

“She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms” by Qui Nguyen

“She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms” is presented by arrangement
with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.
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Time

The Present

Setting

Athens, Ohio and Newlandia

Director’s Note

If someone says “high culture,” what’s the first thing you think of? A fancy dinner at which you need to know what each piece of silverware does? An abstract painting by Kandinsky? An opera by Verdi? If you know all of those, congratulations; if you don’t, or if you only have a passing familiarity, I suspect you’re not alone. What if I asked you the same question about “low culture”? You might think of auto-tuned pop music by actors who can’t actually sing, the tacky novelties sold at a store like Spencer’s Gifts, or the gleefully awful *Sharknado* films. If you don’t know all of those, well, I can’t say congratulations (though I recognize for some that might be a badge of honor) because I wouldn’t want you to miss their unique pleasures.

The one thing that both lists have in common is access: how intellectually, physically, and financially accessible are any of these? One of the many joys of *She Kills Monsters* is the way it takes all of these questions, puts them into a woodchipper and shoots the results onto a stage (or, in our case, a screen). Playwright Qui Nguyen’s body of work is full of cultural mashups like *Alice in Slasherland* and an exploration of his own Vietnamese-American heritage, *Vietgone*. He sometimes deliberately avoids defining the race or cultural heritage of his characters, a choice which increases accessibility for BIPOC actors, but doesn’t necessarily allow those identities to be written into the plays themselves. Finally, some of his plays, like *She Kills Monsters*, specifically highlight the physical by including lots of potential for stage combat.

What makes this irreverent mix all the more delightful in *She Kills Monsters* is that it focuses these issues on two very different young women: Agnes, a very mainstream all-American girl, and her sister, Tilly, who resists the mainstream at every turn. In doing so, Nguyen directly and indirectly targets the troubling sexism and misogyny in geek culture. He also deals frankly with the thorny incompleteness of grief, and . . . wait a minute. Am I trying to tell you that this play is important because there is something serious and deep underneath its aggressively silly veneer? I suppose I’m saying you can be stimulated by this play in many different ways. For as much as I love popular culture, I know that it too can be a language that only some people speak; that even the most mainstream and accessible of entertainments can exclude and might even define

their pleasures in part by that exclusion. In this unprecedented year, I have been all too aware that things I love and believe in, like education and theatre, aren't available to everyone.

A few months ago, Nguyen made the admirable decision to retool his play for virtual performance (hence the subtitle *Virtual Realms*), and I want to emphasize that not many plays are being made available this way. During the past months, I've thought a lot about how much theatre will have to adapt to these difficult circumstances. Our production team found a way to film an entire show with actors and technicians who weren't in the same theater (actually some of them weren't in the same state or even the same country). As we soldiered through these very new challenges, I wondered what theatre might look like on the other side of all of this. I don't have any answers just yet, but until we can see you again (either in Fenwick Theatre or in the Prior Center for the Arts), I hope this tale of young women showing resilience in the face of isolation offers you something, whether it's high or low, good or bad, serious or funny. Even better, I hope you won't have to choose at all.

— Scott Malia

Thanks

We would like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the following individuals who assisted us immensely in mounting this production:

Meaghan Deiter, Ed Isser, Lynn Kremer, Sharon Matys, Chris Arrell, Barbara Craig, Greta Morgan, Kerri Saucier, and Joan Townsend

Practicum Students

Alexis Armstrong
Anne Borzner
Emily Bouzan
Colin Boylan
Thomas Cremins
Michael Donius
Eric Fenn

Caroline Fital
Isaiah Gomez
Liza Goodman
Ryan Julian
Jacqueline McCarthy
Sean Mikovits
Istar Moya

Shabnam Mohamad Zarif
Peter Molosky
Trinity Offutt Decker
Blake Sheridan
Gaytrix Solo
John Walsh

Sets, costumes, and properties are designed especially for Fenwick Theatre productions and are built in its shops.

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