

Players Making Creepypastas in Roblox – Kindred Appeal of Haunted Houses and Game Creation Systems

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Creepy deserted houses should repel visitors, yet they attract excitement of trespassing, dare and social sharing of spooky encounters. Similar engagement is found in game creation systems (GCS) and especially in the online game platform Roblox (Roblox Corporation 2006-). Roblox affords kindred elements for game making and play, especially illustrated in user made creepypasta experiences¹; players making creepy games. If creepypastas are regarded as vernacular² ghost stories of the digital era, are creepypasta games in Roblox the Haunted Houses of the digital era? This presentation extends on an ongoing study asking what makes creepy games appealing, and what conceptual design implications come forth (e.g., Byrne et al. 2022 for otherworldly as design resource).

By observing selected creepypasta experiences gives grounds to outline a preliminary framework of a Haunted House allegory from three recognized distinctions. An appealing Haunted House (in Roblox) consists of 1) *legend-tripping*, 2) *mythmaking*, and questioning if something is 3) *potentially true*. Haunted Houses and creepy games share kinship in related experiences.

Creepy and ghostly stories, "copy/pasted" onto forums and threads initially emerged in the mid-2000's mainly shared and made by younger audiences slowly surpassed their peak viral days in 2010 (Blank & MacNeill 2018; Asimos 2019; Ohlendorf 2016; Piedra 2018; Roy 2014). Creepypasta games relate to written, internet slang of "pastas", stories emitting a shared feeling of playful unease (Blank & MacNeill 2018), however game design adaptations in Roblox speak of new ways creepy lore and legends are experienced (Ohlendorf 2016, 40).

Considering the popularity and accessibility of Roblox there is promising ground in the allegory of a haunted house and GCS's. However, Roblox being one of the most played game creation systems and online game platforms³ today, academic research on Roblox is few and mainly regarded in educational and heritage studies (see Rospigliosi 2022; Mustafa et al. 2020; Meier et al. 2020). Looking at games made by hobbyist game

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makers in GCS's engaging with spooky game content illuminates the different appeals of creepy game making and play with discrepancies (e.g., transgression in games Mortensen & Jørgensen 2020).

Inherent to all creepypastas, is the activeness of online communities aspiring for "player-driven creations" (Ohlendorf 2016; Henriksen 2013). Games are created and "built to meet needs" (Oliver 2007), therefore particularly the communal and social purposes of user generated creepy designs are considered in the composition of a Haunted House. This juxtaposition highlights the culture of users making (creepy) games, which has previously left unnoticed (e.g., Swawell 2021 on home-brew games).

By means of game-immanent close-reading, 10⁴ of the most popular experiences were observed and played (2022) from thousands of playable versions of Roblox #creepypasta's. The existing literature on creepypasta's and folklore served as a framework for content analysis, and the emerging distinctions. The study was done through examining how the scholar-player-avatar was guided and "thrown into" the creepypasta experiences; the environments, storytelling, and gameplay (Lagerkvist 2017).

The Haunted House, a cultural trope dating back to the birth of gothic literature⁵, plainly consists of creepy encounters in buildings (e.g., Dagnall et. al 2020). Although Roblox creepypasta experiences have story themes familiar to early creepypasta lore, such as the Slender Man⁶, prominent but not limited⁷ to Roblox are creepypastas relating to glitches, hacking, and overall spooky technology (e.g., on "spooky technology" Byrne et al. 2022; "glitch horror" Crafword 2017). Creepypasta games dare to press play.

Roblox Creepypasta experiences provoke the player by asking are they too scary to play, is there a real haunting entity, or will my system get hacked - prompting suspicions on cybersecurity. These themes are elicited in three distinctive ways.

Creepiness and spookiness of technology is often framed how users feel uncomfortable among surveillance technology (e.g., Byrne et al 2022; Birnbach et al. 2022). The purposeful act of venturing into creepy content relates to 1) *legend-tripping* (Kinsella 2011, 20). Legend-tripping can be described as searching ghostly lodgings - whether conceptual legends or tangible properties. The daring acts, testing the veracity of a haunted house are appealing and tangent to creepypasta experiences. (Kinsella 2011).

Creepypastas elicit a feel of plausible authenticity representing existing online legendry (Foster & Tolbert 2015, 5). Spaces enabling user generated content are prominent incubators for emergent vernacular lore and legends, 2) *mythmaking* (Cragoe 2016; Ohlendorf 2016). Before creepypastas, legends of spooky stories in video games were found in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) on creepy children's assemblies to Bigfoot sightings in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar Games 2004) (Ohlendorf 2016; Belinky 2019).

Characteristic to legends is that they feel 3) *potentially true* (Ohlendorf 2016). Similarly, to how philosopher Gilbert Ryle used the example of a "ghost in the machine" to reflect the mind-body dilemma (2009 [1949]), creepypastas contemplate on possible haunting (online) entities, and Supernatural Others (Asimos 2019) within machines. Early creepypasta legends are even seen originating from the 4chan/x/ "paranormal" forum site contributing its threads to otherworldly speculations (Chess 2016). Now reflections bleed into future game iterations prompting existential questioning.

The Haunted House allegory found in Roblox shows itself in mythmaking, legend-tripping and existential exploration afforded by creepypasta experiences – inspiring game making. Simultaneously these distinctions continue in understanding the counter-intuitive social and cultural appeal of creepy engagements.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Experience is a Roblox coined concept for their player creations. Chosen Creepypasta experiences are user (vernacular) design adaptations negotiating creepy experiences online.

² Vernacular in this study is operationalized to describe emerging and inherit social and cultural game-making aspects of creepypasta game adaptations.

³ Roblox had on 8.12.2022 1,700,918 live players (<https://activeplayer.io/roblox/>).

⁴ Games listed in the end.

⁵ The first haunted house story is contributed to *The Castle of Otranto* (Horace Walpole 1764).

⁶ Slender Man is a famous creepypasta of a tall faceless man snatching children in a forest.

⁷ Creepypasta games and themes are also found among other game platforms enabling user generated content or customization such as in *Minecraft* (Mojang 2011-) or *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts 2014-). Roblox is chosen here for its most widespread usage of creepypasta legends and game adaptations.