Introduction

Monsters have fascinated us since time immemorial, springing from our cultural imaginations and appearing in our stories, myths, legends, fairy tales, literature, artwork, poetry, comic books, films, television shows, and, of course, video games. Monstrous beings embody our fears, anxieties, and prejudices, while also being irresistible figures whose forms and stories are continuously re-envisioned, remediated, and even sometimes redeemed. The concept of monstrosity itself is a form of chimera, defying classification and categorization, morphing and mutating to fit all kinds of analytical moulds. This is perhaps because monsters themselves are ambiguous and often contradictory figures. As Rosi Braidotti (2011) has pointed out, monsters "represent the in-between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word for 'monsters': *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration, placed between the sacred and the profane" (p. 216, emphasis in original). In this sense, while the monster is a villain in countless stories and media, it is really an ambiguous figure, defying clear categorization as either "bad" or "good." For example, in his book *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) discusses how the figure of the monster often symbolically polices the borders of what is permissible, signalling that to step outside of social norms risks either "attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (p. 12). Yet, at the same time, some monsters can be guardians or protectors, such as the *kaiju* Mothra; they may also be objects of dangerous or transgressive romantic interest, such as vampires or sirens; or they can be cute companions, like Pokémon—short for "Pocket Monsters." The monstrous also sometimes offers space for the subversion of hegemonic norms and power structures (see Wilson, 2020) and a point of identification for marginalized groups. For instance, feminist activists have reclaimed a figure like Medusa as a symbol of women's rage against oppressive patriarchal systems, and even a pop star like Lady Gaga has used the term "monster" to refer to the queerness, deviance, and non-normativity of herself and her fans.

Stang, S., M. Meriläinen, J. Blom & L. Hassan (eds.), *Monstrosity in Games and Play: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Monstrous in Contemporary Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025
DOI 10.5117/9789463725682_INTRO

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The fascination and allure of monstrosity is apparent across media and across cultures. Loaded as they are with meaning, monsters are rich objects of study for countless fields, from psychology to history to media studies. Regardless of how fantastical they are, or the nature of the medium or genre in which they appear, monsters are ripe for examination through countless theoretical and conceptual lenses. This collection is intended to provide a range of perspectives that speak to the depth, ambiguity, and ambivalence of the monster in and around games and play—a much-needed close look at the multifaceted ways monstrosity is intertwined with this ever-growing, deeply influential medium.

Monstrosity in/and Games

Monsters of all kinds are particularly ubiquitous in games; we fight them, slay them, capture them, tame them, eat them, and sometimes become them through the act of play. Monsters have been central to gameplay since the inception of the video game and the role-playing game, whether digital or non-digital. Monsters are particularly intriguing for game scholars concerned with how monstrosity is intertwined with real-world behaviours, media representations, and identity politics. In many fantasy, science fiction, and horror games, the player is forced to confront and defeat monsters, either adopting the role of a heroic monster slayer/hunter or being pursued and attacked by nonhuman beings, including aliens, robots, zombies, demons, ghosts, etc. Indeed, across many games, murdering monsters is an unavoidable aspect of gameplay, a requirement for a player to win the game. This is important to consider because monstrosity has been used as a dehumanizing label to justify the violent execution of countless unwanted Others—in media and, unfortunately, in real life (see Kocurek, 2015; Loponen, 2019; Mittman & Dendle, 2012). While such dehumanizing logic is common to all media, games take it one step further by making players enact violence against monstrous beings themselves—an action for which they are generally rewarded with points, loot, experience, and/or narrative progression—thereby solidifying an "us" versus "them" or "Self" versus "Other" dynamic.

However, sometimes the player's relationship to the monstrous is one of identification. Games can allow players to become a literal monster, as in *Vampyr* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2018) or *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Davis et al., 1992). Players may also embody a monstrous "race," such as an orc in the *Warcraft*, *Warhammer*, or *The Elder Scrolls* franchises. Games may permit players to transform into a monstrous or otherwise nonhuman being, as in

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Bloody Roar (Raizing, 1997), *Chrono Cross* (Square, 1999), *Primal* (SCE Studio Cambridge, 2003), or *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Nintendo, 2006). Additionally, in many games, monsters become companions, minions, summons, or pets, for example in the *Pokémon*, *Dragon Quest*, *Final Fantasy*, or *Ni no Kuni* series. Moreover, monstrosity is entwined with "real-world" aspects of game culture; monsters can occupy central roles in live-action role-play ("larp," also written as "LARP") and cosplay (short for "costume play"—when fans dress up as characters from games and other media). Even online bullying or inflammatory joking is referred to using the monstrous term "trolling." Monstrosity is, therefore, a multifaceted, complex, and often contradictory aspect of gameplay and game culture.

Given the centrality of monstrosity for this extremely popular, lucrative, and ever-growing medium, scholarly works that focus on the role of the monstrous in games and game culture are vital for a nuanced understanding of how media shape and are shaped by contemporary societies. Several studies have examined the horror genre of video games and, therefore, touch on aspects of monstrosity (e.g., Perron, 2018; Stobbart, 2019), especially the ever-popular figure of the zombie (see also Backe & Aarseth, 2013; Carr, 2009; Krzywinska, 2008; May, 2022; Webley & Zackariasson, 2020). Other works have focussed on the monster in the context of representation and identity, including issues surrounding disability (Carr, 2014), race (Kocurek, 2015; Young, 2016), and gender (Stang, 2019, 2021a, 2021b; Stang & Trammell, 2020). Still other analyses have taken a more ludological approach and examined the monster as an in-game mechanic and a familiar, quintessential enemy type (Perron, 2009; Švelch, 2013; 2023).

Many of these works build on Bernard Perron's (2009) foundational edited collection entitled *Horror video games*, in which Perron observes that confrontation with the monster is inevitable in many games because the player is forced to either flee or kill it to proceed further. Horror games are perhaps more intense—or, at least, demanding—than horror in other media because even if players are frightened, Perron has noted, they cannot cover their eyes like a spectator of a film; instead, they must hold onto the controller and react quickly to the threat (p. 137). This is a key reason why games are unique as a mediated experience, and why scholarship that addresses the ludic monster on its own terms is so important.

Much of the research listed above as well as the chapters in this collection demonstrate how video games offer players a uniquely interactive engagement with monstrosity; they can become monster slayers and monstrous characters themselves. While scholars often apply established theories from other fields to their analyses, they also consider the unique affordances of

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games and what they mean for both monsters and players. For example, in the face of the monster's savagery, Perron has argued, the player character usually has no choice but to violently retaliate, and boss battles are particularly unavoidable: "no one gets out of a nightmarish adventure without having defeated the final, most horrible and most threatening creatures" (p. 130). Often, this confrontation is extremely violent: "as much as the evil enemies make every effort to scare and to tear the player character to pieces, they are mutilated equally in return" (p. 130). For example, zombies in several games must be shot in the head, the Necromorphs in *Dead Space* (EA Redwood Shores, 2008) must be torn limb from limb, the *God of War* series features horrifically violent finishing moves, and so on. In this sense, although the monster is terrifying, it is (usually) ultimately defeated by the player, who thereby enacts a violent power fantasy.

Like Jaroslav Švelch (2013, 2023), one can argue that ludic monstrosity is, therefore, actually less abject, mysterious, and unknowable than monstrosity in other media. Because ludic monsters function as algorithmic procedures, video games provide players with monsters that can be analysed, understood, and defeated—thereby deactivating the threat of monstrosity and granting players the fantasy of control. Indeed, as players learn the rules and mechanics of a game, they can also learn how to defeat monsters by memorizing their attack patterns and learning their weak spots (p. 201). In other words, "monstrosity is now under the control of the empowered player. Although video game monsters are still made to *look* disgusting or awe-inspiring, their behaviors are dictated by algorithms that can be analyzed and described" (p. 202; emphasis in original). Games offer players the opportunity to analyse, control, and defeat monsters—an experience unmatched in other media.

Moreover, as an influential cultural phenomenon, video games both draw on and shape our existing notions of what it means to be a monster. Indeed, in his recent historical analysis of monstrosity in games entitled *Player vs. monster*, Švelch narrates the history of how monsters—specifically, traditional kinds of "nonhuman fantastic beings" (p. 3)—have "invaded video games and how video games have, in turn, affected our notions of monstrosity" (p. 3). He approaches monstrosity as a general conceptual category, focussing on the specific roles and functions of monsters within games in order to argue that they embody commodified otherness designed to be beaten.

Tabletop role-playing games offer perhaps the most illustrative example of this commodified otherness; many games feature hundreds of fantastical monsters broken down into numerical statistics and mechanical patterns

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of action. In this sense, resources like the *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax & Arneson, 1974) *Monster Manual*, which is the game's bestiary, allow the game master to transform monsters into tools for gameplay. Sarah Stang—one of the editors of this collection—and Aaron Trammell (2020) have demonstrated how the *Monster Manual* and other ludic bestiaries underscore the abject nature of their monstrous beings through statistics, illustrations, and flavour text. In their analysis, Stang and Trammell use the Hag as a case study to show how harmful ideologies, including sexism and ageism, become embedded and naturalized in the design of the *Monster Manual*'s creatures. Similarly, Stang (2021b) analysed female monsters in the *Fiend Folio*—another *Dungeons & Dragons* bestiary—to highlight the problematic aspects of categorizing certain bodies and behaviours as monstrous in game resources like bestiaries.

Scholars have long pointed out that many monsters are designed in relation to real-world groups of people—especially those who are disenfranchised, marginalized, and/or minoritized. With this in mind, the violent, monster-slaying power fantasy that games offer becomes particularly problematic. The violence enacted by the player and directed at monstrous bodies is an important aspect of game scholarship precisely because games incorporate the player as an active, and therefore complicit, participant. Carly Kocurek (2015) has observed that constructing video-game enemies, who are the victims of player violence, as monsters enacts a type of dehumanizing, cultural violence that justifies their execution (p. 80). Consequently, "the broad deployment of monstrousness as a justification for killing in video games implicitly suggests that those who can be killed are inherently monstrous" (p. 88). Depending on their settings, games that portray enemies as monstrous can therefore be considered echoes of historical propaganda strategies that were deployed to justify real-world violence against specific groups of people.

The question of in-game representation, identity politics, and monstrosity—which is also the focus of several chapters in this collection—has been explored at length by several game scholars. For example, in Diane Carr's (2014) analysis of *Dead Space*, she shows how the infected, mutated, and horrifically abject Necromorphs fall into the long-standing popular culture tradition of presenting physical disability as monstrous. Given that the word "teratology" refers to the study of anomalous births in medical science and that the freak show has often been considered a showcase of physically anomalous bodies, the association between monstrosity and disability in games is perhaps unsurprising. Yet the fact that the player is encouraged to feel fear and revulsion towards these creatures and, as mentioned above, is urged to destroy them through violent, horrific dismemberment underscores

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the reason why the design and portrayal of monstrous Others in games can be particularly problematic and harmful. While many studies have debated whether in-game violence can impact the likelihood of violent acts outside of games (Adachi & Willoughby, 2011; Granic et al., 2014; Hilgard et al., 2017; Prescott et al., 2018), scholars have long demonstrated that media portrayals impact real-world, socio-cultural attitudes towards groups of people (see Hall, 1997).

Questions of representation and identity have also been asked in relation to racialized monstrosity in games, especially the ubiquitous orc found in many fantasy media. As Helen Young (2016) noted, while other kinds of monsters, such as vampires, werewolves, zombies, and aliens, can embody fears about gender, sexuality, and class, "orcs are always racial monsters, even on the occasions that they also intersect with other identity constructs" (p. 89). For example, in the *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Warhammer* series, orcs live in violent, brutal, and "primitive" nomadic tribal societies and always have green, brown, or black skin. Video games in general are dominated by white protagonists, and many role-playing games follow the ludic tradition established by *Dungeons & Dragons* of framing orcs (and other nonhuman characters) as racialized and declaring them monstrous or monstrous "races," even when they are playable characters[1]. For example, in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), the narrative is constructed around an ongoing war between the Alliance races (including humans, who are generally portrayed as European) and the Horde races, which are designed using racialized signifiers and are, importantly, considered monstrous and evil within the lore of the game.

Gender is another lens through which game scholars have analysed monstrosity. For example, in her dissertation and published work, Stang has examined several kinds of female monsters common to science fiction and fantasy, role-playing games to show how misogyny becomes embedded in game design when developers remediate traditional monsters from mythology and folklore. As she argues, "games are part of a long tradition of constructing the female body as monstrous—the sexual Other to be hated, feared, and destroyed" (2021a, p. 203). Like Kocurek, Stang points to monstrosity as a veil used to keep problematic (in this case, misogynistic) representation symbolic and so less likely to draw criticism. Although games

1 Wizards of the Coast has finally begun to address this issue by, for example, moving away from the term "race" and reducing the influence of a character's species in terms of game mechanics in their 2024 revision to *Dungeons & Dragons*.

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might be getting a little better in terms of gender representation, for instance by having more diverse, female characters as playable protagonists, monstrosity is an area where much interrogation and improvement is still needed.

In addition to reinforcing harmful ideologies, the design of gendered or racialized monsters can be alienating to players who do not fit the mould of the industry-constructed "ideal player" (see Chess, 2017; Neely 2017; Shaw, 2014) because such monsters can send the message that the game was not made for them—likely an accurate assumption given the way these kinds of games (made by teams composed primarily of straight, abled, white men) are often marketed. Yet there might be potential for self-reflection in this process: Perron (2009) has argued that the ludic violence directed at monsters during gameplay forces players to confront *themselves* as monstrous, especially in the more gruesome games, since "battling monsters is a highly veiled odyssey of self-exploration" (p. 130). In this sense, gameplay offers the possibility of engaging with the monstrous in more nuanced, reflective ways.

Such conflicts and opportunities are precisely why the monstrous is so fascinating to study; a monster's design, story, and portrayal can mean something different to each player, and an encounter with a monstrous Other could awaken critical reflection, or it could simply re-entrench problematic beliefs about marginalized groups. A game could be exclusionary to players who identify more with aspects of the "repulsive" monsters than they do with the normative protagonists. Because games offer a first-hand, interactive engagement with monstrosity, they are powerful and influential vehicles for the communication of beliefs, values, norms, and ideologies.

What This Book Contributes

To examine how games accomplish this communication, the chapters here build upon and expand the existing work on monstrosity and games discussed above—as well as literature on monsters in other media, popular culture, and history. Our volume applies theories of monstrosity to games, play practices, and aspects of player culture and online behaviours in novel ways. Consideration of the monster in games is a popular, yet relatively recent, avenue of research, and we seek to add to this growing body of literature by showcasing how the concept of monstrosity—understood broadly—can be deployed for studying games, play, and surrounding discourses in varied, and sometimes surprising, ways. This collection contributes to the nascent sub-field of what we might call "ludoteratology" by not focussing on one genre (e.g., horror), one type of enemy (e.g., the zombie), or on monsters

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that are strictly understood as nonhuman fantastical beings; rather, the chapters in this collection range widely in their subjects and emphases. They encompass both "traditional" monsters examined with established methods, including close reading as well as historical and cultural analysis, and novel applications of the idea of monstrosity to unexpected topics. With our authors' diverse approaches, the chapters in this collection offer important insights into how monstrosity is interwoven with games and play.

Here, readers will find studies of games and play practices that have never been analysed through the lens of monstrosity. For instance, some chapters unpack questions of race, gender, disability, and mental health, while others seek to challenge assumptions regarding the connection between monstrosity and mediated representation. Still other chapters offer readings of real-world behaviours and situations within the context of the monstrous or seek to underscore the violence and harm of certain monstrous portrayals. Yet further chapters argue for the more positive potential of the monstrous. Despite sometimes conflicting viewpoints, the chapters work together to highlight the complexities around the topic of monstrosity. This book, therefore, presents a wide range of topics and approaches, as well as a diverse understanding and interpretation of the very concept of monstrosity, but it is unified by the application of this concept to games and play.

As mentioned above, the authors featured here were encouraged to conceptualize, define, and apply the concept of monstrosity as they wished and were given space to address the topics of games and play either in traditional ways, for instance close readings of monstrous characters, or in more unorthodox ways, for example the interpretation of chat as a monstrous swarm. We sought scholarship that could explore the intersection of games and monstrosity without being too strict about the definition of either of those topics. Our purpose was twofold. First, we aimed to encourage interpretive creativity in order to acknowledge the ambiguous, slippery, category-defying nature both of monstrosity and of what it means to play a game. This flexible approach means being playful with the concept of monstrosity, as is befitting a game-related text. Second, we wanted to provide a space for scholars new to the topic to try their hand at exploring this fruitful area of study and for those more familiar with it to approach it in new ways. Indeed, this collection presents a mix of established and emerging scholars, providing a broad variety of approaches, topics, methodologies, and games or game-related objects of study and discussion.

This book is, therefore, perhaps an odd contribution to ludoteratology, but it highlights how flexible, malleable, and surprising both game studies and teratology can be. Thus, this collection builds upon previous work on the

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topic—which itself is a wide and diverse area of research—and also expands beyond existing scholarship, offering new kinds of analyses, especially on topics and games that have not yet received attention in this context, as well as alternative interpretations of the relationship between games, play, and monsters. Our collection is intended to add to the subfield of monstrosity and games (ludic monstrosity or ludoteratology), and we hope it will be considered an important contribution to the current understanding of how games, play, and monsters are intertwined.

Because of the diversity of topics and approaches here, the chapters provide a transdisciplinary take on the topic, incorporating various ideas, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and methodologies into a sort of chimera. As Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody (2020) note in their introduction to *Monstrous women in comics*—a collection similarly dedicated to unpacking monstrosity in an understudied medium riddled with monstrous beings—"interdisciplinary studies tend toward the 'monstrous' in that they are hybrid by nature" (p. iii). Yet, according to Langsdale and Coody, hybridity is also the strength of an interdisciplinary approach to a topic, demonstrating the topic's richness with sometimes contradictory and often surprising findings. Like games themselves, which defy categorization as audio-visual-haptic interactive texts, this collection sits comfortably within several fields, disciplines, and methodologies. Also like Frankenstein's monster, this book is more than the sum of its parts, yet it is undeniably the hybrid, category-defying monster we have collectively created and released into the world.

The Structure of the Book

Our volume is structured to showcase a breadth of approaches, methodologies, conceptual frameworks, and interpretations related to monsters and the monstrous. While this intentionally chimeric collection was never going to be cohesive, we have nevertheless divided our volume into two broad, thematic sections for the reader's benefit. The first section focuses on different presentations of monstrosity in digital games, with close readings of monstrosity in relation to gender, race and ethnicity, and mental health. The second half of the book moves away from analyses of in-game monstrosity to offer novel, and even unorthodox, takes on how the monstrous manifests in phenomena in and around games and gaming.

Across our first three chapters, themes of nationalism, cultural appropriation, and othering are explored. These chapters highlight how games

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either erase or portray entire cultures as nonhuman, while simultaneously drawing from the mythologies of these cultures for profit, thereby illustrating the sometimes unexpected ways monsters and colonialism intersect. Our book opens with Dom Ford and Joleen Blom's analysis of how the Mongol invaders of the Japanese island of Tsushima in *Ghost of Tsushima* (Sucker Punch Productions, 2020) are dehumanized and made monstrous in order to construct a notion of "pure" Japanese identity. The game creates two distinct categories of the "pure" and the "monstrous," but simultaneously positions the game's protagonist, Jin, as a liminal figure, thus blurring the boundary between these two categories. Ford and Blom show how the developer, Sucker Punch, navigates being a US developer aiming to create an "authentic" portrayal of Japanese history.

In the second chapter, Rachael Hutchinson continues the focus on Japan by arguing that the Japanese game industry has leveraged monsters (*yōkai*) to promote sales and so has revealed deeper cultural meanings of colonialism and modernization. She explains that monsters in franchises such as *Pokémon*, *Monster Hunter*, and *Yo-kai Watch* provide a resource-gathering, skill-increasing gameplay loop via inventories (or "bestiaries"). She places digital games in the context of Japanese analogue monster encyclopaedias and databases, showing how they drive order over chaos, and impose mainland Japanese civilization and enlightenment onto regional and Indigenous Japanese populations and their beliefs.

Shifting our focus from Japan to the Philippines in Chapter 3, Christoffer Mitch C. Cerda analyses *Nightfall: Escape* (Zeenoh Inc., 2016), a Filipino survival horror video game, and how it represents Filipino mythological and folk creatures as monsters. He discusses how the game attempts to translate these creatures to the game's design and mechanics so that players come to understand the culture and history of the Philippines. With this approach, Cerda also underscores *Nightfall: Escape*'s place in the growing popularity of horror games in the international video game market, highlighting how the commodification of Filipino culture for the consumption of a global audience affects the game's design and narrative, and helps the developers avoid self-exoticization.

With our next two chapters, we move from exploring the monstrosity of colonialism to considerations of the ways in which games position the female body as a monstrous Other. In Chapter 4, Caighlan Smith examines how three digital role-playing games—*The Wanderer: Frankenstein's Creature* (La Belle Games & ARTE France, 2019), *Fable II* (Lionhead Studios, 2008), and *Dragon Age II* (BioWare, 2011)—have incorporated a familiar trope of gendered monstrosity. The monster and the monster-maker of each game are

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designed and positioned in ways intended to foster more or less sympathy and elicit particular reactions from players. Smith builds upon existing theories of identification in games to demonstrate how the player-avatar relationship influences the various framings and perceptions of gendered Otherness in games that objectify and deny agency to monstrous women.

In Chapter 5, Nazely Hartoonian challenges the assumption that the monstrous-feminine in games can only ever be problematic and harmful. She examines *The Evil Within 2* (Tango Gameworks, 2017)—a surprising case study given its plethora of grotesque and abject monstrous women—to show how the monstrous-feminine can be a subversive trope. She argues that the game's gendered approach to monstrosity actually grants agency to feminine beings, thus positioning the straight, male player character as the abject and unwanted Other and reminding him of his own complicity in patriarchal power structures. Engaging with established theories from feminist film studies, including the final girl, the monstrous-feminine, and the male gaze, Hartoonian shows how *The Evil Within 2* can be read as an example of the feminist reclamation of monstrosity.

The two following chapters turn from the body to the mind, as the authors discuss the stigma and representation of mental health issues and neurodiversity. In Chapter 6, Kelli N. Dunlap and Rachel Kowert analyse how mental health is presented in games and problematize the representation of mental illness as a stigma. Despite an increase in nuanced portrayals, many of the stories told about mental health and illness through games suffer from inaccurate tropes and overgeneralization, such as the character archetype of the homicidal maniac or the depiction of mental health institutions as settings of inevitable horror. Dunlap and Kowert argue that these representational tropes undermine both the importance of mental health and the humanity of people with mental illnesses, in addition to reinforcing negative stereotypes and raising barriers to seeking help.

Concluding the first half of the book, in Chapter 7 Lisanne Meinen deploys a neurodiversity perspective to discuss depictions of psychosis in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory, 2017), a game that blurs the line between heroic protagonist and monstrous Other. Meinen examines the design choices for the game that aim both to make the player empathize with the main character, Senua, and to depict her mental health struggles through game narrative and mechanics. The result, Meinen suggests, is a game that manages to challenge the stigma of monstrosity associated with psychosis and that can be seen as emancipatory and empowering, while still being itself problematic.

The second half of this volume reminds us that monstrosity in game culture is not just about literal monsters, but can also extend to the hidden,

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ubiquitous monsters of our everyday society: commodification, conspiracy theories, constant productivity requirements, and online performance. Unlike traditional monsters, these monstrous entities cannot be directly fought and defeated. Instead, they lurk at the intersections of monstrosity, game cultures, and everyday life.

This section opens with Chapter 8, Lars de Wildt's analysis of conspiracy aesthetics in video games. Examining several contemporary game franchises that emphasize narratives reliant on conspiracy themes, de Wildt shows how, beneath the veneer of the easily identified, in-game antagonists, there lurks a different kind of monster: the conspiracy, a slippery, intangible monster that evades identification and objectification. He argues that video games, which feature engagement with hidden systems at their core, are in a unique position to represent such systemic monsters.

Next, in Chapter 9, Rachel Linn examines the chat platform of the streaming service Twitch as an arena of performance that can be viewed through the lens of monstrosity. Because the chat platform is built from hundreds and thousands of individual human acts, it cascades down in an amorphous stream of trolling, emotes, and copypasta, all of which coalesce into a swarm, a hybrid creature that can itself be understood as a monster. Linn argues that the chat platform can be considered a microcosm of our own existence—part of the digital swarm that threatens to consume our individuality and the responsibilities that come with it—and shows how theories of the monstrous can help us interrogate these digital threats.

While much of the volume revolves around the digital, Sarah Lynne Bowman highlights the importance of tabletop and live-action role-playing games in Chapter 10. Bowman demonstrates how these games can be used to safely explore the darker side of humanity and address themes such as loss, abuse, and oppression. Emotionally intense and even distressing game experiences can also be empowering and help explore facets of our internal worlds that we find ourselves incapable of acknowledging or with which we are unwilling to engage. Drawing from interviews with therapists, educators, and game designers, Bowman reminds us that all humans harbour internal, personal monsters, and that games, especially when paired with off-game processing, can help us in our lifelong process to understand, tame, and live with these monsters.

In Chapter 11, J. Tuomas Harviainen, Johanna Granvik, and Henry Korkeila explore how the unsustainable environment of *Diablo III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2012) is a reflection of neoliberal ideals centred on the exploitation of resources and the pursuit of self-interest. Here, the monster is presented as a commodity and a resource, in addition to its role of facilitating game

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engagement and murderous enjoyment for the player. The authors demonstrate that by combatting monsters, player characters themselves become monsters; they wander through the wilderness of a colonial, capitalist utopia in an orgy of slaughter motivated by fun and personal gain.

In our twelfth and final chapter, which boldly challenges norms of academic expression, Diane Carr, Shakuntala Banaji, and Hakan Ergül look at the monstrous in academia through the lenses of race, disability, parenting, and lifestyle. Employing the drawing game/method of "exquisite corpse" as both a work and a reflection framework, the authors provide an unconventional method of looking at the monstrous in academic life. In a fitting conclusion to a volume characterized by its diversity of approaches, this collaborative endeavour details the game of assembling and dissecting a text, consciously embracing disjuncture and contradiction over synthesis.

To conclude, we hope this collection provides a valuable contribution to and expansion of existing scholarship in game studies, cultural studies, and media studies by applying established theories in new ways, engaging with themes of social justice and identity politics, and pushing the boundaries of the very concept of monstrosity. As games continue to dominate the entertainment media landscape of the 21st century, scholarly works that focus on the role of the monstrous in games are vital for a nuanced understanding of the game-related cultures and communities that develop in our contemporary society. The chapters in this book seek to provoke critical reflection on the label of "monster" and on our engagement with the monstrous. Unlike other media, games offer players the experience of either embodying the monstrous themselves or playing the role of "monster slayer" so that they are forced to personally confront societal issues which have often been overlooked in entertainment media. Consequently, this collection demonstrates why monstrosity provides a potent conceptual framework for asking challenging questions about games, play, society, and what it means to be human.

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About the Editors

Joleen Blom (Ph.D.) is a university lecturer in the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies at the Tampere University Game Research Lab. She is the author of *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling*, which has been published by the Amsterdam University Press. For more information, see joleenblom.com.

Lobna Hassan (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor (tenure-track), with a focus on sociotechnical transitions in services, at Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology, Finland. Her research interests include game accessibility, gamification, and the inclusion of people with disabilities. Her work and publications can be found at http://lobnahassan.com.

Mikko Meriläinen (Ph.D.) is an Academy Research Fellow in the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies at the Tampere University Game Research Lab. His research focusses on the intersections of gaming cultures with various areas of everyday life. Further information can be found at mikkomerilainen.com.

Sarah Stang (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor of Game Studies in Brock University's Department of Digital Humanities where she teaches courses in the Interactive Arts and Sciences, GAME, and Game Studies MA programs. Her research primarily focuses on gender representation in both digital and analogue games.