a month and finished the year with 250,000 units sold. Fast-forward to 1997, where major changes will reshape D&D. First with the many expansions and revisions that were made in the previous years, but also when TSR is bought out by Wizards of the Coast following their 23 years of successful sales. Something that is often overlooked is Hasbro’s buyout of Wizards of the Coast in 1999 costing Hasbro $325 million, which by todays inflation rates would have been nearly $500 million. The last major revision to D&D came in 2000 when they began allowing Open Game Licenses (OGL), and the first System Reference Document (SRD)” (Peterson, Jon). This allows for third-party products to be made if they follow the *Third Edition* D&D rules. Up until 2003 D&D had a very positive relationship with a community of hackers that established a clear sense of player ownership and maintained relatively lax copyright laws but all of that was put to a controversial end when Hasbro took control of the franchise. Without a change this will surely lead to a recession in the D&D community or a transformation that better accommodates their player-base beginning with those who helped create the game, the hackers of course.

From the day of inception until present “hackers” have played a major role in the ingenuity of a franchise like that of D&D. The word Hacker carries negative connotations today albeit they are very marginalized in comparison to what they were when D&D started. Many people believe that a hacker is someone who uses a computer to steal your credit cards or passwords, but this simply isn’t the case. “Hackers can do almost anything and be a hacker. It’s not necessarily high tech. It has to do with craftsmanship and caring about what you’re doing” (Himanen, Pekka). Without the ingenuity brought to the D&D franchise and others like it there wouldn’t have been as many revisions or expansions to add a sense of the community and in a way the players persona within this game. This was something that Gary Gygax understood and ensured was conveyed within his game.

D&D changed when Gary Gygax died in 2008. It lost its sense of community and with it the principles that made D&D so unique. Technology has a major impact on the influence a concept or idea has on the world, especially a niche community that has been on the rise like D&D as Alex Gygax stated “More than anything, Alex said he’s excited to find his father’s original work a new home in the future of digital role-playing games” (Hall, Charlie). Following the death of Gary Gygax his son and original concept and development designer Alex believes that bringing D&D to the world wide web will give it new life. However, as with many things by putting these ideas and experiences online it eliminates the sense of presence and identity that comes from interacting face-to-face. Without these principle values D&D may very well fall between the cracks like TSR.

When TSR was bought out by Wizards of The Coast and later by Hasbro it lost a part of its identity. With each new owner the directions of D&D changed, and for many years this dissuaded veteran players and noobs alike from continuing to play. As many players stated on RPG stack after the *Fifth Edition* which released in 2014 many players returned due to the simplicity and ease that players could join or create a campaign. “If you enjoy writing stories, of even making them up in your head, playing D&D solo can be a fun way to mix things up” (Is It Possible). With each edition of D&D many rules were simplified, and others were better detailed or outlined. This wasn’t the case when Wizards of the Coast and later Hasbro bought the rights to the game. The hardest and most controversial editions were the *Third* and *Fourth* which only complicated the fact that Wizards of the Coast had revived the D&D Basics and Advanced series of guides creating a clear divide between a very cohesive community.

The transference of ideas from public to private ownership has always been intertwined with D&D in part because of the essence of the game, which was created on the foundation that with some help from manuals and guides that inspire players to create their own adventures. This isn’t to say that there aren’t copyrights that prohibit and often strong-arm competitors out of the tabletop roleplaying games genre. As listed “Under the First Sale Doctrine; Ownership of a physical copy of a copyright-protected work permits lending, reselling, disposing etc. of the item” (Copyright Basics). While TSR seemed to embrace the idea that D&D was mostly an idea and therefore the ownership was public and shared within its community, when Wizards of the Coast took the reins, they initially allowed other creators to use their style to create separate games but within a few years began to squeeze out anyone with copyright infringements. There is a very undefined line that exists however, that hasn’t been addressed by Hasbro which is the internet and how technology directly influences the ownership of things like ideas.

Technology influences ownership via change whether it be the spread of ideas quickly, or adaptations of D&D that reside online rather than a physical copy as is the case with the original game. As modern TV shows and movies reference to D&D this created tension between creators of games that utilize similar concepts or styles to that of D&D. According to Brian Goldner the CEO of Hasbro “We just announced this afternoon that there’ll be a crossover between ‘*Dungeons and Dragons*’ and ‘*Magic: The Gathering*’ in the fall, and I think our fans and gamers are going to be very excited about what’s coming” (Gurdus, Lizzy). By melding D&D with *Magic: The Gathering* Hasbro may destroy a sense of the exclusivity that is present with D&D or meld the two fanbases. As Samantha Melamed learned “The infiltration of D&D into the media, such as in the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, and seeing D&D ads in men’s magazine, like GQ and Maxim” (Melamed, Samantha). This makes it apparent that the community for D&D has evolved and encompasses more people than ever, and yet Hasbro is trying to restrict access to many potential players by enforcing strict copyright on the game.

With technology the complication of ownership brings forth yet another problem. The problem of reproduction as mentioned earlier by expanding access via technology this also “Detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. Permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced” (Benjamin, Walter). There is a choice to be made to ensure D&D doesn’t suffer from oversaturation. As Benjamin mentioned by tailoring a reproduction to the beholder or the consumer you can regain some of the essence of the original game which seems to be the case with D&D. While trying to remake the original game would only serve to dilute it, building off it or from it creates an even more unique experience of the game with the intent that Gary Gygax had when he first created D&D to personalize these concepts and ideas.

Something of note is that based on todays standards D&D is thriving, but the continued success and perhaps even its demise depend on whether the community of hackers that have stood by TSR and Wizards of the Coast will utilize their tools of technology and originality to create new iterations that serve the players on their journeys. Samantha came across a fan’s statement that seems to suggest that D&D will continue to thrive “Everything is so high tech and online now, people see this very old game, and they think it’s something new” (Melamed, Samantha). As D&D has changed from each owner there has been some good and some bad but it’s up to the fanbase to ensure that the legacy of Gary Gygax and the principles he modeled the game after are met or allowed to be cast aside for copyright exclusivity.

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