# Coding Medieval Worlds 4: Outcasts and Monsters

**Schedule and Timings**

## FRIDAY 16 FEBRUARY (PRE-EVENT)

**Evening 18:30-22:00: Hangout, orientation, coding chatter in Gather Town**

## SATURDAY 17 FEBRUARY (DAY ONE)

| Event | Time | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Introductions | 13:00 | |
| Panel: Monsters around the Medieval World | 14:00 | *Panel discussion with Tineke D'Haeseleer, Rebecca Merkelbach, and Rakesh Khanna. Chaired by Liam Downs-Tepper.* |
| Break 1 | 15:00 | |
| Offers & Responses | 15:30 | |
| Panel: Life on the Medieval Margins | 17:00 | *Panel discussion with Michelle Sauer, Thom Gobbitt, and Owen Goddard. Chaired by Blair Apgar.* |
| Break 2 | 18:00 | |
| Breakout 2 | 18:30 | |
| Day 1 plenary | 19:45 | |
| Close of Day | 20:00 | |

# SUNDAY 18 FEBRUARY (DAY TWO)

| Event | Time | Notes |
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| Reconvene | 13:30 | |
| Panel: How Do Monsters Work? | 14:00 | *Panel discussion with Hannah Bayat, Sven Gins, Tamara de Bruin. Chaired by James Baillie.* |
| Break 3 | 15:00 | |
| Breakout 3 | 15:30 | |
| Break 4 | 17:30 | |
| Keynote: *Tess Watterson* | 18:00 | *With Tess Watterson. Chaired by Madeline Sterns.* |
| Reports from groups | 19:30 | |
| Feedback, Next Steps | 20:00 | |
| Close of Day | 20:30 | |

**Evening drinks/chatter session 21:00-23:59.**

# Panel 1: Monsters around Medieval Worlds

In this panel, we will have three specialists giving views on monsters from different parts of the world and how they fit in with the different cultural and historical specificities of those areas. What made a creature or idea monstrous or outside society's norms in different cultures? How many of those ideas were shared, and what differences do?

The format will be an open roundtable: panelists will give 10-15 min starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

This panel will feature:

**Tineke D'Haeseleer** was trained as a sinologist at Leuven University (Belgium), and got her PhD in mediaeval Chinese history at Cambridge University in 2012. For two decades she taught classical Chinese and East Asian history in the UK, the Netherlands and the US. She is the editor of *China's Magical Creatures (and Where to Find Them)*, a free, open online textbook written by her students, and she is a co-translator of the eighth-century *Essentials of Governance* (Cambridge Univ.Press, 2020).

**Rakesh Khanna** grew up in Berkeley, California, of mixed Punjabi and Anglo-American heritage. He co-founded Blaft Publications in Chennai with his wife, Rashmi Ruth Devadasan, in 2008. The company publishes translations of bestselling Indian-language pulp fiction, folklore, and graphic novels. He is the co-author, with J. Furcifer Bhairav, of *Ghosts, Monsters, and Demons of India*.

**Rebecca Merkelbach**  is assistant professor of Old Norse-Icelandic studies at the University of Tübingen, Germany. She has published on the paranormal and the monstrous in medieval Icelandic literature, including the book *Monsters in Society*, on storyworlds and worldbuilding, and on the late medieval Sagas of Icelanders.

The panel will be chaired by **Liam Downs-Tepper.**

# Panel 2: Life on the Medieval Margins

In this panel, we move the focus from monsters to those people on the edges of medieval societies whose lives on the margins were . Our different panelists will consider how social class, law, and identity were among elements that could leave people outside society's boundaries, and will share different perspectives from practical game development to academic research on how we express those marginalisations in modern games.

The format will be an open roundtable: panellists will give short starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

This panel will feature:

**Michelle M Sauer** is the Chester Fritz Distinguished Professor of English at the University of North Dakota. She is a medievalist who specializes in early Christian devotional literature, gender and queer theory, and critical race studies. She is also one of the founding members of an organization called Medievalists of Color, and part of our mission is to counteract the "inherent" whiteness of representations of the Middle Ages. Currently she is working on a number of collections on materiality, critical race theory and religion, as well as the history of sexuality. She is also working on a monograph about solitary sexuality involving religiously enclosed peoples, including issues like monastic masturbation. She enjoys playing video games, particularly fantasy-setting games such as RPGs set in medieval-esque worlds and is interested in the relationship between medieval stereotypes and Victorian conceptions of the era.

**Owen Goddard** is a solo hobbyist developer from the UK. His current project, *Under The Yoke*, is a multi-generational medieval life-sim told from the perspective of a family of peasants from 1085-1335 as they strike out a living in medieval England. The game intentionally centres the lives of everyday people as they navigate the oppressive feudal system of the period. Throughout *Under The Yoke* are player-choice moments designed to reveal the conditions of those who are cast to the margins of society, whether it be by their occupation, religious affiliation, or health, among other factors.

**Thom Gobbitt** is an early medievalist whose research focus stands at the intersection of the history of law and the history of the book, and who is steadily expanding into ludology. On the gaming front, he is currently editing a collected volume of chapters on the representation of the medieval past in analogue/tabletop games, and is preparing a TTRPG based on the seventh-century Lombard laws in the *Edictus Rothari* of 643 CE. Thom is also a part-time postdoctoral researcher on the ERC PresentDead project, in the Austrian Academy of the Sciences, Vienna, which explores grave reopenings and human interactions with materials relating to the dead, from the fifth to eighth centuries.

The panel will be chaired by **Blair Apgar**.

# Panel 3: How Monsters Work

In this panel, we invite three specialists from game development and academia to introduce us to some particular specific monsters and discuss why they work in their particular formats, settings, and narratives. What effects different sorts of monster are there to produce, how both medieval and modern creators worked them into those settings, and how we can use those techniques to present or re-imagine monsters when representing medieval worlds will all be areas for potential discussion.

The format will be an open roundtable: panellists will give short starting remarks and then discussion between the panellists and audience will open for the remainder of the time.

This panel will feature:

**Hannah Bayat** is a QA analyst at Microbird Games in Vienna, where she has worked on the upcoming title *Dungeons of Hinterberg*, a modern-fantasy alpine adventure mixing dungeon crawling and puzzle gameplay. Her work more widely has included a range of areas around software development, especially visual computing in which she holds a master's degree - this has included development of health and food security applications, and publishing academic work on medical imaging technologies.

**Sven Gins** is a doctoral researcher at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, working on the core project *Homo Imperfectus: Animals, Machines, and the Quest for Humanity in Late Mediaeval France.* He is also the lead for design and development on the public engagement project *Monstrum: The Medieval Cooperative Board Game,* and works on how medieval heritage finds its way into modern fantasy and sci-fi games as one of his sidequests.

**Tamara de Bruin** is a research Master's student in Medieval Literature at the University of Groningen. Her research focuses on treason and literary propaganda around the Wars of Scottish Independence, and the way that popular medieval narratives use animalistic natures or characteristics as strategies to create effective dehumanisation of their subjects. She is also currently involved in the design and development of *Monstrum*.

The panel will be chaired by **James Baillie**. The convenor of Coding Medieval Worlds and current chair of Exilian, James is a historian focusing on digital approaches to the history of the medieval Caucasus and has written and taught on the topic of games in history as well as being an active writer and game developer.

# Keynote: Tess Watterson
# Playing with Medievalism and Monstrosity

In fantasy worlds, notions of humanity and monstrosity are often fraught. This keynote examines the operation of monstrosity in medievalist fantasy texts as inherently shaped by its medievalist context, and by the ways in which games and play can disrupt our usual understanding of monstrosity and abjection. The monstrous is produced by a subversion or refusal of normative categories – something becomes perceived as monstrous when it cannot be understood or incorporated into a worldview. This works in harmony with the enabling flexibility of medievalism – the medieval is able to be so diversely utilised because it is never fully knowable (though some users also disregard very knowable aspects out of convenience), just like the monstrous. However, in a game with rules, and especially one with win conditions, this potential to unsettle boundaries is often dispelled by game mechanics that render the world into knowable components. This keynote talk will draw on my research on monstrous hags in fantasy games, as well as the ideas discussed at the workshop, to consider the relationship between game systems and the disruptive potential of medievalism and monstrosity when it comes to dnormative boundaries and Othered outsiders.

**Tess Watterson** is an early career researcher who specialises in medievalism and experiential learning. She received her PhD from the University of Adelaide for a thesis on witchcraft, gender, and persecution in medievalist fantasy video games. Her earlier work focused on medievalism and militainment in Robin Hood video games, including her Masters of Research thesis completed at Macquarie University. Tess aims to contribute to expanding pedagogical approaches for engaging with the past through experience and play, including in her current role as Special Collections & Experiential Learning Coordinator at the Library of the University of New South Wales.

The session chair will be **Madeline Sterns.** Madeline is a mediaeval and early modern art historian and game studies academic with interests in materiality and reception. She is currently a part-time instructor at Front Range Community College in Colorado (USA) teaching Humanities courses including Film Art and World Mythology with contemporary media applications.