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Costume Design for Qui Nguyen’s She Kills Monsters

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Costume Design for Qui Nguyen’s She Kills Monsters

A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

by

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Bachelor of Arts in English, and Theatre 2016

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation of the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

The following thesis details the process of creating costume designs and implementing them in the production of *She Kills Monsters* which was produced at the University of Arkansas Black Box Theatre in the Fall of 2018. Throughout this thesis I will explain how the costumes went from initial research and conversations with the director to the final products on the stage. The account of this includes an analysis of the script, collages of photos used for inspiration, portrait gallery, research, rough sketches, renderings with fabric swatches, production photos, and my evaluation of the process as a whole.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Personal Design Philosophy

Set in the 1990s, *She Kills Monsters* is a contemporary play by Qui Nguyen about the journey of two sisters after the passing of the younger sister, Tilly Evans. *She Kills Monsters* was produced at the University of Arkansas’s Global Campus Theatre in the Fall of 2018. Morgan Hicks served as the production director. Members of the design team included Catie Blencowe as lighting designer and projection co-designer, Austin Aschbrenner as scenic design, projection co-designer, and puppet co-designer, Tyler Michel as sound designer, Melissa Rooney as makeup designer, and Karl Hermanson as properties designer. I served as production costume designer, and as well as one of the puppet designers under the mentorship of Patricia Martin, head of costume design at the University of Arkansas. The costume shop manager was Valerie Lane.

This thesis will cover my process of designing the costumes and puppets for *She Kills Monsters* from beginning to end. My creative journey began with analysis of the script, moved forward to researching clothing from the 1990s, and researching fantasy and cosplay costumes. I will also include my thoughts about the collaborative process with the director and the rest of the design team and will conclude with an assessment of the show’s strengths and areas of improvement needed regarding the costume design aspect of the production.

 Though this thesis is about the designs for one specific show, I do want to take a moment to speak about my design philosophy as a whole. I believe good theatre at its base is good storytelling. As costume designers, the way we tell story is through fabric, where the silhouette serves as the words, and a hat or accessory serves as the perfect punctuation. My goal is to bring in an open mind and positive energy to the design team so that we can work together to create the best piece of art as we can. Great productions do not require great budgets, but rather a team of
people who care about doing their best work, and that is what I try my best every time to bring to the table. Design that challenges the designer is what ultimately challenges a good audience, and this is what I strive for. The open flow of ideas and information among the designer is the richest thing I believe any designer could ask for.

In this thesis I will take you on a journey, much like the one Agnes Evans went on, through my process as a costume designer for *She Kills Monsters*. In each of the chapters to come we will meet new “monsters” and discover how they are to be confronted. In Chapter Two I will analyze the script and break it down fully. In Chapter Three I will show my process of finding the characters and follow in Chapter Four with a self-evaluation and review of the design process.
Chapter 2

Analysis of Qui Nygen’s *She Kills Monsters*

For a theatrical designer, the script is the literature that we are tasked with interpreting for an audience. For any designer, finding the basic information about a script such as the time, place, and locations of the scenes is very important. For a costume designer, it becomes important to dive deep into the psyche of the characters in the world of the play. Finding out what makes a character tick, their occupation, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and religious beliefs all become crucial information to have in order to figure out what these characters would wear. I read the play several times to try and extract every piece of information that I could to fuel my design choices. A brief summary of the play would be this; the play begins with the central character Agnes Evans as she begins to clean out her parent’s home after the death of her family. Upon discovering a module for a Dungeons and Dragons game, Agnes makes the decision to play it to see what her sister’s life was like. With the aid of local gamer Chuck, Agnes begins to make her way through the Dungeons and Dragons world, meeting several characters that were based on her sister’s real-life friends and foes. By the end of the game, Agnes has discovered a deeper understanding of who her sister was when she was alive. The game also gives Agnes a new group of friends, and a way to gain closure from the tragedy of losing her entire immediate family to a car accident. My full analysis with action chart can be found in Appendix 1 on page 26.

After diving very deeply into the script the theme of the play started rising to the surface. I began to look at this play as if it were a storm or, more specifically, a maelstrom smashing two worlds together. On one side you have the real pop culture-centered society where Agnes lives. On the other side of the coin you have the fantasy world of Dungeons and Dragons.
Dungeons and Dragons is a situational role-playing game in which people create characters and go on adventures with others in character to solve one issue as a team. I will refer to Dungeons and Dragons as D&D from this point forward in this paper. The plot of the play is centered around Agnes navigating the storm and fighting her inner monsters.

During my initial reading, I began asking myself the basic questions sparked by any script: the who, what, when, where, and why. In this play we find Agnes, a very average young woman reeling from the recent death of her parents and younger sister Tilly. While cleaning out Tilly’s room, Agnes finds a notebook that is a detailed module for a game of D&D. As she reads it, she discovers that Tilly wrote it in the hopes of one day playing it with Agnes as a way for them to bond. She is stricken by how clear it is that the two are not similar in any way, and that this module could help her understand who her sister was more clearly. Agnes takes the module to a local gamer nerd named Chuck Biggs and convinces him to be her Dungeon Master, the one who will guide her through this journey. Once inside the game, Agnes finds her sister Tilly, who goes by Tillius in the game, as well as Lillith a demon princess, and Kalioppe a dark elf. The five characters set off on a journey to find the lost soul of Athens which belongs to Tilly. The first time Agnes is in the game she experiences a bit of what could be referred to as culture shock, especially about what the other people are wearing, which was very important for me as a designer. I wanted the clothing to give a sense of culture shock to the prudish older sister Agnes.

As the story progresses, Agnes finds out that Orcus (the Demon Lord of the Underworld) traded Tillius’s soul for a television. The characters force him go on the journey with them to retrieve it from the Tiamat, a five headed dragon. The team ventures on, fighting monsters and slaying bosses in order to get Tillius’s soul back. Agnes is using this game to escape her real-world grief and get to know her sister better. In the real world, Agnes’s boyfriend Miles is becoming more
irritated with her because she isn’t paying enough attention to him. Eventually, Agnes quits the
game because she is too grief stricken to continue. This happens after she finds out that her sister
is in a relationship with the female character Lillith in the game, which leads her to assume that
her sister was probably also gay in real life. This information reveals to Agnes how little she
truly knew Tilly and causes her to break down. Chuck eventually convinces Agnes to follow him
to an undisclosed location. Once they have arrived, Agnes meets Tilly’s friends in real life and
realizes that the game she has been playing was even closer to Tilly’s actual life than she had
realized. Agnes then decides to finish the game, slaying her final monster, and returning the lost
soul of her sister. Agnes gains closure and new friends after this.

Moving forward from answering the basic questions about the plot, I began to see that the
two separate worlds of the play would greatly influence the design concept. The script often flips
between Agnes’s real world and Tilly’s D&D world, which must be shown through careful
costume changes in order to ground the audience in the correct setting in any given scene. In
order to further solidify the two separate worlds, I broke the play down into an analysis of each
character, delving into how each appears and behave in the two worlds contained in the play.
Each character is so rich in this play, and every individual brings something new and exciting to
the world when they enter.

Agnes is the central character of the play, it is her journey is ultimately what we follow
the closest. Agnes is an English teacher at Athens High School and she is socioeconomically
middle-class. She is dating Miles, whom she loves, but who can be very immature. Agnes wants
to get married and settle down with Miles, but he seems to have reservations. One of her closest
work friend is a woman named Tara, whom she trusts and frequently asks for advice. As the play
progresses, Agnes realizes that the characters in Tilly’s imaginary world are people in her reality. She soon learns to love and cherish them and who they were to her sister. She likes Chuck because he helps her through the module but has to put him in his place when he hits on her. She loves Tilly and regrets that she was not closer to her when she was alive. At the beginning of the play Agnes thinks she is a good person but believes that she is average and unimpressive. However, through D&D and learning more and more about her kid sister, she realizes who she really is. As she begins to accept herself more fully, we watch her character develop into a person who is more accepting of others as well. She ultimately realizes that despite her initial shock, she actually is okay with her sister being a lesbian, although she regrets that she never knew in real life.

Tilly is the deceased sister of Agnes Evans. In the real world she was friends with Kelly and Orcus and had a crush on Lilly. Vera was her High School guidance counselor. Gabi and Tina were cheerleaders who bullied in high school. Tilly was a high school student and a huge part of the D&D world in her community of Athens, Ohio. In real life, Tilly feels that she is a nerd, but in the world of D&D, she is the amazing leader of heroic characters. This attitude gives her a feeling of amazing potential because not only is she the leader of the module she has created, but everyone in Athens wanted to go on a campaign with her as well. She is scared to admit to her family that she is a lesbian, and her insecurity about how others will react to her sexual identity is why she felt she can only be her true self in the D&D world she has created.

Chuck is a local high school gamer nerd who works at the role-playing Game store. Agnes gets him to help her play the game, and he takes on the role of the Dungeon Master to help guide her through New Landia. He knew Tilly Evans and looked up to her as a D&D player.
He is in the same friend circle as Ronnie, Kelly, and other gamers. He meets Miles during the play and feels an internal struggle because he believes Agnes is in his league and at times has a crush on her but never acts on it. He thinks he is tougher and cooler than he is in real life, and deep down he knows that his self-image is flawed but never admits it. He is a teenage boy, so his hormones are wild from time to time, especially when he is playing the module with all the attractive girls.

Miles is Agnes’ boyfriend. Miles’s job is never specifically named in the show, but he seems to be middle-class like Agnes. He is there to support Agnes in the real world. He loves her, but thinks what she is doing is a little crazy at times. Despite being unsure of what Agnes is doing, he wants to support her and seeks advice from Vera, Agnes’s closest friend in the play. He briefly meets Chuck and tries to beat him up because he thinks he is trying to make out with his girlfriend. He also briefly meets the characters of New Landia because he wants to join the game but dies very quickly during it. We never really hear what Miles thinks about himself, but he seems to be grounded in being average and mellow for most of the play. He knows that he wants to be with Agnes but has not totally committed to her as far as marriage goes.

Lillith is a demon princess in the D&D world who sets out to get Tilly’s soul back from the Tiamat. In real life, Lilly is a student at Athens High that Tilly had a crush on her before she died. Agnes meets her at the high school and talks about Tilly with her. Lillith is very unsure of herself in real life and has not become open about her sexuality, although she does have feelings for Tilly deep down. Contrastingly, in the game, she is described as a leather-clad dominatrix who is very confident in who she actually is and feels very free to love Tilly. She also respects Kaliop and thinks Orcus the demon lord of the underworld is a total flake.
Kelly is a friend of Tilly and the younger sister of Ronnie. Kaliope is a character in the game and is one of the characters that sets out to find Tilly’s lost soul. Kaliope is a dark elf and therefore does not have human emotions. In reality, her name is Kelly, and she was one of Tilly’s friends. She is a young adult with a physical disability which confines her to a wheelchair. She loves D&D because, in that world; she can be whatever she wants to be without restriction. Kelly thinks that Agnes is very nice and loved Tilly’s friendship. In the game, as Kaliope, she does not like Orcus because she believes he is a terrible person and the reason that Tilly’s soul is lost.

Ronnie, who is the real world version of Orcus, is the older brother of Kelly and a friend of Chuck and Tilly’s. Ronnie is a high school student and they do not mention him having a job. In the D&D module, he is Orcus the demon lord of the underworld, where he trades Tilly’s soul for a television and the adventure team has to go out and find it. Orcus thinks highly of himself but is also very lazy, and he knows it. In the module Orcus’s character is gay and talks about liking men, but in the real world this is never mentioned. He listens to Tilly in the game and though he does not seem to enjoy it, goes along and participates in the whole adventure.

Vera is the closest friend of Agnes and the high school guidance counselor at Athens High School, where the other characters go to school. She is not a very good counselor because she is constantly telling kids to get out of her office, and she even sends a student to get her a coffee in her personal car during school. She is not a friend of Miles, but still tries to give him some advice to help his relationship with Agnes. She thinks she is very smart and believes that she gives great advice, but in actuality, her advice is typically terrible or unhelpful. She thinks
marriage will solve Agnes’s and Miles’s relationship problems. She also freely talks about sex and sexually transmitted infection to a student, which is inappropriate.

Gabbi and Tina and their counterparts, the evil cheerleaders in the game, share both their names and their characteristics. They are very hateful and bully the other characters in both worlds. Gabbi and Tina represent the students that Tilly had to deal with in her real world, so naturally she makes them monsters in her game. Gabbi and Tina, who are very popular and preppy in real life, are characterized as demon cheerleaders in the game.

Steve is a high school aged nerd character in real life who repeatedly dies in the game. He is a mage who is constantly running into the worst luck during the game. Every time he is on stage he dies, usually instantly. His real-world character does not have any better luck while talking to Vera about his school-related problems.

The monsters play a huge role in this play and especially in our production. The Bug Bears are three creatures that Agnes and the rest of the party fight in the second scene in the D&D world. They are described as neither bugs nor bears but as huge and overpowering, and very grotesque. The Kobalds were the other grouping of three monsters that are goblin like creatures that yield small swords or knives. The Kobalds are never mentioned in the text and are only on the stage for about 20 seconds.

Executing a deep analysis of She Kills Monsters allowed me to work as a detective searching for all of the pertinent information I needed to fuel my designs. After reading the play several times and going through all of the information, I was able to create a clear vision for the separate worlds of the play, D&D and real-world, and make purposeful choices for each of the characters. The information I discovered through my analysis of the script also allowed me to
create a design concept and approach that I will outline and explain in the following chapter.

Through research and in Chapter Four I will reflect on the process as a whole. You can find my complete analysis in Chapter Six, Appendix 1 on page 26.
Chapter Three

Statement of Design Concept, Approach, and Process

The costume design process is a multi-layered adventure that takes several months to complete. The first thing to do when developing a new design is to read the script several times. As a costume designer, it is my job to create a visual character that brings the world of the play to life while providing actors with a tangible means of fully immersing themselves into their characters. This was particularly important during the design of She Kills Monsters. As this show contains two worlds coexisting simultaneously (the Dungeons and Dragons game world and the real world), it was very important to create two very visually distinctive groupings of people. One group lived in a real-world setting, (teachers, students, boyfriends), and the other group was a fantastical group of monsters, warriors, and demons. The scenes switch worlds so quickly that it was important for the costumes to establish the worlds for the audience. It was clear to me that color and texture would play a key role in the design of these characters to push the two worlds as far apart as possible because visually to a close audience these design elements can be most exciting.

After reading the script, I like to gather evocative images that speak to me about the script. I search for images anywhere from Pinterest to magazines. Once I have the images pinned up all around my work station, I began to write the analysis. The analysis is a way to get to the core of a script and see what the base facts are so that I can separate my feelings about a script from the author’s intent. After analyzing the script, and having a few short hallway discussions with the director, I knew the foundational facts of the play. There are two separate worlds, it is set in the 90s, and there is a nerd versus pop culture aspect that I found intriguing and wanted to
capitalize on. I found more images that spoke to me and begin to compile them into a collage where some images fit perfectly and others, sadly, have to be cut. The end result of this process with this particular show left me with a series of images which were laid out in such a way that they helped me articulate my feelings about the play to the design team. I view a collage as a way of settling artistically into the world of the play, and for this show, I began by finding images that were not necessarily related to clothing, but more evocative images about the play as a whole. This is the stage where my design concept really started to come to fruition. As I printed photos, I began to place them on a corkboard in my studio. Naturally, the photos were of popular nineties culture, and various visual adaptations of Dungeons and Dragons fan art. As I placed the images on the board, the D&D photos all seemed to fit closely to each other, much like the characters in the module of the play. On the other hand, the popular culture images sort of floated around the borders not really integrating with the other images. This visual representation of two worlds swirling around each other, separate yet coexisting on the same plane was what this play was all about, and the center began to symbolically represent the truth that Agnes was looking for all along. After I made this connection, I began to use the metaphor of a Maelstrom from this point, and it stuck as the design of the play moved forward. A maelstrom is a swirling vortex, a kind of whirling storm that smashes everything together in its path. This play, for me, was about two worlds that would usually never be together colliding after a very traumatic experience in the central characters life.

The next step in my process is the portrait gallery, something that is extremely useful for any designer going back and making decisions about characters. The portrait gallery is an exercise in which I found photographs of people’s faces that I felt could represent the characters in the script. It was here that I found the importance of the relationships on stage, and the way
the two separate worlds exist. On one hand you have a normal, boring world, and on the other hand you have a vibrant place filled with people who are radical and extreme. This exercise gave me a solid foundation to the age, socioeconomic status, health, and features of the characters, as well as creating another avenue for a strong line of communication with the director about my views on the characters. You may find an example of this in Appendix 2 on page 31.

The first design meeting was really successful and it was great to hear director Morgan Hicks’s, the director’s, interpretation of the script. This was the design meeting where I shared my collage and portrait gallery, and both were received well by Morgan. The idea of using bright popping colors for the D&D world while keeping the real world very muted and soft was something the design team really responded well to. As far as costumes were concerned, Morgan was very open to any ideas that I wanted to bring forward about interpreting the character and expressed that she was not at all interested in keeping the traditional ideas of Dungeons and Dragons characters. We decided that Tilly would have used her creativity to design some amazing costumes pieces for her friends, and Morgan was excited to see this reflected in the costume design. This was also the meeting where we began to evaluate the monsters of the play as well. We quickly realized that we did not want our monsters to appear homemade, instead gravitating to extravagant costume pieces that would look realistic to an audience. This is where the idea of puppetry began to appeal to us. A few members of the design team had either worked on this show or seen it before, and we began pulling inspiration from other interpretations of the monsters with the goal of improving and building upon what we had seen before. Overall the first design meeting went very well, and I was able to move on to the next step in my process.
After the first design meeting, I felt confident that we were all on the same page, and I began my character research. I found images that correlated with the vision of the show and created individual character collages. This time, the collages were more specifically related to clothing and how their costumes would reflect the individual as a whole. This is the step where color and texture began to play a huge role in my design. For the characters in the real world, I tried to stay more with soft textures, muted colors, and patterns that were easy for the eye to look at. With the D&D characters, I chose bright colors, harsh textures, and pieces that were exciting to look at. I also created a collage for each of the monsters in the show, as the puppets would be considered costume pieces. The color palettes of the show really started coming through after my character collages were finished, as evidenced on Appendix 3 on page 32.

I presented the collection of research collages at the second design meeting. Morgan really responded to the use of color and texture, especially in the D&D world. One of my images for Kaliotype features a doll with tribal makeup and brightly colored dreadlocks. This image sparked a discussion about the hair of the play. After an exciting discussion, Morgan and I decided that it would be fun and visually enticing if the members of Tilly’s D&D party all had some sort of dreaded hair that would tie them together like a tribe. I was very excited about this idea, and it became a central part of my designs for the D&D module. In the second design meeting we also divided up the tasks of creating the puppets so that no one designer would be labored with the task of designing all of them, and no one shop would be responsible for fabricating them. I was responsible for the Bug Bears and the Kobald Goblins.

With the feedback and information I got from the second design meeting, I was ready to start the rough sketches of the characters. I began by researching different types of puppets and
what I believed would best suit the needs of our play. I then began to make some sketches from different perspectives showing how the puppets would be manipulated, as well as showing the scale of the puppets to the actors using them. Scale was very important because we wanted the puppets to grow in size as the play progressed so that the stakes of the play grew with each new monster Agnes had to defeat. In other words, each subsequent set of puppets would be larger than their predecessors.

Agnes’s sketches are the first costumes I began to flesh out. I had Agnes start the show in a very bulky sweater that was grey. The sweater covered a lot of her body up and was supposed to look warm and comforting, something she would have worn after the death of her family. As the play progressed, Agnes would lose the sweater, then the blue blouse that was under it. In the final scene of the play, Agnes would be wearing a spaghetti strap tank top that would be reminiscent of the silhouette on the other girls in the D&D party. Agnes’s progression starts very layered and bundled up, and as we see her defeat each monster we also see her shedding a layer that is holding her down.

The members of the D&D party each had distinctive costumes. Tilly, Kariope, and Lillith would all be in the same type of silhouette, wearing stretch skinny jeans featuring straps and an armored corset because the silhouette looks very powerful while still being feminine. Kelly in green like many Elf’s are portrayed had a swirl motif on her armor because this character uses a lot of spells, I thought the swishing motion the actress used, and that I observed in rehearsals could be added in the details to her costumes. Lillith was in purple with lots of scales on her corset because of the relationship between serpents and demons. Tilly has lots of triangles on her armor because a big part of her character arc was a queer person. The triangle has been a
symbol of queer pride throughout history and I wanted to pay tribute to queer people who fought so that we may do plays like this today. When I designed Orcus the demon lord of the underworld who stole Tilly’s soul, I really wanted his costume to create a daunting figure on the stage. I chose to have him wear a leather chest harness that would tie him into the aesthetic of the girls, but I put him in satyr pants because of the western depiction of what the devil looks like. I originally sketched him with hooved feet, which later turned into motorcycle boots due to the intense fight choreography. For the real world looks of these characters, I researched what teenagers were wearing in the 1990s and found images that reflected who I believed they would have been back then. I sketched all of these characters to have dreadlocks in the D&D world that would be a wig, but I had to figure out how to make their natural hair work in the real world especially because of the fast changes. I chose to have Orcus have on a hat for Ronnie, Lillith to have French braids that were easily covered with a wig, and Kaliope use her very short natural hair as Kelly. These hair choices were effective and easily managed during the actual show.

The demon cheerleaders were a fun duo to sketch. These actors also played Gabbi and Tina in the real world and the puppeteers, so whatever they would be wearing had to be able to be changed very quickly. I sketched the demon cheerleaders with platform shoes and horns coming from their black wigs to give even more height to the already tall actors. I had pentagrams and tall tube socks on them to make them look more like mean demon girls. As far as their real-world counter parts were concerned, I wanted to model them after preppy girls from the 1990s with short plaid skirts, pearls, and polos with blazers. The two silhouettes looked very similar, and I was pleased with this because I wanted the audience to be able to tie the two together and see where Tilly drew her inspiration which you may find in production photos in appendix 6 on page 39.
The Great Mage Steve was a character where I got to really push a stereotype, which was a fun design experiment. In the real-world, Steve is a very nerdy high schooler who is in the middle of an internal struggle about dropping out of the marching band. I chose to have him in a pair of jeans that were too short and pulled too high. He had a polo that he tucked into it, glasses, and a pocket protector. However, in the D&D world, Madge Steve was much cooler, and his costume represented how the nerdy Steve wished others would perceive him so that he followed the same arch of changes that the other characters had. He wore a really long cloak over a poet shirt, skinny black motorcycle jeans, a hat, and riding boots. To tie Steve to Madge Steve, I chose to have him keep his glasses on when portraying both characters.

Vera is funky and cool while also being a high school guidance counselor. I chose to have her in a skirt and fun blouse, but she would also have a cardigan to put on if she needed it. What really set Vera apart from other teacher types was her way of accessorizing. She had fun bangles and a necklace with large earrings.

Miles, Agnes’s boyfriend, was a character that I struggled a bit with, but after many conversations with the director and my mentor Pat Martin, I found that it was very important to solidify Miles in a career of some sort. Because Miles was so bland and no one in the play seems to like him, I chose to have him look like a used car salesman. He wore khakis and a long sleeve polo, which was a very popular look in the 1990s. He also wore a shark tooth necklace and a large leather banded cuff watch to make him look a little more out of place with the other characters.

Chuck, the dungeon master, is characterized as a nerdy guy trying a bit too hard to be cool. All of his dialogue is about how he is trying to be cool, and how he could get a girlfriend if
he wanted. I knew the actor playing Chuck would be funny in the role, so this gave me an opportunity to play with a visual joke. I found a source for a really fantastic Run D&D shirt that looked a lot like the Run DMC shirts from the 1990s. With these pieces, Chuck also wore black cargo pants and a black sneakers. To tie Chuck to the D&D world as the Dungeon Master, he had a fancy magicians cape which he would put on when he guided Agnes through the game.

Farrah the fairy was another character where I could create a costumed juxtaposition, playing with the ironic aspects of her character. When the party encounters Farrah, they all talk about how cute she is. This happens moments before she goes into a tangent of expletives and rips Madge Steve’s throat out. To make her language and actions even more of a shock, I wanted to have Farrah look very dainty and girly. I sketched a tulle skirt with flowers and a corset. This was all visually sweet to see and made her tirade even more scary.

Along with the scripted characters, I was also in charge of designing the puppeteer looks. For these characters, I did not create a sketch because I knew we would be purchasing garments. I sourced garments that I thought would work and put them in a collage for the director to see. I chose grungy black pieces that I thought someone of the goth or punk crowd would wear. This was because the black clothing and the fact that they did not speak allowed them to be present, but not pull focus from the others.

The third design meeting went well. I presented my sketches alongside the character collages to the director and design team, and they were received very well. Morgan did not have any notes for me as I moved into my final color renderings. The color renderings were done after I was able to shop for materials and fabrics so I could render them. The final renderings were used as a tool for the costume shop to make the three-dimensional garments. I presented my final
renderings at the fourth design meeting, and again Morgan felt really good about them. Both the rough sketches and final renderings can be found in appendix 4 on page 33.

For this project I knew budgeting would be key. Though I was given a large budget of $5,000 for costume and $2,000 for puppets, I knew that I would have to be prepared and resourceful to make a large show like this work really well. For the characters in the real world, I was able to pull mainly from stock and purchase a few garments that needed to be filled in. The armored corsets were crafted out of foam and painted with details, using craft googly eyes for rivets. The demon cheerleaders were also built because they were so specific. Orcus’s entire costume, save his chest harness, was built inhouse, as well as Farrah the fairy. Overall the shop handled the build exquisitely. The drapers all asked questions as they arose and were able to use their artistry to create three-dimensional costumes from a drawing on paper.

For a designer, sometimes it is imperative that you also build things for your show, which was the case in this particular production, as I was in charge of building the puppets. I began over the summer holiday by creating small paper prototypes of the puppets to make sure the mechanics would be able to work. I then began creating and building the bones of the puppets. Luckily, I was able to use my father’s cabinet shop to cut wood and build the inner workings of the puppets. I then began fleshing the puppets out. I used craft foam and carved it before I brought them back to the university to finish the fabrication of them during shop hours. I was quite pleased with how they turned out.

Wigs and hair styles played a huge role in transforming these characters for the audience, and also distinguished them from the other character each actor played on stage. I got the opportunity during this process to experiment with an area of costume design that I am very
interested in, which is wig styling. Because colorful dreaded wigs are extremely difficult to locate, I purchased long lace front wigs in the colors that I wanted and then dreaded them myself. I then styled them differently, customizing the style to each character. The process the wigs went through can be found in fitting photos in appendix 5 on page 37.

It was my goal from the beginning to create two separate worlds of characters. Color and texture played a giant role in establishing the two worlds. In the real world we had soft, muted tones easy to look at. The fabrics I chose were knits, cottons things that are comforting and soft. While in the D&D world I chose to use electric colors, and harsh textures like leather and metal things that bind and stretch. I wanted the audience to instantly realize which world they were a part of when any character stepped on stage. A small “Easter egg” I put into this show was that when Lillith, Orcus, and Kalioppe were seen as their real world counter parts, they carried their bright color with them. Kelly wore green converse, Lilly wore a purple and grey baseball T-shirt and Ronnie, who was also Orcus had on a red flannel, and combat boots.

Working on a script like She Kills Monsters was such a great experience, especially with my fellow designers and director. Throughout the entire process, from initial collages and portrait galleries, through sketches, and finally to fully produced garments, the people on the team worked hard to create an amazing piece of theatre. I am fortunate to have been a part of it. You may find production photos of the design choices that were made in appendix Six on page 39.
Chapter 4

Assessment and Evaluation of the Design Process and Final Product

In this process it was my goal to create characters through the lenses of fashion and clothing. I wanted to make strong choices that helped the audience understand who these people were. From the early stages it was my intent to bring an open mind and positive energy to the group of designers I got to work with on this project. After I have had time to reflect on the process of designing She Kills Monsters, I am extremely proud of the show we created and believe my designs were a pivotal part of that final product. From the initial meeting to opening night I had a positive and enriching experience with almost every person that I encountered.

The entire process went very smoothly for me. Morgan Hicks, the director, was always very responsive to the work I presented, as well as making herself available for any questions that I had during the process. The inspiration that I was able to draw from her solidified my vision and helped me create the characters in this world we created.

The costume shop, under the guidance of Shop Manager Valarie Lane, was able to take my two-dimensional drawings and create amazing garments. The notes I would make during fittings and alterations were all accomplished by the opening night of the production and looked wonderful. I felt like the drapers were very responsive to my ideas for the most part and tried to make any changes work. There was a small problem with the foam armor ripping during the fight scenes at the shoulder. This was something that I communicated to the draper Kelsey Looney who was in charge of their creation. Kelsey was able to replace the under support of the straps with elastic to allow the actors to move more freely rather than having the foam attached
directly to the body of the corset. Production photos and fitting process photos can be found in Appendix 5 and 5 on pages 37-39.

This was the first opportunity that I had to create puppets. To say that I learned a lot is an understatement. Puppetry, unlike clothing, is a sort of combination of sculpture, prop making, and creating a being that is supposed to move naturally. The aesthetic of the Bug Bears and Koballds were exactly what I wanted. The problems came with the Koballds though, because they had mobile limbs and attached to the actors a lot of stress was put on their joints. Arms and legs fell off of the puppets nightly until I came up with a solution. In the beginning there were metal hooks for their joints that allowed full range of motion, but the screws that held them in would strip out of the holes under any major stress. I took out all of the screws and replaced them with elastic bands that were hot glued into place. The bands held much better, though they still occasionally came loose. The stage management team checked the joints of all of the puppets each night before the show to ensure they were strong enough for the run of the show.

Designing She Kills Monsters was a great experience for me, and I am very glad to have been a part of this fantastic show. The process from initial collages and renderings to full designs being in the shop and on stage all went very smoothly. Though I was very busy with this show, the work felt like it was for a good cause and a strong final goal. My goal was to create strong characters and make bold choices, and I am proud to say that I feel like I accomplished that to the best of my ability.
Chapter 5

Works Cited

Chapter 6: Appendices

Appendix 1: Script Analysis of She Kills Monsters

Costume Design
Name: Tanner McAlpin
She Kills Monsters
Date: Feb 27, 2018

Costume Designers Outline For Playscript Analysis

This outline has been constructed as a series of questions. Not all these questions will apply to every script you read and examine in this class, and some scripts may require you to create additional questions.

✓ Your analysis must include the questions as written as well as your response.
✓ The analysis must be type written.
✓ Answer in complete sentences the questions that apply as concisely and as specifically as possible.
✓ Note script references and record page numbers on your outline so you can locate your references quickly.

I. WHERE ARE THEY?
   a. In what country, city, place, building, room, etc.?

      2. New Landia (Tilly’s D&D Module) Mountain of Steepness, Orcus’ Cave, Layer of the Tia mat.

   b. How do the characters describe the place they are in?

      Inside the module the characters all talk about how dangerous New Landia is. Everything inside the module is high stakes at all times. The characters in reality, specifically in the final scene talk about how D&D has given them a space where they can live the lives that they want. The characters that Kelly, Ronnie, and Tilly have created in New Landia is really who these people are at their core. Or at least desire to be.

   c. Is there any special significance to the place they are in?

      Athens is describes as a very average place, and it backs up all of the mundane actions of the real world characters which sets a dull background for the D&D world to really shine through. These two world exist with one another like two heads on a coin. They are one in the same, yet opposite at the same time.
II. WHEN ARE THEY?

a. In what day, month, year, century, season, time of day, etc.?

The whole show happens in 1995, during the academic school year through different times in the day.

Prologue- No time or place
1. RPG game store, 1995
2. Tilly’s Room later that evening.
3. Orcus’ Cave, New Landia, Moments later.
4. Vera’s Office, Athens High School, the next morning.
5. New Landia, later that evening.
6. A few hours later in New Landia.
7. Agnes’ parents’ house the next night.
8. New Landia, a few hours later.
9. Vera’s office, Athens High School, the next day.
10. New Landia/ Agnes’ Parents home, that evening.
11. Vera’s Office, Athens High school, the next morning.
12. New Landia, later that night.
13. Athens High School, Agnes’ class room.
14. Agnes’ house that night, then to New Landia.
15. Vera’s office a few days later.
16. Ronnie’s house that evening. New Landia later that evening.

b. Do the characters have anything specific to say about when they are?

Agnes makes several references to popular culture when she is apologizing to Tilly for not being there for her. Agnes says that she was wrapped up in what was cool, “like George Michaels and leg warmers,” instead of paying attention to Tilly. What the reader can infer here is that Agnes was wrapped up in shallow things, things she thought were important, instead of getting to know her sister.

c. Is there any special significance to when they are? Is it for instance, a national holiday?

There is no specific holiday, the inciting incident is that Agnes’ has lost her whole family in a tragic accident.

III. WHO ARE THEY? (List and answer the following questions for each character in the script that you are asked to design a costume for.)

a. How is this character related to the other characters in the script?

b. What is the character’s role in life? Include jobs, professions as well as social and
economic class.
c. What does the character think of the other characters?
d. What does the character think of him/herself?
e. What are the prevailing attitudes toward sex, family, marriage, and ethical conduct? Does this character live within or rebel against these attitudes?

Agnes-
- Agnes is the older sister of Tilly. She gets Chuck, a local nerd, to help her play through her dead sisters D&D module. She meets Kaliaope, Orcus, and Lilith in the game and in real life, and find out how they were related to her sister Tilly. She is a work friend of Vera. She is dating Miles. Gabbi and Tina are school bullies where she teaches and evil cheerleaders she has to fight in real life. She is supposed to defeat Farrah in a battle in New Landia.
- Agnes is an English teacher at Athens High School, she is middle class. But she is new to the D&D world, so there she is just getting her footing.
- Agnes Realizes that the characters in Tilly’s world were people in her reality. She soon learns to love them and cherish them and who they were to her sister. She loves Miles, but knows he can be goofy. She likes Chuck because he helps her through the module, but has to put him back in his place when he is hitting on her. She likes Vera as a work friend, and tries to seek advice from her. She loves Tilly and regrets that she was not closer to her when she was alive.
- At the beginning Agnes thinks she is a good person, pretty average, nothing spectacular. However, through D&D and learning more and more about her kid sister she realizes who she really is and that she can be way more accepting of people as the play progresses. Agnes wants to be married, and settle down with Miles, but he seems to have reservations. She is ok with her sister being a lesbian, and talks about herself in college, but is still shocked that she never knew in real life.

Tilly-
- Tilly is the deceased sister of Agnes Evans. She is friends with Kelly and Orcus and has a crush on Lilly. But she is the amazing leader of these D&D characters. Vera was her High School guidance counselor. Gabi and Tina were bullies that she had in high school.
- Tilly was a high school student, and a huge part of the D&D world in her community of Athens Ohio.
- Tilly knows she is a nerd, but also knows she has amazing potential because she is leader of the module she has created, and everyone in Athens has wanted to be on a campaign with her.
- Tilly is scared to admit how she really feels and that she is a lesbian to her family, that is why she is only herself in the D&D world she has created.

Chuck-
- Chuck is a local gamer nerd who works at the RPG store. Agnes gets him to help her play the game, he takes on the role of the Dungeon Master to help guide her through New Landia. He knew Tilly Evans, and is in the same friend circle as Ronnie and Kelly. He meets Miles during the play.
- Chuck is a high school student who works at the local RPG store. He is also the Dungeon Master for Agnes when she is in New Landia.
- Chuck thinks Agnes is in his league and at times has a crush on her. He looked up to Tilly as a player in D&D and is friends with Kelly and Ronnie.
- Chuck thinks he is tougher and cooler than he is in real life, and deep down he knows that, but never admits it.
- Chuck is a teenage boy, so his hormones are pretty wild from time to time in the game, especially when he is playing the module with all of the attractive girls. He also develops a crush on Agnes, but is never able to act on it.

Miles-
- Miles is the boyfriend of Agnes, who was Tilly’s older sister. He seeks advice from Vera, who is Agnes’ closest friend in the play. He briefly meets Chuck, and tries to beat him up because he thinks he is trying to get with his girlfriend. He also briefly meets the characters of New Landia because he wants to join the game, but dies very quickly into it.
- Miles’ job is never specially named in the show, but he seems to be middle class like Agnes. He is there to be a support system to Agnes in the real world.
- He loves Agnes, but thinks what she is doing is a little crazy at times, but is there for her. He thinks Vera is a terrible councilor, and he also thinks that Chuck is trying to steal his girlfriend.
- We never really hear what Miles thinks about himself, but he seems to be pretty grounded in being average and mellow for most of the play.
- He knows that he wants to be with Agnes, but has not totally committed to her as far as marriage goes.

Lilly/ Lillith-
- She is a member of the team in New Landia set out to get Tilly’s soul back from the Tiamat, but in real life she is the girl crush of Tilly. She is a student at Athens high where Agnes meets her and talks about Tilly in front of her.
- Lillith is a demon princess in the D&D world, but in real life she is a high school student.
- I think deep down she had feelings for Tilly. In real life. In the game however, she loves Tilly, respects Kaliope, and thinks Orcus is a total flake.
- She is very unsure of herself in real life, and is not out of the closet, but in the game, she is very confident in who she actually is.
- She is very reserved, and is not out of the closet. However, in the game she is very free to love Tilly. Agnes describes her as a leather clad dominatrix.

Kelly/ Kaliope-
- She is a friend of Tilly and the younger sister of Ronnie. She is a character in the game and is one of the ones who is set out to find Tilly’s lost soul. She meets Agnes in real life. She was a friend of Tilly’s when she was a live.
- She is a young adult with a physical disability, it is never mentioned that she works.
• Kelly thinks that Agnes is really nice and loved Tilly. In the game she does not like Orcus because he is a terrible person and is the reason that Tilly’s soul is lost.
• She knows she has a disability, but is ok with it, and knows that she can get away from it in the world of D&D where she can be whatever she wants to be.
• Her character is unable to have human emotions in the game because she is a dark elf. But she does ask if she can copulate with Agnes in the game, (however, this was mainly chuck.)

Ronnie/ Orcus-
• Ronnie is the older brother of Kelly, and a friend of Chuck and Tilly’s. Orcus is the demon lord of the underworld in the game where he trades Tilly’s soul and the adventure team has to go out and find it.
• Ronnie is a high school student and they do not mention him having a job.
• He listens to Tilly in the game, and though he does not seem to enjoy it, goes along and participates in the whole adventure.
• Orcus thinks highly of himself, and is very lazy and he knows it.
• His character is gay, and talks about liking men, but in the real world this is never mentioned.

Vera-
• She is the closest friend of Agnes, and the High School guidance counselor at Athens High School where the other characters go to school. She is not a very good counselor.
• She is not a friend of Miles but still tries to give him some advice to help his and Agnes’ relationship.
• She is a high school guidance counselor and is probably middle class American.
• She thinks she is all knowing, and get very annoyed by people asking her questions. She is always willing to give sassy advice though.
• She thinks she is very smart, and gives great advice, but sometimes her advice is terrible, or not helpful at all.
• She thinks marriage will solve Agnes’ and Chuck’s relationship problems. She also freely talks about sex and std’s to a student that she probably should not have.

IV. WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE PLAY BEGAN?
Limit your facts to information given in the dialogue but be sure to “listen” carefully; much of what you discover will come from casual clues, which can occur in a variety of contexts.

• Agnes and Tilly have not really connected as sisters growing up.
• Agnes wishes for a more exciting life.
• Agnes’ Parents and sister are struck down in a car crash.
• Agnes decides to move in with her boyfriend Miles.
• Agnes find, and decides to play a D&D module that her sister has created.
V. WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF EACH CHARACTER IN THE PLAY? (List each character and chose a, b, or c and answer the corresponding questions.)

What are the functions of the other principal characters?

Protagonist- I would say that the protagonist is Agnes, she goes through the biggest change in the play, and she comes out a better person.

Antagonist- I think Agnes is the one who blocks herself from changing the most in the play, and it isn’t until she really lets herself go that she becomes a better person. b. Secondary characters:

What is the function of each?

Tilly – To lead her sister on an adventure to change her, and give her closure.

Chuck- Works as Agnes’ mentor and liaison between her world and the D&D world.

Lilith/ Lily- She shows the intimate sides of Tilly’s love life, and what her inner thoughts were.

Kaliope/ Kelly- She is there to show the power of getting to play a game that lets you out of your own reality.

Orcus – He is there to put up road blocks and being the stakes down when people are getting too worked up.

Miles – He tries his best to support Agnes in her new adventure.

Steve – He is a pawn in the game, that is always dying.

Gabbi and Tina- They show how ruthless Tilly’s bullying was in school both in reality and in the game world.

Vera – She is meant to give wisdom, but by her giving poor life advice, the characters sometimes learn more than if she didn’t give any advice at all. t

VI. WHAT KINDS OF DIALOGUE DO THE CHARACTERS SPEAK?

These characters speak in a realistic dialogue. The characters all speak in the language that they would have at the time, and it is understood by all those who speak it in the play.

VII. WHAT HAPPENS IN THE PLAY?
(a) Briefly describe the principal events in the play.

- Agnes finds a D&D module and decides to play it to get to know her sister Tilly.
- Agnes is introduced to the world her sister created, New Landia, by a local nerd Chuck Biggs.
- Agnes plays though the game learning more and more about her sister and decides to quit after realizing that the role playing game is not the same as being with her sister.
- Agnes meets her late sister’s friends, in reality, and the interaction they have convinces Agnes to rejoin the game.
- Agnes defeats the biggest Monster, which is a metaphor for defeating her real life monsters. Agnes gets closure from the loss of her sister.

VIII. WHAT IS THE PLAY’S THEME?

This will only become apparent when you have read the script several times.

The theme of the play is Regrowth. No matter what terrible things happen in the play, something good is able to come out of it. Tilly’s soul being lost is a way for the team to have an amazing adventure and Agnes can get to learn more about her late sister. Agnes, by losing her family, gains another with the D&D community, and though she can still miss, and mourn the loss of her sister, she has gained new friend group and way of getting to know her sister, even after she has passed.

VIII. CREATE AN ACTION CHART *attached*

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Action Chart
Appendix 2: Portrait Gallery Example

All research photos were found on Pinterest and can be found on Author’s board titled “She Kills Monsters”
Appendix 3: Character Research Collage Examples

Character Collage Example for Tilly/ Tillius

Character Collage Example for Kelly/ Kaliopé
Appendix 4: Rough Sketches and Color Renderings

Rough Sketches for Kaliope/ Kelly (left) and Lillith/ Lilly (right).
Sketches courtesy of Author.
Rough Sketches for Steve (left) and Farrah the Fairy (right).
Sketches courtesy of Author.
Color Renderings:

Color Renderings for Tillius (left) and Kaliope/ Kelly (right).
Renderings courtesy of Author.
Color Renderings for Evil Cheerleader Gabbi and Tina (left) and Lillith/ Lilly (right).
Renderings courtesy of Author.
Appendix 5: Fitting Photos and Dressing Sheets

Dressing Sheet and Fitting Photos for Agnes (actor Anna Grace Estes.)

Dressing Sheet and Fitting Photos for Orcus/ Ronnie (actor William Trey Smith.)
Dressing Sheet and Fitting Photos for Gabbi and Tina
Actors Heidi Kirk (left) and Aubrey Pohlman (right).

Dressing Sheet and Fitting Photos for Gabbi and Tina
Actors Heidi Kirk (left) and Aubrey Pohlman (right.)
Appendix 6: Selected Production Photos

Photos courtesy of Shawn Irish and the author.

“The gang assembles.”

Actors from left to right: Charl Young, Madi Watkins, Caroline Dean, and Trey Smith.
“You gave my soul away?!”

Actors: Trey Smith and Madi Watkins
“Preparing to fight the Kobalds”

Actors Madi Watkins (left) and Anna Grace Estes (right).
“Suddenly three Bug-Bears attack!”

Actors from left to right: Heidi Kirk, Madi Watkins, Anna Grace Estes, Annie Sullivan, and Aubrey Pohlman.
“You’re my girlfriends ‘special friend?’”
Actors Matt Clothier (let) and Jake Lewis (right).
“Look Evil Gabbi a pack of losers!”
Actors Heidi Kirk (left) and Aubrey P