

English 102: Inquiry into Popular Medievalism
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This course explores the tremendous popularity of alternate realities based on ancient and medieval cultures, including Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and other fantasy novels, online roleplaying games such as *World of Warcraft*, a medieval legends such as those of King Arthur and Robin Hood, a number of fairly awful *Beowulf* movies, and live historical re-enactment. Why does Europe's premodern past, along with some very creative reinterpretations of it, have such vast appeal in North American popular culture? We will examine tensions and differences (if any) between historical fiction and fantasy fiction, as well as differences between academic and popular writing on medieval culture. Through discussion of historical and pseudo-historical roleplaying and re-enactment, we will ask questions about self-construction and persona, escapism and subcreation, historical authenticity and accuracy, and, eventually, some of the complex connotations of the term "reality."