

**A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR QUI NGUYEN'S *SHE  
KILLS MONSTERS***

Miami University Fall 2019

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# I. Introduction

*She Kills Monsters* is a massive spectacle, with fantastical costumes, wonderful lighting, and an extraordinary set. However, beneath all of that spectacle is a story with an immense heart. These characters, especially Tilly and Agnes, are immensely relatable, both individually and as a realistic depiction of sisterhood. Agnes, who is shown to be entirely average, is grieving over the death of her family and is looking for solace in anything she can get her hands on. The discovery of a D&D campaign written by Tilly gives her a chance to connect with her deceased sister and see the world through Tilly's eyes for a change. Along the way, the story highlights themes such as growing up LGBT+, in an environment where you can't truly be yourself and surrounding yourself with people who accept all parts of you.

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## II. Play Overview

A comedic romp into the world of fantasy role-playing games, *She Kills Monsters* tells the story of Agnes Evans as she leaves her childhood home in Ohio following the death of her teenage sister, Tilly. When Agnes finds Tilly's *Dungeons & Dragons* notebook, however, she stumbles into a journey of discovery and action-packed adventure in the imaginary world that was Tilly's refuge. In this high-octane dramatic comedy laden with homicidal fairies, nasty ogres, and 90s pop culture, acclaimed young playwright Qui Nguyen offers a heart-pounding homage to the geek and warrior within us all.<sup>1</sup>

- Samuel French

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## III. Characters

**Tilly** → a queer teenage girl obsessed with Dungeons & Dragons. Smart, sarcastic and strong but underneath an insecure, bullied girl

**Agnes** → Tilly's older "average" sister, a high school teacher who never really knew her

**Lilith** → Demon Queen, Tilly's girlfriend, powerful, beautiful and bloodthirsty

**Kaliope** → Dark Elf, master tracker, lock-picker, intelligent and above emotions

**Orcus** → Overlord of the Underworld, a mellow, surfer-type, giant, red demon

**Chuck** → a nerdy teenager, serves as the games' Dungeon Master, desperately tries to be cool

**Miles** → Agnes' boyfriend, struggles with commitment

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.samuel french.com/p/8807/she-kills-monsters/>

**Narrator** → Lord of the Rings-style hooded figure

**Vera** → Agnes' friend and school guidance counselor, brash, sarcastic and unhelpful

**Steve** → A D&D adventurer who continually appears and dies multiple times

**Farrah** → A cute fairy who is a violent, vicious, badass fighter

**Evil Gabbi & Tina** → vampire cheerleaders who bully Tilly in the game and in life

**Kobalds, Bugbears, Tiamat the Dragon** → various larger than life D&D monsters

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## IV. Scene Breakdown

Scene	Plot	Characters	Real World or Fantasy	Location
Prologue	Narrator introduces D&D, Tilly, and Agnes	Narrator, Tilly, Kobalds	Fantasy	Unknown
1	Relationship between Tilly and Agnes is shown	Narrator, Tilly, Agnes	Real world (in the past)	Agnes & Tilly's home (in the past)
2	Agnes asks Chuck to help her play through Tilly's module	Chuck, Agnes	Real world	Gaming store
3	Chuck begins the module and Agnes meets Tillius, Lilith and Kaliope then joins their party	Agnes, Miles, Tilly, Chuck, Lilith, Kaliope	Real world & Fantasy	Tilly's bedroom, unknown fantasy location
4	Intro to Orcus and learning that the Tiamat has Tilly's soul	Narrator, Orcus, Tilly, Agnes, Steve	Fantasy	Orcus's cave
5	Intro to Vera	Agnes, Vera, Steve	Real world	Vera's office
6	The adventure party encounters their first monsters together, Agnes begins to take the module seriously	Chuck, Agnes, Tilly, Lilith, Kaliope, Orcus, Bugbears	Fantasy	Unknown fantasy location

7	The party defeats Farrah the Faerie, guardian no. 1	Orcus, Agnes, Tilly, Lilith, Kaliope, Farrah Steve	Fantasy	Woods in fantasy world
8	Miles misunderstands what Agnes and Chuck have been doing	Agnes, Miles, Chuck	Real world	Agnes's apartment
9	Agnes learns that Tilly is gay, then she watches her get bullied by the Succubi	Agnes, Tilly, Lilith, Kaliope, Orcus, Evil Gabbi, Evil Tina	Fantasy world	Unknown fantasy location
10	Agnes meets Lilly in the real world	Agnes, Vera, Lilly	Real world	Vera's office
11	Agnes tries to comfort Tilly, Chuck gives Agnes a letter from Tilly	Tilly, Agnes, Chuck	Fantasy & Real world	Unknown fantasy location, glimpses into real world where Chuck and Agnes are running the campaign
12	Miles learns from Vera that Agnes has been playing D&D	Miles, Vera, Steve	Real world	Vera's office
13	The party encounters a gelatinous cube (guardian no. 2), which looks a lot like Miles	Agnes, Kaliope, Chuck, Tilly, Lilith, Orcus, Gelatinous Cube, Miles	Fantasy & Real world	Unknown fantasy location, glimpses into real world where Chuck and Agnes are running the campaign
14	Agnes rages on two cheerleaders in the real world	Agnes, Tina, Gabbi, Tilly	Real world	School where Agnes works
15	Agnes invites Miles to play the campaign with her and Chuck, the	Agnes, Chuck, Miles, Lilith, Kaliope, Orcus,	Real world & Fantasy	Location where Chuck & Agnes are playing the

	Succubi kill Lilith and Agnes decides to quit playing	Tilly, Evil Gabbi, Evil Tina, Steve		campaign in the real world; the Mountain of Steepness in the fantasy world
16	Agnes gets to meet Tilly's friends in the real world, she learns why D&D is important to all of them	Vera, Agnes, Chuck, Orcus (Ronnie), Kalliope (Kelly)	Real world	Vera's office, Ronnie & Kelly's house, unknown school location (maybe Agnes's classroom)
17	The party fights The Beholder (guardian no. 3), defeats the Tiamat, and completes the quest	Agnes, Tilly, Orcus, Kalliope, Vera, Steve, Lilith, Narrator	Fantasy	Unknown fantasy location

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## V. Production History

*She Kills Monsters* premiered Off Off Broadway at the Flea Theater on November 4, 2011 under the direction of Robert Ross Parker. Since its debut, it has been produced by multiple regional theatre companies and by many college theatre departments<sup>2</sup>. At the time of our production in November, there will also be 30 other schools and theatre companies producing this play.

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## VI. Playwright History

Qui Nguyen is a Vietnamese-American playwright, TV/Film writer and cofounder of Vampire Cowboys of New York, an Obie award-winning theatre and the only theatre organization to be officially sponsored by NY Comic Con. He is well known for his artistic style, which involves puppetry, pop culture, and media work.

Notable works include *Vietgone* (2015), *Soul Samurai* (2010), *Alice in Slasherland* (2011), *Fight Girl Battle World* (2008), *She Kills Monsters* (2012), *Trial By Water* (2006), *Living Dead in Denmark*




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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samuel french.com/p/8807/she-kills-monsters/>

(2008), and *Vampire Cowboy Trilogy* (2011). Nguyen has more recently been credited as a writer on the hit Netflix show, *The Society*.

Qui Nguyen is a member of the Writer's Guild of America (WGA), The Dramatists Guild, The Playwrights Center, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and The Ma-Yi Writers Lab.

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## VII. Dungeons and Dragons



The first Dungeons & Dragons game was played back when Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson chose to personalize the massive battles of their fantasy wargames with the exploits of individual heroes. This inspiration became the first fantasy roleplaying game, in which players are characters in an ongoing fantasy story. This new kind of game has become immensely popular over the years, and D&D has grown to include many new ways to vividly experience worlds of heroic fantasy.

The core of D&D is storytelling. You and your friends tell a story together, guiding your heroes through quests for treasure, battles with deadly foes, daring rescues, courtly intrigue, and much more. You can also explore the world of Dungeons & Dragons through any of the novels written by its fantasy authors, as well as engaging board games and immersive video games. All of these stories are part of D&D.<sup>3</sup>

**Important Dates:** ([Complete timeline of the history of Dungeons and Dragons](#))

- **1974 - The Creation of Dungeons and Dragons:** *Dungeons & Dragons* is created by Gary Gygax and Tim Kask and is published by **TSR Hobbies, Inc.** as three booklets: *Men & Magic*, *Monsters & Treasure*, and *Underworld & Wilderness Adventures*. Within eleven months, the entire hand-assembled print run of 1,000 games sold out
- **1989 - Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Second Edition is released**, which included the *Dungeon Master Guide*; *Player's Handbook*; *Monstrous Compendiums Volumes 1, 2, and 3*; *Complete Fighter's Handbook*; and *Complete Thief's Handbook*.
- **1995** - TSR Hobbies, Inc. marks its 20th anniversary with **revised versions of the Second Edition *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master Guide***. Experienced Second Edition fans find new ideas in the *Player's Option* and *Dungeon Master Option* rulebooks.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dnd.wizards.com/dungeons-and-dragons/what-is-dd>

## Role-Playing Games

A role-playing game (sometimes abbreviated RPG) is a game in which players assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. Players take responsibility for acting out these roles within a narrative, either through literal acting, or through a process of structured decision-making regarding character development.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of an RPG is World of Warcraft, which is a Massive Multiplayer Online RPG where players from around the world assume the roles of heroic fantasy characters and explore a virtual world.<sup>5</sup>

There are **three core books** needed for a Dungeons and Dragons Campaign. (All links are to 2nd edition, which is what they would be using in the play).

1. **Player's Handbook** - This book contains rules for the players of the game. It also contains information on character creation. ([PDF version](#))
2. **Dungeon Master's Guide** - This book contains rules for use by Dungeon Masters, who facilitate a game. They are in charge of creating the details and challenges of a given adventure, or module, and describe to the players what they see and hear. They control all aspects of the game, except for the actions of the player characters.<sup>6</sup>
3. **Monster Manual** - This book shows the monsters players may encounter within the game. It includes encounter tables and statistics that the Dungeon Master uses to direct monsters that spawn during the game. ([PDF version](#))

During the game, players describe their character's intended actions, such as punching an opponent or picking a lock, and converse with the Dungeon Master, who then describes the result or response. Trivial actions, such as picking up a letter or opening an unlocked door, are usually automatically successful. The outcomes of more complex or risky actions are determined by rolling dice.

## Character Creation

Due to the nature of role-playing games, character creation is an important and lengthy process. When creating a D&D character, there are many choices that a player can make which affect the skills, abilities, and behavior of your character. Therefore, these decisions heavily influence the way the individual plays the game, since they are playing the role of the character they have created. Some of these choices include their character's class, race, and alignment.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing\\_game](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing_game)

<sup>5</sup> <https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-gb/news/20151237/welcome-to-world-of-warcraft>

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeon\\_Master](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeon_Master)

**Class:** In 2nd Edition, character classes were divided into four groups or "metaclasses": Warrior, Wizard, Priest, and Rogue.<sup>7</sup>

Tilly plays a paladin, which is a holy knight, crusading in the name of good and order, and is a divine spellcaster. From 1st through 3rd edition, paladins were required to maintain the Lawful Good alignment (see below for information on alignments).<sup>8</sup> For more information on paladins, watch this [video](#) (length 2:43 - explicit language warning!).

Find more information on the following classes here:  
[Bard](#), [Cleric](#), [Fighter](#), [Monk](#), [Paladin](#), [Rogue](#), and [Wizard](#).

Group	Class
Warrior	Fighter
	Paladin
	Ranger
Wizard	Mage
	Specialist wizard
Priest	Cleric
	Druid
	Priest of specific mythos
Rogue	Thief
	Bard

Want to discover what class matches your personality most? Take [this quiz!](#)

**Race:** Each race has a distinct appearance, special abilities, and statistics associated with it. Some examples include human, elf, half-elf, drow (or dark elf), dwarf, half-orc, or halfling.

**Alignment:** The character's alignment is a guide to his basic moral and ethical attitudes toward others, society, good, evil, and the forces of the universe in general. [Players] use the chosen alignment as a guide to provide a clearer idea of how the character will handle moral dilemmas.<sup>9</sup>

Want to discover your own personal alignment? Take [this quiz!](#)

## Monsters<sup>10</sup>

### Kobolds

A cowardly, sadistic race of short humanoids that vigorously contest the human and demi-human races for living space and food. They especially dislike gnomes and attack them on sight. Barely clearing 3 feet in height, kobolds have scaly hides that range from dark, rusty brown to a rusty black. They smell of damp dogs and stagnant water. Their eyes glow like a bright red spark and they have two small horns ranging from tan to white. Because of the kobolds' fondness for wearing raggedy garb of red and orange, their non-prehensile rat-like



<sup>7</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character\\_class\\_\(Dungeons\\_%26\\_Dragons\)#Advanced\\_Dungeons\\_&\\_Dragons\\_2nd\\_edition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_class_(Dungeons_%26_Dragons)#Advanced_Dungeons_&_Dragons_2nd_edition)

<sup>8</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paladin\\_\(Dungeons\\_%26\\_Dragons\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paladin_(Dungeons_%26_Dragons))

<sup>9</sup><https://4thmaster.wordpress.com/2015/08/23/alignments-add-2nd-edition/>

<sup>10</sup><https://orkerhulen.dk/DnD%205th/TSR%202140B%20Monstrous%20Manual.pdf>

tails, and their language (which sounds like small dogs yapping), these fell creatures are often not taken seriously. This is often a fatal mistake, for what they lack in size and strength they make up in ferocity and tenacity.

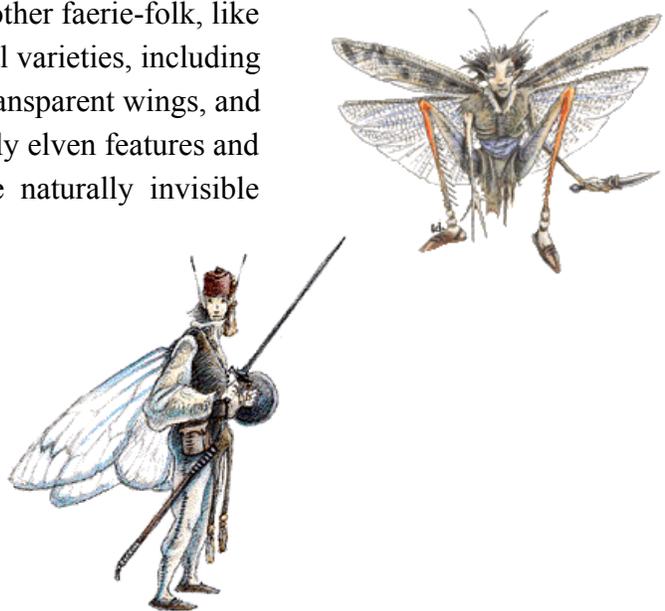
## Bugbears



Bugbears are large and very muscular, standing 7' tall. Their hides range from light yellow to yellow brown and their thick coarse hair varies in color from brown to brick red. Though vaguely humanoid in appearance, bugbears seem to contain the blood of some large carnivore. Their eyes recall those of some savage bestial animals, being greenish white with red pupils, while their ears are wedge shaped, rising from the top of their heads. A bugbear's mouth is full of long sharp fangs. Bugbears have a nose much like that of a bear with the same fine sense of smell. It is this feature which earned them their name, despite the fact that they are not actually related to bears in any way. Their tough leathery hide and long sharp nails also look something like those of a bear, but are far more dexterous. The typical bugbear's sight and hearing are exceptional, and they can move with amazing agility when the need arises. Bugbear eyesight extends somewhat into the infrared, giving them infravision out to 60 feet. The bugbear language is a foul sounding mixture of gestures, grunts, and snarls which leads many to underestimate the intelligence of these creatures. In addition, most bugbears can speak the language of goblins and hobgoblins.

## Faerie/Pixies/Sprites

Shy and reclusive faerie people, related to other faerie-folk, like brownies and leprechauns. There are several varieties, including pixies and nixies. Most have small, semi transparent wings, and elven features. Normal sprites have distinctly elven features and live in meadows and wooded glens. The naturally invisible pixies are perhaps the most intelligent and mischievous of the faeries; they dwell in idyllic woodlands and delight in harassing travelers with their pranks.



## Succubus<sup>11</sup>



When uncovered in her true form, a succubus appeared as a stunningly beautiful woman of statuesque build and perfect figure, with flawless skin and red or raven-black hair, but also clawed fingers and large dark-hued or reddish bat-like wings mounted on their backs. Their eyes were said to smolder with sinister desire. Small horns or a tail might also be seen. Succubi stood on average around 6 feet tall and weighed 125 pounds. With a kiss of her lips, an embrace in her arms, or something more intimate, a succubus could drain the life energy of a mortal who lacked stamina, weakening them in every aspect or wounding their psyche until they died or escaped and took time to recover. For mortals who were unwilling, and the certain few who were willing, the succubus would have to charm or grapple him or her in order to lay their kiss somewhere. Caught in the throes of passion, the victim often didn't notice their life being drained away, unless they could keep their heads. However, a kiss from a fiendish succubus was actually quite painful, giving no satisfaction, only utter emptiness.

## Gelatinous Cube

The slimes and jellies of the underworld are hideous, amorphous creatures that are the bane of all that lives, dissolving the weapons, armor, and flesh of their victims. Gelatinous Cubes are so nearly transparent that they are difficult to see, these cubes travel down dungeon corridors, absorbing carrion and trash along the way. Their sides glisten, tending to leave a slimy trail, but gelatinous cubes cannot climb walls or cling to ceilings. Very large cubes grow tall to garner mosses and the like from ceilings.



## The beholder

The stuff of nightmares. This creature, also called the sphere of many eyes or the eye tyrant, appears as a large orb dominated by a central eye and a large toothy maw, has 10 smaller eyes on stalks sprouting from the top of the orb. Among adventurers, beholders are known as deadly adversaries.

<sup>11</sup> <https://forgottenrealms.fandom.com/wiki/Succubus>

## Tiamat

The patron goddess of chromatic dragons and the embodiment of greed and envy. She takes the form of a five-headed dragon, and each head is a different color. She gave birth to the five primary species of chromatic dragon, each taking the form of one of her heads. Tiamat combines the powers of all of the chromatic dragons. (Chromatic dragons are typically of evil alignment - white, black, green, blue and red dragons being the classic chromatic dragons.<sup>12</sup>)



## Goblin

These small, evil humanoids would be merely pests, if not for their great numbers. Goblins have flat faces, broad noses, pointed ears, wide mouths and small, sharp fangs. Their foreheads slope back, and their eyes are usually dull and glazed. They always walk upright, but their arms hang down almost to their knees. Their skin colors range from yellow through any shade of orange to a deep red. Usually a single tribe has members all of about the same color skin. Their eyes vary from bright red to a gleaming lemon yellow. They wear clothing of dark leather, tending toward dull soiled-looking colors. Goblin speech is harsh, and pitched higher than that of humans. In addition to their own language, some goblins can speak in the kobold, orc, and hobgoblin tongues.



## Orc

Orcs are a species of aggressive mammalian carnivores that band together in tribes and survive by hunting and raiding. Orcs believe that in order to survive they must expand their territory, and so they are constantly involved in wars against many enemies: humans, elves, dwarves, goblins, and other orc tribes. Orcs vary widely in appearance, as they frequently crossbreed with other species. In general, they resemble primitive humans with grey-green skin covered with coarse hair. Orcs have a slightly stooped posture, a low jutting forehead, and a snout instead of a nose, though comparisons between this facial feature and those of pigs are exaggerated and perhaps

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chromatic\\_dragon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chromatic_dragon)



unfair. Orcs have well-developed canine teeth for eating meat and short pointed ears that resemble those of a wolf. Their eyes are human, with a reddish tint that sometimes makes them appear to glow red when they reflect dim light sources in near darkness. Male orcs are about 5½ to 6 feet tall. Females average 6 inches shorter than males. Orcs prefer to wear colors that most humans think unpleasant: blood red, rust red, mustard yellow, yellow green, moss green, greenish purple, and blackish brown. Their armor is unattractive besides -- dirty and often a bit rusty. Orcs speak Orcish, a language derived from older human and elvish languages. There is no common standard of Orcish, so the language has many dialects which vary from tribe to tribe. Orcs have also learned to speak local common tongues, but are not comfortable with them.

### **Medusa**

Medusae are female humanoids with hair of swarming snakes. They are hateful creatures that can petrify any creature that meets their gaze. The typical medusa has a pale-skinned, very shapely woman's form. It stands 5 to 6 feet tall with the snakes adding up to another foot. At distances farther than 30 feet, the medusa is easily confused with a normal woman. Its red-glowing eyes are visible up to 30 feet. At distances of 20 feet or closer, the medusa's true nature is revealed. Its face is horrible -- the snakes writhe constantly, especially if the medusa is excited. Medusae wear human clothing such as loose dresses or robes. They seldom wear armor and cannot easily wear helmets. Medusae may carry a knife, dagger, or short bow. Medusae speak their own tongue and the common one.



### **Orcus (Source)**

Orcus's appearance is that of a ram's head, bat's wings, and goat's legs. He was also revealed as the prince of the undead—able to summon wights, wraiths, specters, and vampires—and the holder of the skull-tipped “wand of death.” This description was largely consistent with Orcus's appearance in 1977's *Monster Manual* for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, even as that book upgraded him to “one of the most powerful and strongest of all demons.”



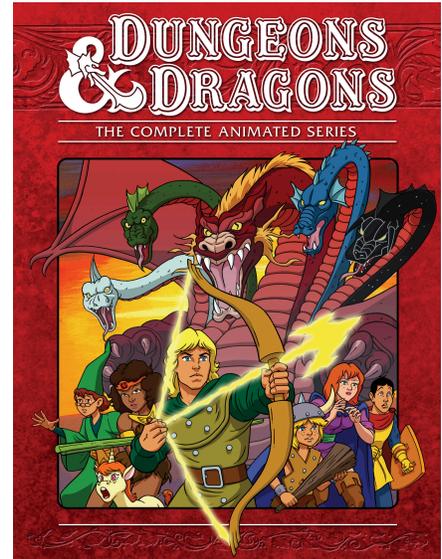
## Dungeons and Dragons in Culture (80's-90's)

### The Dungeons and Dragons Animated TV Series:

- Ran from 1983 to 1985 for three series and a total of twenty-seven episodes
- Very cheesy intro clip ([length - 0:58](#))
- Features the Tiamat as one of the main antagonists

### Panic in the 1980's:

In 1979, 16-year-old child prodigy James Dallas Egbert III disappeared from his room at Michigan State University. A private investigator, William Dear, was hired by James's parents to find their son. Despite apparently knowing little about roleplaying games, Dear believed that D&D was the cause of Egbert's disappearance.



In truth, Egbert suffered from, among other things, depression and drug addiction, and had gone into hiding - in the utility tunnels under the university - during an episode of self-harm. The well-publicised episode - referred to as the Steam Tunnel Incident - prompted a number of works of fiction, including the novel *Mazes and Monsters* and 1982 Tom Hanks film of the same name.

Egbert later died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 1980. Despite the evidence regarding his mental health problems, some activists believed Egbert's suicide was caused by D&D.

In 1982, high school student Irving Lee Pulling died after shooting himself in the chest. Despite an article in the *Washington Post* at the time commenting "how [Pulling] had trouble 'fitting in'", mother Patricia Pulling believed her son's suicide was caused by him playing D&D.

At first, Patricia Pulling attempted to sue her son's high school principal, claiming the curse placed upon her son's character during a game run by the principal was real. She also sued TSR Inc, the publishers of D&D. Despite the court dismissing these cases, Pulling continued her campaign by forming Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD) in 1983.<sup>13</sup>

### Watch the following videos for more information!

**New York Times Retro Report: Dungeons & Dragons Satanic Panic** ([watch up to 11:05](#))

- Sales of the game nearly quadrupled the year after Egbert disappeared

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26328105>

**CBC news cast aired: April 15, 1985 entitled “Is Dungeons and Dragons Dangerous?”**

([watch up to 5:38](#))

- “This medieval fantasy world is so detailed, so real, that some say it has caused kids to kill in the real world.”
- “Since these games are so violence oriented you do not just play at the game, you become the game - you are the game.” - Patricia Pulling
- At the time this was aired there were 28 documented cases of juvenile murder and suicide that were supposedly linked to D&D

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## Dungeons & Dragons Discussion Questions

1. How does the experience of Role-Playing relate to the overarching message of the play ?
  2. Why might the playwright have chose to make Tilly’s character a Paladin? How does that relate to the themes of the play?
  3. What similarities and differences do you see between the D&D Satanic Panic and recent conversations about the influence of violent video games on youth culture and behavior?
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## VIII. Cultural & Historical Context

### 90’s Pop Culture

The mid 90’s were marked with many pop culture classics, including songs such as “Wonderwall” by Oasis, and movies such as Toy Story, Braveheart, and Apollo 13. For more pop culture happenings, check out this [timeline](#).

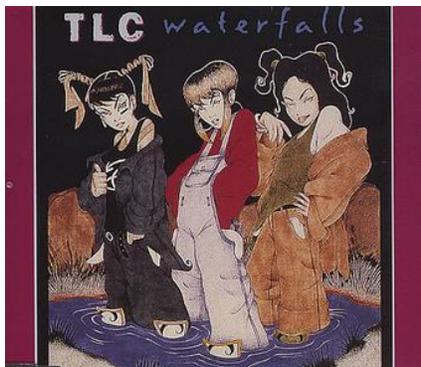
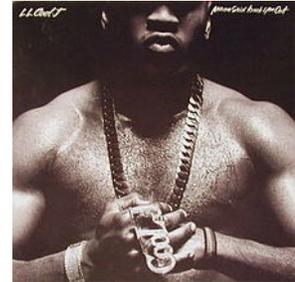
Below are all the pop culture characters, TV shows, songs, albums, and artists that are mentioned in the script.

[Quantum Leap](#) is a science-fiction television series that aired from March 1989 through May 1993. *Quantum Leap* follows the story of Dr. Sam Beckett, a physicist who has become stuck in the past as a result of a time-travel experiment gone wrong, and his attempts to return to his present by altering events in the past for the better. When Sam leaps, his body is physically present in the past, although he appears to others as the person into whom he leaped.



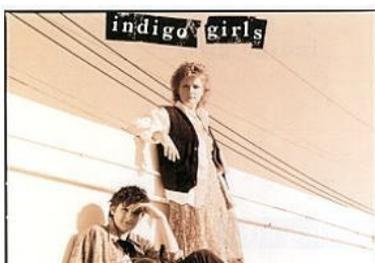
[ER](#) is an American medical drama television series that aired on September 19, 1994. *ER* follows the inner life of the emergency room (ER) of fictional County General Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, and various critical issues faced by the room's physicians and staff. The show is the second longest-running primetime medical drama in American television history behind *Grey's Anatomy*. The original starring cast consisted of Anthony Edwards, George Clooney, and more.

["Mama Said Knock You Out"](#) is a hit single by LL Cool J from his album of the same name. The song famously begins with the line "Don't call it a comeback/I've been here for years."



["Waterfalls"](#) is a song by American recording group TLC. The song was released as the third single from the album on May 29, 1995 in the United States. [TLC](#) is an American girl group whose original line-up consisted of Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes and Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas.

[Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness](#) is the third studio album by American alternative rock band The Smashing Pumpkins, released on October 24, 1995. After the 13-month tour in support of The Smashing Pumpkins' second album [Siamese Dream](#) (1993), Billy Corgan immediately began writing songs for the band's next record. From the outset, the band intended the new record to be a double album, partly inspired by The Beatles' self-titled album.



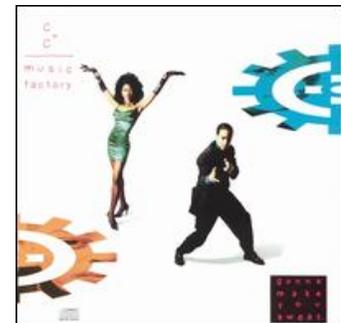
[Indigo Girls](#) are a folk rock music duo consisting of Amy Ray and Emily Saliers. Saliers and Ray are both lesbians and are active in political and environmental causes. They recorded [Swamp Ophelia](#) in 1994, which went platinum in September 1996, and charted at #9 on the *Billboard* 200 album chart. In 1995, the Indigo Girls released a live, double CD, [1200 Curfews](#).

[The Cranberries](#) were an Irish rock band formed in 1989. The band officially classify themselves as an alternative rock group, but incorporate aspects of indie pop, post-punk, Irish folk, and pop rock into their sound. The Cranberries rose to international fame in the 1990s with their debut album [Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?](#), which became a commercial success.



[10,000 Maniacs](#) is an American [alternative rock](#) band that was founded in 1981. They achieved their most significant success between 1987 and 1993, when they released four albums that charted in the top 50 in the US: [In My Tribe](#) (1987), [Blind Man's Zoo](#) (1989), [Our Time in Eden](#) (1992) and the live album [MTV Unplugged](#) (1993).

["Gonna Make You Sweat \(Everybody Dance Now\)"](#) is a hit song by American dance group C+C Music Factory. It was released in late 1990 as the lead single from the album, [Gonna Make You Sweat](#). The song charted internationally and achieved great success in the United States, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland where it reached number one on the charts.



**Further Listening: If you want to listen to some popular 90's music, check out this [playlist!](#)**  
**Nerd Culture**

Nerd Culture has seen a seismic shift from the 90s to the present. Certainly, people will learn and obsess about different things, but what has transformed the most is the word “nerd” itself. In the 90s, words like “nerd” and “geek” were hurled as insults and used as a way to differentiate the

“cool kids” from those who were not. The representation of those in TV and film who were considered nerds in the 90s did nothing but reinforce the stereotype that nerds were outsiders deserving of ridicule (ie. Steve Urkel or Screech). These nerdy types were often obsessed with science fiction, socially awkward, and male.

Nowadays, nerd culture seems to have been wholly embraced by the surrounding culture. The image “nerd” brings to mind has shifted from someone to ridicule into someone who loves something passionately. The object of that fascination has also expanded as well; people are able to nerd out about a whole host of things including TV, movies, books, video games, etc. The advent of the Internet has also allowed people to connect more frequently and there are social media platforms dedicated to the spread of fan culture (Tumblr, Archive of Our Own, etc.).

Nerd culture today has also seen an increase in the way women are intrinsic to the fan narrative. Because women did not fit into the stereotypical image of the nerd presented by media, there was little mainstream acknowledgment that they even existed. Today, women are crucial to the survival of nerd culture, whether in science fiction writing or superhero movies, they are creating content for the next generation.

[The History of Women in Geek Culture Should Not Be Overlooked](#) by Bitch Media

[The Ultimate Nerd in the '90s versus Today](#) by Bustle

[The rise of D&D liveplay is changing how fans approach roleplaying](#) by The Verge

Further Reading:

*The Geek Feminist Revolution*<sup>14</sup> by Kameron Hurley

*Geek Wisdom: The Sacred Teachings of Nerd Culture*<sup>15</sup> by Eric San Juan, Genevieve Valentine, N. K. Jemisin, and Zaki Hasan

*Luke Skywalker Can't Read: And Other Geeky Truths*<sup>16</sup> by Ryan Britt

*Of Dice and Men: The Story of Dungeons & Dragons and The People Who Play It*<sup>17</sup>: by David M. Ewalt

Further Watching:

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<sup>14</sup> Kameron Hurley. *The Geek Feminist Revolution*. Tor, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen H. Segal. *Geek Wisdom: the Sacred Teachings of Nerd Culture*. Quirk Books , 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Ryan Britt. *Luke Skywalker Can't Read and Other Geeky Truths*. Turtleback Books, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Dice-Men-Dungeons-Dragons-People/dp/1451640501>

*Geek Girls*<sup>18</sup> by Gina Hara - “the first feature-length documentary exploring the hidden half of fan culture: nerdy women”

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## Cultural Context Discussion Questions

1. What is your personal connection with nerd culture? Do you feel that your thoughts have shifted over time?
  2. Of all the 90s references mentioned, which one would you like to explore further?
  3. Do you feel that there is still a subset of nerd culture that is looked down upon? If so, why do you feel that this is the case?
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### School Structures in the 1990s

The 1990s were a tumultuous time in the world of public education. Schools were undergoing massive restructuring, while at the same time being forced to deal with in-school violence at an unprecedented level. Low standardized test scores and run down buildings paired with imminent threats of violence created a toxic system that many parents wanted to remove their children from. This led to the creation and growth of the school voucher system both for private schools and for high performing public schools outside of their district. In the world of higher education, affirmative action, the policy created to increase opportunities for women and minorities in the workplace and in university admissions<sup>19</sup>, had faced serious pushback from several states who wanted to repeal federal law.

### Rural Ohio

This play is set in 1990s Athens, Ohio, which is highly rural location.. Ohio geographically was heavily impacted by the glaciers during the Ice Age, resulting in highly fertile land. Therefore, over half of the counties in Ohio are designated as rural counties, based on the natural amenities<sup>20</sup> of the land as well as population density and commuter flow, by the federal government. The population of Athens at the time of the play was roughly twenty-one thousand people based on the 1990 census<sup>21</sup>. In comparison, Oxford, currently is around twenty-three thousand people, not including the college students that live here two-thirds of the year, according to data taken in 2017.



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<sup>18</sup> <http://geekgirlsfilm.com/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/culture-magazines/1990s-education-overview>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/natural-amenities/>

<sup>21</sup> The United States Census Bureau

## Male Gaze

**male gaze** [meyl geyz] - the assumption in visual and creative arts that the default or desired audience consists of heterosexual males, and the inclusion of women in narrative or art should seek to please this audience with the objectification or sexualization of these depicted women.

From the feminist perspective, this theory can be viewed in three ways:

1. How men look at women.
2. How women look at themselves.
3. How women look at other women.

Typical examples of the male gaze include medium close-up shots of women from over a man's shoulder, shots that pan and fixate on a woman's body, and scenes that frequently occur which show a man actively observing a passive woman<sup>22</sup>. This can be seen in many action and superhero films, but also in Disney Princess movies. Almost all of the princesses are thin and white, with waists as wide across as their necks. This sets highly unrealistic goals for little girls, many of whom want to look like their favorite princess.

The male gaze can also be seen in everyday life. Some theorists have noted that in advertising, objectification and sexualized portrayals of the female body can be found even in situations where sex or representations of sex have nothing to do with the product being advertised. It is shown to have a damaging effect on women, who are led to believe that self-worth<sup>23</sup> is based on outward appearance.

Further Reading:

*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*<sup>24</sup> by Laura Mulvey

## Stages of Grief

The 5 stages of grief were first established by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*. Originally, these 5 stages were presented in chronological order: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance, but Kübler-Ross amended that belief, stating that grief

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.filminquiry.com/film-theory-basics-laura-mulvey-male-gaze-theory/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-clarity/201711/taking-back-the-male-gaze>

<sup>24</sup> [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-19798-9\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-19798-9_3)

is not a linear process. She expounds upon this by saying that everyone grieves differently and one might experience all five stages, or possibly only two, or sometimes none.

**Denial:** Denial is the way that your body helps you cope and survive the grief following the death of a loved one. It helps pace the feelings of grief as to not completely overwhelm you and therefore stagger the full impact of the loss. It places you in a “preferable reality” that serves as the body’s natural defense mechanism.

**Anger:** Anger is when one starts to live in “actual reality” again. One will most likely look for objects of blame and find the loss incomprehensible. Researchers say it is important to feel the anger and not suppress it as the more quickly you feel the anger, the quicker it will dissipate and then the quicker one can heal.

**Bargaining:** Bargaining deals with false hope and the idea that if one changes something, the powers that be will change what has already happened. This stage is often accompanied by guilt and “what if” statements.

**Depression:** Depression is the most commonly accepted form of grief and one that is most often associated with the grieving process. This stage is characterized by overwhelming feelings and the urge to withdraw from society.

**Acceptance:** Acceptance is when emotions begin to stabilize and you come to terms with the fact that this change is something you can live with.

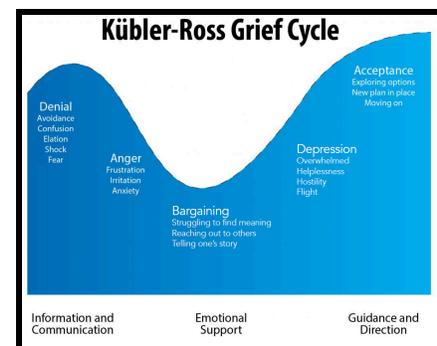
Articles:

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/>

<https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model)

<https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>



## 90's Coming Out Stories

Ellen Degeneres (20 Years Later)

<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/04/20th-anniversary-of-ellen-degeneres-coming-out>

Kimberly Garland

<https://medium.com/@kimberlyjgarland/happy-pride-coming-out-as-a-teen-in-the-90s-f1513fcb2a9b>

Steve Kornacki

[https://www.salon.com/2011/11/16/the\\_coming\\_out\\_story\\_i\\_never\\_thought\\_id\\_write/](https://www.salon.com/2011/11/16/the_coming_out_story_i_never_thought_id_write/)

C. Reichart

<https://www.comeoutstpete.org/2017/07/27/fag-hag-mom-90s-kid-comes/>

Rachel B. Tiven

[https://www.lambdalegal.org/blog/20161011\\_national-coming-out-day-rachel-b-tiven](https://www.lambdalegal.org/blog/20161011_national-coming-out-day-rachel-b-tiven)

Further Research:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/coming-out-stories/id1436044250>

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## ***She Kills Monsters* Discussion Questions:**

1. *She Kills Monsters* deals heavily with the idea of found family, how have you created a family for yourself in college?
2. How do the fantasy elements of the play relate to overcoming grief?