

College of DuPage Theatre Department

Presents

She Kills Monsters

By Qui Nguyen



Directed by Amelia Barrett

The College Theatre Department sincerely thanks the Library for research support for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director and production team, working on the project.

Time and Place: 1995, Athens, Ohio and the imaginary land of New Landia

Characters:

Narrator	Orcus/Ronnie
Tilly	Steve
Agnes	Vera
Chuck	Farrah
Miles	Evil Gabbi
Kalipoe/Kelly	Evil Tina
Lilith/Lilly	

Adult themes, language, flashing lights and stage fog used during the show

***She Kills Monsters* Director’s Note**

Fall 2021

Agnes has lost her entire family and she begins both a literal and a figurative quest. She takes a journey within the game; an emotional quest to discover the sister whom she has lost; and a quest to discover something “not ordinary” about herself.

Within the game world, the more advanced player you become, the greater the ability you have to punish those who oppose you, regardless of your station in “real life.” Inside this world, you have the ability to be respected, powerful, fearless and feared.

Through the game, Agnes copes with her powerlessness to save her sister, by taking an imagined power to control and unleash death upon others. This is the most interesting aspect of the play for me, as it acts as a salve for anyone who has ever felt like an outsider, invisible, the victim, or powerless, It is a delicious moment to take something you have no control over and imagine yourself heroic, courageous, and superhuman. And isn’t that a marvelous way for, as Nguyen phrases it, “...how Agnes, the girl who never left home, finally found a way out...” AB

Qui Nguyen, the Playwright

citation:

Quinguyen.com, October 25, 2021. <http://www.quinguyen.com/about.html>.

Qui Nguyen is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter, and Co-Founder/Co-Artistic Director of the OBIE Award winning Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company of New York City.

Scripts include *Krunk Fu Battle Battle* (East West Players); *She Kills Monsters* (The Flea); *Trial By Water* (Ma-Yi Theater); *Bike Wreck* (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *Aliens Versus Cheerleaders* (Keen Teens); *Soul Samurai*; *The Inexplicable Redemption of Agent G* (Ma-Yi Theater & Vampire Cowboys); *Lush Valley* (HERE Arts Center); and the critically acclaimed Vampire Cowboys productions of *Alice in Slasherland*; *Fight Girl Battle World*; *Men of Steel*; and *Living Dead in Denmark*.

His scripts are published by Samuel French, Broadway Play Publishing, and Playscripts.com.

Honors include the 2011 & 2009 GLAAD Media Award nominations (*She Kills Monsters* and *Soul Samurai*); 2008 & 2006 NY Innovative Theatre Awards for Best Production (*Fight Girl Battle World* and *Living Dead in Denmark*); cited as a “Downtown Playwright to Watch” by TIME OUT NEW YORK.

He is a proud resident artist at New Dramatists, a core member of The Playwrights’ Center, an alumnus of Youngblood, and a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre and The Ma-Yi Writers Lab.

His company, Vampire Cowboys, is the only theatre organization to be officially sponsored by NY Comic Con.

Qui Nguyen and Queering the Coming of Age Tale

Citation:

Mirashrafi, Melory. Oct. 25, 2021. <https://linfieldtheatre.wordpress.com/portfolio/qui-nguyen-and-queering-the-coming-of-age-tale/>

Qui Nguyen: Self-admitted geek, genre-bender, and the playwright of *She Kills Monsters* knows a thing or two about working beyond the normative narrative. Unable to find his voice writing

traditional plays early in his career, Nguyen reworked the contemporary understanding of what theatre can be by coining his own style of show, and starting a theatre company called Vampire Cowboys. In an interview with American Theatre Magazine, Nguyen says that his work with Vampire Cowboys was “lovingly dubbed, “geek theatre,” by creating pop-culture-infused action-adventure stories with heroes who were female, people of color, and/or LGBTQ.”

Qui Nguyen

She Kills Monsters premiered in 2011, and while it wasn't a product of Vampire Cowboys, the rules established by conventional theatre for a coming of age tale are nowhere to be found. Tilly and Agnes, two sisters, get to know each other through the world of Dungeons & Dragons after Tilly dies in a car crash. In part, the expectation-bending nature of *She Kills Monsters* are a testament to Nguyen's creativity, but it's also born out of necessity—when telling a tale of grief, queer coming of age, sisterhood, and femme-badassary, there's nothing to work with but scratch. The revolutionary content of *She Kills Monsters* had to be reflected in its form and language.

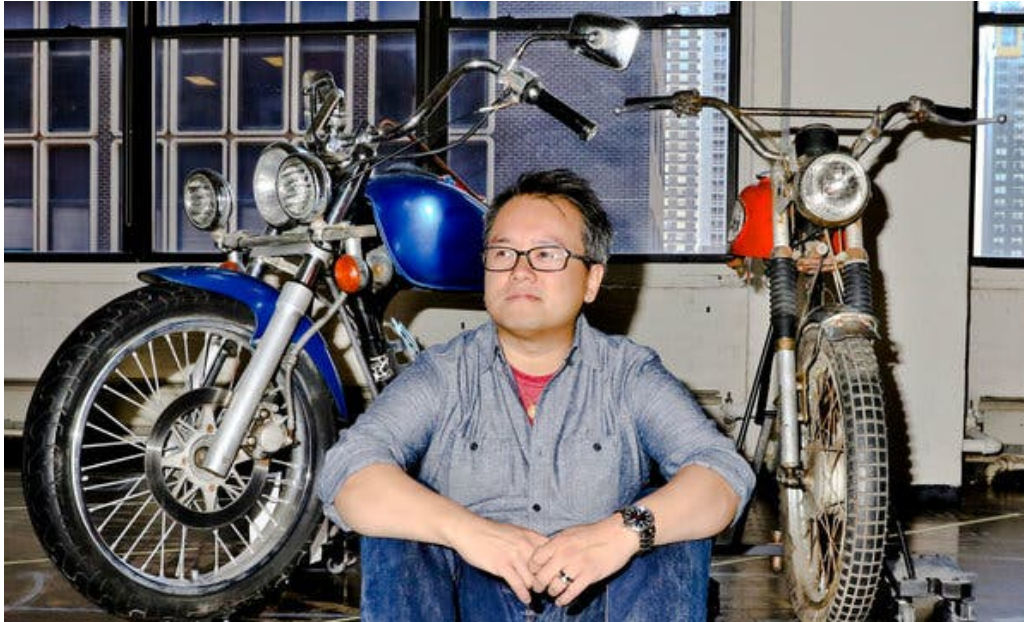
Revolutions are found all throughout *She Kills Monsters*, from a macro-scale, to the revolutions happening within sisters Tilly and Agnes as they learn more about one another (and themselves), all while working their way through a mystical and often treacherous D&D adventure. The layers, diverse range of characters, and dynamic women of the play are what bring *She Kills Monsters* to life. As Nguyen said in his interview with American Theatre Magazine, “Everyone deserves a chance to see themselves onstage.”

About the Author:

Citation:

Tran, Diep. "How Mom and Dad Met, with Ninjas: [Arts and Leisure Desk]." *New York Times*, Oct 09, 2016. *ProQuest*, <https://cod.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.cod.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/how-mom-dad-met-with-ninjas/docview/1827073820/se-2?accountid=10202>.

How Mom and Dad Met, With Ninjas



Qui Nguyen, who wrote the play “Vietgone,” at the Manhattan Theater Club in September. Credit... Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

By [Diep Tran](#)

- Oct. 5, 2016

On a sunny Southern California day in the spring of 2015, a full house showed up to attend not a play, but a reading of a play: “Vietgone” by Qui Nguyen. It was the last day of the [Pacific Playwrights Festival](#), hosted by the local South Coast Repertory theater. “Vietgone” was the final presentation, a two-and-a-half-hour piece about a complicated event: the Vietnam War.

“Mamas, don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys...,” sang two actors, who were playing a Vietnamese father and his son.

End of play.

Immediately, the audience — a mix of industry professionals, subscribers and members of the Vietnamese community — stood up in applause. Among them was Elizabeth Rothman, director of play development at [Manhattan Theater Club](#). Right after the reading, she called the theater’s artistic director, Lynne Meadow, with the words: “We must do this play.”

A year and several other productions later (including a current run at [Oregon Shakespeare Festival](#)), “Vietgone” began performances Oct. 4 at Manhattan Theater Club’s 300-seat space Off Broadway at New York City Center.

Even now, Mr. Nguyen, 40, can't believe it. "They're nutbags," he said, jokingly, about the prestigious theaters who have given a prime slot to a writer best known for low-budget, action-packed plays about superheroes and samurai.

He was speaking over a dinner of bacon and pineapple pizza, jet-lagged after having flown into New York at 5 that morning for "Vietgone" rehearsal.

After 13 years in Brooklyn, he moved to Los Angeles six months ago, to write for television. His credits include the PBS children's show ["Peg + Cat"](#) and the coming Syfy series ["Incorporated,"](#) produced by Ben Affleck and Matt Damon.

His week is largely taken up with his new job: screenwriter for Marvel Studios. In typical Marvel fashion, Mr. Nguyen is quiet about what he's working on, except to say: "Things seem to be going O.K. for me right now!"

If Mr. Nguyen could be described in only four words, it would be "not the model minority," as he puts it. Talking to him is to be showered with a steady stream of jokes and the occasional expletive — more like a playful 20-something than the father of two children that he is.

Image



From left, Raymond Lee, Paco Tolson and Jon Hoche rehearsing "Vietgone" at the Manhattan Theater Club. Credit...Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

But Mr. Nguyen doesn't consider his new day job different from what he had been doing in New York. He is a co-founder of the Obie-winning downtown theater company [Vampire Cowboys](#), which drew a passionate following thanks to plays with titles like "Soul Samurai," "Fight Girl Battle World" and ["Alice in Slasherland."](#) His best-known play, ["She Kills Monsters,"](#) has received almost 300 productions nationwide since 2013

It was that work that also drew notice from Marvel, which Mr. Nguyen calls “kind of a dream job.” He added: “It’s a weird evolution from doing downtown superheroes, creating theater, and suddenly, writing *actual* superheroes.”

“Vietgone” may seem to be a drastic departure. The playwright calls it a “romantic comedy” about how his parents met at a refugee camp in Arkansas in 1975, having immigrated right after the Vietnam War. It’s a story that Mr. Nguyen grew up hearing and knows well, but it has also been filtered through his pop-culture-filled and irreverent sensibility.

“When my parents told me stories about Vietnam, they told me the real stories, what actually happened,” he explained. “But what I imagined was kung fu movies. Because the only things I ever saw [growing up] that had a lot of Asian people in it, were kung fu movies.”

So there is kung fu in “Vietgone,” and ninjas. As in Mr. Nguyen’s other works, everyone speaks in a modern voice and raps — and no one speaks with “an Asian accent,” part of his fight against minority stereotypes.

“This play is still very much him,” the director, May Adrales, said by phone during a rehearsal break. “There’s genre-bending, it’s bawdy, it’s slick and it’s humorous.” (A critic for [The Los Angeles Times](#) called it “a riotous theatrical cartoon [that] won me over with its simple honesty.”)

Mr. Nguyen, the oldest of three sons, said he always knew he would be a storyteller. He was born and raised in El Dorado, Ark. His parents — Quang Nguyen, a pilot for the South Vietnam Air Force, and Tong Nguyen, who worked at the United States Embassy in Saigon — had grown accustomed to Arkansas while in the camp and didn’t want to move. They were one of only two Asian families in town and lived in a primarily African-American neighborhood.

Along with family stories, Mr. Nguyen consumed comic books (Spider-Man was his favorite superhero), studied martial arts (Bruce Lee was an idol) and participated in freestyle rap battles. He joined the drama club in high school because “there are cute girls in theater,” he said with a laugh.

But he stuck with it, eventually majoring in theater at Louisiana Tech University, with an emphasis on acting. It was there that he started writing plays. “I don’t want to play a stereotype,” he recalled thinking. “How do I get those roles? I’ll just write them.” He eventually earned a master’s degree in playwriting from Ohio University.

Creating substantial roles for minority actors became a touchstone of Vampire Cowboys, which Mr. Nguyen co-founded in 2002 with the director and fellow comic-book lover Robert Ross Parker. The troupe specialized in what became known as “geek theater,” a term coined by a producer, Abby Marcus, who eventually became Mr. Nguyen’s wife.



Temar Underwood, left, and Maureen Sebastian in the Vampire Cowboys' stage production of Qui Nguyen's "Fight Girl Battle World." Credit...Jim Baldassare

The genre proved popular; their shows regularly sold out, and they had their own performance space called the Battle Ranch and a regular booth at [New York Comic Con](#).

"One of the missions of Vampire Cowboys was always to make heroes out of women, people of color, lesbian, gay, transgender characters — those people who generally don't get to be heroes," Mr. Parker said by phone.

Though the company is on hiatus, its essence lives on in Mr. Nguyen. In "Vietgone," he wanted to tell a story he had never seen growing up, a story about people like his parents, South Vietnamese who fought for their country.

Movies like "Rambo" and "Platoon," and even the musical "Miss Saigon," provided a narrow view that turned the Vietnamese into supporting characters in their own stories, Mr. Nguyen said.

"It always made me go: 'Oh no, you're the other! You're either the other we're killing or the other we're saving!'" he added. "'You're never going to be the lead character.'"

Not in "Vietgone." In a world where leading roles for Asian-American men and women are [still rare](#) and Asian-American characters are sometimes [whitewashed](#), it was important for Mr. Nguyen to create "strong Asian-American characters," he said. "They're cool, and they're sexy, and they're not exotic. They can be feminist, strong women, and they can be sexy men."

And Ms. Adrales, whose parents were immigrants from the Philippines, thinks the relevance of “Vietgone” goes even beyond Asian-Americans, especially when the presence of new generations of immigrants is being fiercely debated.

“When he’s writing about people that are displaced,” she said, “it makes me think of the Hmong and now the Syrians, who have that same story.”

“Vietgone” is the first in a five-play cycle about Mr. Nguyen’s family. Manhattan Theater Club and South Coast Rep have commissioned the second play, which will be about his parents acclimating to life in Arkansas. As for the real Quang and Tong Nguyen, who still live in El Dorado, Mr. Nguyen said that they haven’t seen “Vietgone.” And they don’t plan to.

“A lot of people who come from a tumultuous situation — whether it’s the Holocaust or the Vietnam War or the Syrian crisis — I think it’s hard for them to revisit it,” he said. But that doesn’t mean they’re not proud of him.

Though it wasn’t the awards the play has won or its productions that made them realize that Mr. Nguyen had written something special. “What made them think it was a big deal,” he said with a chuckle, “was when someone wrote about it in a Vietnamese newspaper.”

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 9, 2016, Section AR, Page 7 of the New York edition with the headline: How Mom and Dad Met, With Ninjas

About *She Kills Monsters*

citation:

Vincentelli, Elisabeth. "This Play Became a Shape-Shifter: [Arts and Leisure Desk]." *New York Times*, Jul 05, 2020. ProQuest, <https://cod.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.cod.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/this-play-became-shape-shifter/docview/2419912933/se-2?accountid=10202>. [or]

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/theater/she-kills-monsters-qui-nguyen.html>

Queer Kids, Nerds and Sword Fights: It's the Hot School Play

"She Kills Monsters" is hugely popular in high schools and colleges. Even in lockdown, performers have found novel ways to make the battles come alive.



Cast members in the 2018 Trinidad High School production of "She Kills Monsters" in Texas, which won a state prize. Credit...Cheanna Nelson



By [Elisabeth Vincentelli](#)

Published July 2, 2020 Updated July 3, 2020

This is a story about kids who make up stories. This is a story in which girls wield swords, queer kids are cool and nerds rule the earth.

This is a story about “She Kills Monsters,” and those who love it.

[Qui Nguyen](#)’s spirited play about finding your real and metaphorical families, as well as yourself, through Dungeons & Dragons did well enough when it premiered at the Flea Theater in 2011 — Eric Grode [called it](#) a “deceptively breezy and rather ingenious comedy” in The New York Times. The play ran, closed, and Nguyen moved on, most notably to his [acclaimed semi-autobiographical breakthrough “Vietgone,”](#) and writing gigs for Disney.

“She Kills Monsters,” meanwhile, had just gotten started. In the intervening years, it has blossomed into one of America’s most popular shows, with 797 productions (performed and planned) between 2013 and next year. Of those, one was a professional revival, 144 were by amateur companies and a whopping 652 were done on school and college campuses.

“We’re dealing with themes that every high schooler, every college student confronts at some point, whether it be this idea of the underdog or familial struggle or sexuality or gender,” said Kelly Trumbull, who is co-directing an [online production slated for July 12](#) at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is a teaching artist. (The live 7:30 p.m. webcast is free; the show will remain available for a small fee until July 26.)

In the show, the teenage Tilly dies early on in a car crash and her older sister, Agnes, must deal not just with grief but with how little she knew about her sibling: reading a notebook left behind, she learns that Tilly was a role-playing aficionado, for instance, and that she had a girlfriend in her game world. (The presence of strong female characters is another big factor for the show’s popularity on campuses, as girls tend to be overrepresented in drama departments.)

These subjects don’t fly everywhere, but obstacles have only energized fans of the play. DeAnna Tart, who runs the theater department at Trinidad High School in rural Texas, had to overcome many hurdles before she could enter her production of “She Kills Monsters” in the 2017-18 edition of her state’s University Interscholastic League contest.

- Dig deeper into the moment.

“It is very comedic, but it’s also very tragic,” she said by telephone. “It dives into sexuality, which some people deem controversial even for high school-age students, unfortunately.”

Once her principal gave her the greenlight, Tart had to follow the contest’s parameters, trimming for length and editing out some curse words, while preserving the show’s integrity. “And we won the state championship,” she said. “It was quite awesome.”

Nguyen, 43, is delighted by the attention the script has received, even while sounding a little nonplused.



Qui Nguyen has been surprised by how fervently high school and college students have embraced “She Kills Monsters.” Credit...Bethany Mollenkof for The New York Times

“I’ve never had a play or anything I’ve ever written take this weird life of its own,” he said on the phone from his Los Angeles home.

Amateur and youth companies started to produce the show. Winning the American Alliance for Theater and Education’s Distinguished Play Award, in 2013, had created a major ping on teachers’ radar, and momentum had built from there, with youth and amateur companies flocking to the show.

Ariana Starkman, a 22-year-old who played Tilly at the University of Pittsburgh in 2018 is back for the virtual version. “I definitely love being a badass warrior.” she said.

Anmarie Duggan, the chairman of Pitt’s theater arts department, agreed that the chance for women to learn fight choreography is part of the appeal: “They don’t just watch the men fight for them. And there is a love interest, but that’s not what the play is about.”

For Emma Lynch, 18, the gateway was Dungeons & Dragons, which she played at Minarets High School and Charter School in O’Neals, Calif. The show’s humor did the rest.

“The first few pages, I was laughing so hard,” Lynch said via Zoom. She ended up co-directing a production in May, before graduating.

A play toggling between reality and fantasy, and featuring elaborate battles, should be daunting to stage. But Nguyen, who created the show with his troupe, Vampire Cowboys, purposefully left directors a lot of leeway. And that started with casting.

“I made sure none of the roles were based on race at all,” he said. “We wanted to see the diversity you would find on the New York subway onstage.”

The result is more than just matter-of-fact colorblind casting, as “She Kills Monsters” directly addresses what it means to be an outsider.



Cast members rehearsing for the University of Maryland’s Zoom version of “She Kills Monsters,” which made use of digital backgrounds. Credit...David Andrews

“I brought my experiences sometimes being the only Black person in the class to Agnes,” said Jasmine Mitchell, 22, who was in a virtual production at the University of Maryland in May. “The person playing Agnes’s boyfriend was white, and I was using this information to figure out her

psychology. Agnes’s community at the end is with people from different races, and I think that’s important to acknowledge.”

Role-playing scenes also allow the designer and technical teams to go wild, and be resourceful. Kayla West, a teacher and Lynch’s co-director at Minarets, mailed costumes and props to cast members stuck at home by the coronavirus, along with tablecloths for the virtual backgrounds on Zoom. Proper green screens were too expensive.

“I love them all because it’s so pure, right?,” Nguyen said of the choices he’s seen, or heard about, over the years. For its new production, Pitt’s theater department — which wanted students who had lost summer-stock jobs to still gain experience on a show — decided to fully embrace a comic-book aesthetic that makes the most of the 2-D platform.

“Everything the audience will see in the imaginary world is something you would see in Tilly’s book, like her drawings and her writing,” Trumbull, the co-director, said. Some costumes and props are recycled from the university’s 2018 staging, like a horned head piece and cheerleader outfits.

“Hopefully they will fit, or at least close enough,” said Ricardo Vila-Roger, the other co-director. “This is uncharted territory for all of us and now we problem-solve together.”



From left: Megha Nabe, Satomi Blair, Margret Odette, Allison Buck, Raul Sigmund Julia and Jack Corcoran in the original New York production of Nguyen’s play.Credit...Joan Marcus

Openness, tolerance and resilience are more than the show's subjects: They are baked into its DNA.

When "She Kills Monsters" started taking off in schools, Nguyen would receive requests to tone down the profanity and sexual references — what was fine in colleges raised red flags when younger students were involved.

So he retooled the script, tweaking some expressions and altering key elements. For example, Agnes is a teacher in her 20s in the original version and a high school cheerleader in "She Kills Monsters: Young Adventurers Edition," which now has totaled 434 productions (performed or licensed through 2021).

"The regular play is often done on the coasts and in the middle it's the YA edition," Nguyen said, laughing. "Oh, I get what's happening here!"



University of Pittsburgh students rehearsing in late June for a virtual production of the play, which was scheduled after summer-stock opportunities for aspiring actors dried up. Credit...via University of Pittsburgh

There was more fine-tuning to come as the show, like a shape-shifter with a high constitution score, has kept on changing.

When stay-at-home orders went up in the spring, directors with planned productions had to scramble. David Marconi of Cranford High School, in New Jersey, started working on an audio version for a podcast.

As Marconi was editing the sound files, Nguyen came up with “She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms,” a version for streaming platforms that the teacher, changing tack again, ended up doing instead.

“Virtual Realms” retrofits the script and stage directions to maximize online formats in clever ways. At the end, for example, Agnes’s battle with a dragon isn’t represented physically anymore, but by her rolling D&D dice as the beast’s multiple heads appear in different Zoom windows. (Connoisseurs will wince in empathy as the game-master character repeatedly calls “no damage.”)

Lisa Nathans, who co-directed the recent University of Maryland virtual production, was taken with Nguyen’s flexibility. “Our students were very attached to the original,” she said, “and when ‘Virtual Realms’ became available, Qui very generously allowed the cast to be part of a devising process to blend elements of both stories together.”

The Maryland show, done on Zoom, made particularly impressive use of filters, with characters suddenly sporting digital horns or elf ears. Its audience also testified to the play’s popularity: The livestream had twice as many viewers as a simultaneous YouTube reading of the David Mamet political comedy “November” starring John Malkovich and Patti LuPone.

In “She Kills Monsters,” role-playing helps the sisters finally bond with each other. For many of those staging it, the play serves a similar purpose, especially in a time of social distancing.

“At the end of the show, Tilly asks Agnes ‘Did you have fun?’” Nathans said. “We used this as guideposts at the end of each rehearsal: ‘Yeah, we’re using this technology, we’re doing this during Covid-19, this is a show about grief, but did you have fun? Were you able to find joy and artistry?’ ”

Such enthusiasm means as much to the playwright as it does to the students. “With professional productions, I remember things, but they didn’t change my life the way the shows I did in high school and college did,” Nguyen said. “So I’m glad to be part of these people’s artistic journey.”

Social Commentary:

Citation:

TV Tropes.org. *She Kills Monsters*. October 25, 2021. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Theatre/SheKillsMonsters>

"Rumor has it you know a thing or two about D&D."

— Agnes Evans

She Kills Monsters is a dramatic comedy play by Qui Nguyen that debuted in 2011. It is the story of Agnes Evans, a young woman leaving her childhood home shortly after the death of her geeky little sister, Tilly. Upon finding a homemade *Dungeons & Dragons* module Tilly made shortly before her passing, Agnes decides to play the game in order to understand her sister

more. To this end, she enlists the assistance of Chuck, a teenager who used to play D&D with Tilly.

The play jumps between the real world and the game world as Agnes travels through the quest from the module to learn about the girl she called sister.

Along with the original version, Nguyen later created a "Young Adventurers Edition" for high school students and *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* in 2020 for video conferencing-based productions.

- **20 Minutes into the Past:** The Virtual Realms edition, which came out in 2020 during the **COVID-19 Pandemic**, sets the story in 2019 rather than the original 1995 setting, updating the pop culture references to reflect the time period.
- **The '90s:** The play is set in 1995, with all of the appropriate pop culture references included.
- **Abridged for Children:** The "Young Adventurers Edition" changes the older characters from 20-somethings into **high schoolers** and omits the more harsh profanity and sexual references.
- **Adaptational Alternate Ending:** While all three versions end with Agnes defeating Tiamat before moving on and continuing to play D&D with Tilly's friends, there are some major differences between the original ending and the "Young Adventurers" and "Virtual Realms" endings:
 - Original: Agnes marries Miles, they have kids, and move away from Athens.
 - Young Adventurers: High-school aged Agnes and Miles break up and become friends, and he joins her to play D&D. Agnes eventually goes to college and moves away from Athens.
 - Virtual Realms: Similar to Young Adventurers, except Agnes grows up and "always remembered fondly the day she killed monsters."
- **Alpha Bitch:** The evil succubi cheerleaders, who bully Tilly for being gay, and their real life counterparts, who are implied to have done the same.
- **Ambiguously Gay:** While the original play is explicit about Tillius/Tilly and Lilith/Lily being lesbians, the editions made for younger students make it more ambiguous without erasing the possibility completely. Chuck in these versions says Tillius is a guy character, despite Agnes imagining them as her sister Tilly. Whether Tilly and Lily are gay, or Tilly identifies as a guy, or neither, is left unclear. Played for Drama, since Agnes can no longer ask the real Tilly.
- **Ass Kicking Pose:** When Tilly's party is introduced. The script directions say: (**TILLY** steps up beside **KALIOPE**, and **LILITH** and do badass poses with their weapons as if they're at a photo shoot.)

- **Big Bad:** The five-headed dragon goddess, Tiamat, is played up from the beginning as the final boss as she has taken Tillius's soul in revenge for her defeat at Tillius's hands. The entire Quest for the Lost Soul of Athens centers around getting to Tiamat to save Tilly's soul.
- **Butt-Monkey:** The Great Mage Steve, in all but one appearance, gets brutally but hilariously beaten by whichever monster the party is tasked to fight. In one case, he even got killed by Agnes.
- **But You Were There, and You, and You:** Agnes talks to her sister Tilly through Tilly's alter ego in the game, Tillius the Paladin. Agnes later recognizes the entire party is made up of fantasy versions of Tilly's real-life friends, while Tilly's enemies - her bullies, Agnes's boyfriend, and Vera the Guidance Counselor - appear as bad guys the party has to fight.
- **Cast Full of Gay:** Everyone in New Landia, Tilly's D&D setting, is gay (except Agnes), since Tilly herself was.
- **Dance Off:** In their second encounter with the succubi, the party challenges them to a dance battle which ends with stabbing them while they're distracted.
- **Dark Action Girl:** Lilith and Kaliope, the other members of Tilly's party, are a demon queen and a dark elf respectively.
- **Do You Want to Copulate?:** Said as much by Kaliope to Agnes' character. **Kaliope:** Would you like to copulate with me now?
- **Agnes:** What?
- **Kaliope:** I think it would make you feel better. I hear you humans like to do such things.
- **Emotionless Girl:** Kaliope. Apparently emotionlessness is a elf trait. **Kaliope:** But we're lacking in "emotional awareness."
- **Agnes:** What? Are you like a robot or something?
- **Kaliope:** No, we're Elves. We're above emotions. That's a human trait.
- **Gayngst:** Tilly was bullied for being gay, which is reflected in her module through the succubi characters.
- **Girl-on-Girl Is Hot:** When Kaliope propositions Agnes' character. **Agnes:** CHUCK! I'm not going to have sex with the Elf-girl!
- **Chuck:** What? I don't want to see you have sex with the sexy Elf-girl. Why would I want to see that? **Ew, gross, hot-girl on hot-girl action.**
- **The Hero:** Agnes Evans, the main protagonist.
- **Horny Devils:** The party fights a pair of succubi.
- **Hot as Hell:** Lilith the Demon Queen is described as a "leather-clad dominatrix".

- **Hot Teacher:** Zig-zagged. Agnes, who is a teacher in the original version of the play, is called hot by Chuck and Ronnie, who hit on her more than once. Yet she is called average-looking by the narrator.
- **Intergenerational Friendship:** 25-year-old Agnes forms one with high-schooler Chuck and later Tilly's whole teenaged friend group during their D&D sessions. Downplayed in versions where all the characters are teens, where it's more of a Freshman-Senior dynamic.
- **Not What It Looks Like:** Agnes's boyfriend begins to suspect she is cheating on him with Chuck, when they are in fact just playing D&D together.
- **Posthumous Character:** Tilly appears on stage through the game module she left behind.
- **Teens Are Monsters:** Often literally, in this case.
 - Evil Tina and Evil Gabbi are the most blatant examples, acting as both literal succubi in the game and as bullies in real life.
 - Tilly/Tillius, while a Paladin and a sympathetic figure, often acts antagonistically to Agnes, especially in forcing her to kill an Evil Doppelgänger of her boyfriend. Becomes more literal when she reveals herself as Tiamat.
- **They Killed Kenny Again:** In four of the five appearances of The Great Mage Steve, he gets murdered in a comical manner, usually by whatever creature the party will fight.
- **World of Action Girls:** In the game world, all of the female adventurers are fighters and warriors.

About our culture:

citation:

Weldon, Glen. *Superman's son comes out as bisexual in a new comic. It's a big deal — sort of.* All Things Considered. October 11, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/11/1044002955/superman-son-comes-out-queer-dc-comics>

In November's *Superman: Son of Kal-El #5*, (written by Tom Taylor, art by John Timms), Jonathan Kent, son of Clark, will get a boyfriend.

DC Comics

By now you've likely heard.

He's queer now.

Yep: Superman, Champion of the Oppressed, the Man of Steel, the Man of Tomorrow, the Last Son of Krypton, the Big Blue Boy Scout, Mr. Not-A-Bird-Nor-A-Plane Himself.

Queer. All of a sudden.

And at 83 years old, no less! Bless his heart.

But that's not what's happening here. Comics being comics, the truth is a lot more granular.

[5 things to know about the MCU's first openly gay super-powered character](#)

We're not talking about the classic, original-recipe Clark Kent/Kal-El Superman that's been around since the June 1938 issue of *Action Comics #1* first hit the stands. It's not the Superman who's infiltrated the global zeitgeist to become a part of our collective consciousness via comics, serials, radio, television, film, toys, roller coasters and the bedsheets I got for Christmas 1979.

No, it's his son, Jonathan Kent. Whose precise backstory in the comics has been so ruthlessly pummeled by a series of reboots, retcons, space missions, time-travel and rapid aging as to render it so incomprehensible that it sends even diehards like me scurrying to [the nearest wiki](#).

He's slated to come out as bisexual in the pages of *Superman: Son of Kal-El #5*, written by Tom Taylor with art by John Timms, which will be published on November 9th. Jonathan and his male friend Jay, introduced earlier in the series, will share a kiss.

Here's what you need to know.

It's still Clark and Lois, not Clark and Louis

In current DC Comics continuity, Clark Kent married Lois Lane. They had a son, named after Clark's father, Jonathan. Lots of stuff happened to the super-tyke, including but not limited to the kind of narratively convenient rapid aging that a lot of sitcom moppets undergo, and now he's a 17-year-old with all of his father's powers. (There's been some talk, in the comics, that the combination of Kryptonian and human DNA may somehow make him somehow even *more* powerful than Superman, which doesn't make a lot of sense on the surface, but then, if a superhero can defy the Law of Gravity, why not the Laws of Gregor Mendel?)

And while Jon Kent is the O.G. Superman's son, and has gone by the *nomme-de-cape* Superboy until now, in the pages of *Superman: Son of Kal-El*, he's assumed the mantle of Superman, while his father heads off to deep space for an indefinite period of time.

DC Comics

(Not for nothing, but it should be noted that Taylor and Timms are spinning a good yarn, in *Superman: Son of Kal-El*. In just a handful of issues they've delineated Jon Kent's mindset and personality more clearly than anyone has been able to do before. Basically: He's a kid who's spent his life in his father's formidable shadow, a state of being that was compounded when

[Superman recently revealed his Clark Kent identity to the world](#). That's left Jon seeking not only a secret identity but trying to figure out a personal one: He's well-meaning but restless, and he chafes against his father's tendency to simply put out literal and figurative fires, instead of bending his formidable powers towards addressing the systemic problems that caused them.)

[Anime Anthology 'Star Wars: Visions' Expands The Galaxy Far, Far Away](#)

Wait. That sounds familiar ...

It should. We've been here before, quite recently. Just two months ago, in fact, [DC Comics announced that the character of Tim Drake](#), one of several Robins who've clocked field time filling Batman's "red-breasted chief intern" position, would get a boyfriend. It made news, as it should: Robin, unlike many other queer superhero characters owned by the DC and Marvel, is a household name. (Sorry, [Coagula](#). It's the truth.)

Yes, it's real. Big-time, marquee superheroes are officially queer. Names even your most dithering, out-of-touch great-uncle would recognize: Robin, the Boy Wonder! Superman, the original superhero! The first and best!

But when you take a step back, the canny strategy DC Comics is employing here comes into sharper focus. They haven't queered their core characters, after all — no, *those* heavily licensed nuggets of intellectual property resist meaningful change because they must, especially if they're to keep paying out dividends by, among other things, getting printed onto kids' bedsheets.

So instead the publisher introduces much-needed, long-overdue progress along the edges — a [sympathetic villain](#) here, a [supporting character](#) there. They re-introduce [deep-bench characters](#) that haven't appeared in any comic for decades, and slap 'em with a same-sex partner.

Finally, they start nudging a few top-tier characters out of the closet — but are always careful never to send 'em out without first attaching an all-important asterisk, as a bulwark against any backlash from homophobic readers (and/or stockholders):

Robin's queer!*

**Not the original Robin, or the Robin that's currently Batman's sidekick, but the Tim Drake Robin, the third character to assume the title.*

Superman's queer!*

**Not the Clark Kent Superman, but his recently-introduced son.*

It's a kind of release valve, that asterisk. It means they can say the thing ("Superman comes out!") that's certain to attract attention — attention in the form of this very article, in point of fact — but they'll always be able to ease the pressure by hitting that valve, and pointing to those all-important asterisks.

Thank you for being a trend

Back in July 2016, the DC Comics character Aqualad revealed he had a boyfriend. It didn't make waves (heh) at the time, because I mean ... it was *Aqualad*.

And even *that* news came with its own asterisk: This wasn't the original Aqualad introduced in 1960, but another character, Jackson Hyde, who'd assumed the title in 2010.

So if you're keeping score at home, that's Batman, Superman and Aquaman — three major DC players who've recently had very close, even intimate, queer contacts introduced into their stories.

Progress is being made, here, it's just a much smaller and more incremental species of progress than DC Comics' press releases, and much of the ensuing coverage, is suggesting.

[Batman's Sidekick Robin Comes Out. It Makes Sense, If You Were Paying Attention](#)

It's not just a phase

In terms of representation, of course, this is an unalloyed Good Thing™. As the world depicted on the comics page starts to look more like the world off of it, as more members of comics' diverse readership gain the opportunity to see a version of themselves on that page, the inevitable result is more, and better, stories. Richer, deeper stories, featuring more voices, perspectives, experiences and cultural touchstones.

(Also, the math works out. Given the hundreds of superhero characters owned by DC and Marvel, the fact that a handful of the biggest names among them might be queer just makes a kind of inevitable demographic sense. And when you consider that superheroes belong to a subset of humanity who are given to skintight outfits that show off their hyper-developed musculature and make their stomachs look like relief maps of the Black Hills of South Dakota — yeah, that scans.)

This is progress, and it's following precisely the same arc that representation of any marginalized community — women, people of color, queers, people with disabilities — has historically followed, in popular media.

Phase One: We're the villains; we threaten the status quo, and the (straight, white, cis, male) hero's job is to punish us, and preserve the way things are. We exist solely to drive the hero's story.

Phase Two: We're the victims; we're weak and vulnerable, and it's the hero's job to punish those who've hurt us. We exist to establish the hero's selflessness and nobility, but we're still a part of his story.

Phase Three: We're the sidekicks — the sassy friend, the wingman. We exist to supplement the hero's story, to offer support and encouragement. But it's still his story.

The goal, of course, is to reach Phase Four: We finally get to be the heroes of our own stories.

We're getting there, slowly. And while these recent comics developments might seem to slot neatly into Phase Four, it's not yet time for any laurel-resting.

[Superman Reveals His Identity To The World](#)

Who's next?

The obvious question, then: Which major DC hero is gonna be the next one to get an off-shoot queer version of themselves?

If the question is obvious, the answer is even moreso: Wonder Woman. Mark my words.

Wonder Woman, let's remember, hails from an island of women who've been hanging around together for thousands of years, with nothing to stare at but one another. And as she herself summed it up so often, in her go-to comics catchphrase:

"Suffering Sappho!"

Yep, Diana's next. It's inevitable. The writing's on the urn.

But in a larger sense, "who's next" isn't the most pressing question facing us.

No, the *real* question that needs answering is this one: Where are these versions of Superman, Robin and Aqualad gonna get a timeshare next summer — Fire Island, or P-Town?

“State of the Gay”: Gay culture in the 90’s

citation:

Bianchi, Brien, Faith Tenney, and Will Inman. “She Kills Monsters.” October 25, 2021. https://www.uh.edu/kgmca/theatre-and-dance/_docs/SKM%20Dramaturgy%20for%20Program.pdf



2016 is a wonderful time to be gay. Same-sex marriage has been legalized, there are gay celebrities everywhere you look, and there are informative, safe gay youth programs all over the country. If it feels like acceptance of homosexuality is skyrocketing, the 90’s was when it was beginning to crest. Before understanding being a gay, early 90’s teen on a personal level, we’ll look at the facts. There was quite a lot of political progress going on in this period. In 1990: the Federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act is passed- the first federal recognition of homosexuals. In this year Dale McCormick also became the first openly lesbian senator.

In 1991: the first Pride celebration happened in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was called the Unity Festival. 1993 gave us our first Dyke March in Washington, D.C.

That same year, Bill Clinton instituted “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. Although by current standards this measure is draconic and discriminatory, by the standards of 1993 it was progressive and divisive. Before the policy was enacted, homosexuals were sniffed out and dishonorably discharged from service. Bill Clinton announced that sex was none of the government’s business, which was a ballsy move and important to the LGBT movement.

1994 also had the American Medical Association opposing the “treatment” of homosexuality. Conversion therapy, as it was called, was a method of exposing same-sex oriented people (often teenagers) to members of the opposite sex until their homosexuality was “cured”. A flat denial from the AMA of homosexuality as a disease was a huge win for the gay community.

As we edge closer to Tillie’s experience, we move into the world of popular culture. The first lesbian kiss on television was between Amanda Donohoe and Michele Greene on *L.A. Law* in 1991. It was undoubtedly a publicity stunt, but that fact hardly registered with the lesbian teens across the country who were exposed to it.

Grammy-winner Melissa Etheridge came out in 1993 at the Triangle Ball, which was also the first inaugural ball held in honor of gays and lesbians.

Perhaps most importantly was Pedro Zamora of *The Real World San Francisco*. The first positively-portrayed AIDS-positive man on television, he continued to do educational works for gay teens until his death in 1995.

This leads us to the individual experience of the gay teenager. Today, when we think of gay issues, we think of marriage equality. In the early 90’s, homosexuality was immediately associated with violence and AIDS. In 2016, gay youth worry about bullying while their families worry about them not fitting in. In the 90’s, gay youth worried about beatings while their families worried about a terminal illness. Perhaps the hardest idea for modern teenagers to understand is the fear gay youth experienced in that time period. Sure, there is a little anxiety about coming out nowadays, but with all of the programs and online assistance available, it is hardly a life-threatening concern. While all of the things listed above make the 90’s seem like a gay paradise, it’s important to keep in mind that those things were only happening at the top, while the normal towns in the flyover states were still being faced with a rock-solid wall of opposition. A 1992 Newsweek poll found that 45% of those asked considered gay rights “a threat to the American family and its values”. The average American still needed quite a bit of convincing.

While Bill Clinton, Ellen DeGeneres, and *Will & Grace* might have been a source of courage, coming out in high school was still nigh-unthinkable. Escaping to a fantasy world of acceptance might have been the only thing that made sense.

Music

Citation:

Gopalan, Nisha. "The 90s: The Decade That Doesn't Fit?" February 5, 2021. <https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/90s-music/>. October 25, 2021.

Unlike most other eras, the notion of 90s music is hard to pin down. Oddball and eclectic, the decade defies easy categorization, but it's this cross-pollination of sounds that left a boundary-breaking legacy that remains today.

A Dungeons & Dragons master shows us how to play the classic game



What is your D&D race?

Quiz introduction

Come find out if you are dwarf, elf, gnome, halfling, half-orc or human.

<https://uquiz.com/quiz/CA7dxc/what-is-your-dd-race>

It Gets Better Project

The It Gets Better Project is a nonprofit organization with a mission to uplift, empower, and connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth around the globe. Learn more about our work.

<https://itgetsbetter.org/about/>

<https://itgetsbetter.org/stories/>

Things to think about prior to performance:

- The author of *Queer Kids, Nerds and Sword Fights: It's the Hot School Play* writes, "Openness, tolerance and resilience are more than the show's subjects: They are baked into its DNA." What does she mean by that? As you watch the play, look for evidence which supports that statement.
- Are you familiar with *Dungeons and Dragons* or other role-playing games? Think about the idea of adventures and story telling and how this might be incorporated into a play (which is story telling).
- Notice the set, before you watch the production. What do you see on the stage?

Things to watch for in performance:

- How would you describe the main characters in the play? Do you identify with any of them and why?
- This set design is an example of what is called a unit set, which is a scenic design made up of pieces (or units) which can be used to produce more than one setting (or rearranged to do so). Was this set design helpful to the production? Why or why not?
- How is the passage of time and reality vs. fantasy conveyed in lighting, sound, use of the set, costume pieces and in character action?
- Observe how the actors establish their relationship with one another. How do we "meet" each character? Does their circumstance affect how we empathize with them?
- Notice the costume design and the properties design. What do the visual cues tell you about the play?
- Listen to the sound design. What does the sound-scape communicate to you?
- Notice how "the real life" stories get integrated into the "games life" of the story. What does it make you think about?
- What do you think about the shadows and puppets in the piece? Does it take you into the story or away from the story?
- What is the effect of the cast wearing masks (because of COVID) have on you as an audience member?

Things to think about the performance:

- Nguyen said he had made sure “none of the roles were based on race at all.” Why was that important to him? What was the result?
- What do you notice about this play? What stands out to you about the language, characters, setting and conflict? Does it remind you of anything else you have seen or read before?
- What are some of the reasons that “She Kills Monsters” has been so popular among high school and college performers and audiences? Do any of these reasons resonate with you?
- What lessons or messages have you taken away experiencing this play?

Other Analysis Tools:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’ In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive his point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for his work?

The running time for this production is approximately 90 minutes, and excludes an intermission. Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, November 4th at 6:45 P.M in MAC 138 preceding the preview performance.

Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production. There will be a post-show discussion following the Friday, October 12th performance. The post-show will be with director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

Please join us!