

UVA Department of Drama

# SHE CREATES MONSTERS

Graduate Thesis Project

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MFA Costume Design & Technology





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*Cover photo by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Tillius played by Actress Karen Zipor*

*Right Photo by Michael C. Bailey*

*Kaliopé played by Actress Ingrid Kenyon*





# FORWARD

The year is 2019 and the geeks, the freaks, the vengeful nerds are having their day. No longer are *Lord of the Rings* fans, *Dungeons & Dragons* players, and video game players considered counter-culture but are, rather, they are celebrated.

Where Sci-Fi and Fantasy fans were once relegated to dank basements and dusty comic book stores, culture has shifted to create a space where those who want to wear a cloak and play a Rock-Gnome in their spare time are encouraged to do so with aplomb.

When I first heard I was going to design *She Kills Monsters* at the University of Virginia I was beyond ecstatic. I feel very passionately that the world needs more heroines and that young men and women should embrace all sides of their personalities. The play resonates in today's society as we learn to have difficult but necessary conversations on physical attraction and sexuality. In embracing the fantasy world we often find the strength within us, the dormant warrior, mage, or she-demon we need to slay the battles of reality.



This thesis project focuses on the design and technology process of the University of Virginia's production of *She Kills Monsters*. Through this production, I was able to successfully demonstrate the collaboration of Costume design and technology that has been the core focus of my studies at UVA. I thought about the construction of the costumes first, design second, and allowed the movement and fight choreography to guide me in the design and construction of the costume elements. I also made use of new technologies in the field in order to fabricate elements of the costumes and to communicate the design elements to the shops. The final design was an integrative and visual success that supported the theory of my approach and demonstrated my ability to work both as a costume designer and technologist.

# INTRODUCTION



# CHAPTER ONE: SHE DESIGNS MONSTERS

In 2019 the world is inundated with extravagant fantasy movies and TV shows that bring a high-quality production value to the Fantasy genre. With that in mind, how do we design a fantasy show that lives up to audience's expectations while staying true to the script, the spirit of live theatre, and the ever humbling budgets and time constraints awarded to academic theatre?

Looking at previous productions of *She Kills Monsters* and what characters exist in the *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)* world, I became determined my costume design should hold all of the best elements while striving for the highest quality I could afford and achieve. With a budget of \$4,000 to costume 13 students, some with multiple costumes, and all of the fantasy characters needing to be created from scratch, I knew that I would need to be resourceful. Where I lacked budget or resources I turned to the suspension of disbelief of the audience to join me on a journey where a young woman might be a purple-haired Elf, or that a thin young man might be a hulking Hell Bred demon. Ultimately the show's success was in my ability to encompass the influential, contemporary expectations of audience as well as operating within the script and still remaining unique to my own personal vision.

*Photograph by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Narrator portrayed by Actress Lianne Davidoff*







The script, written by Qui Nguyen, throttles between a '90s high school and the imagined fantasy world of New Landia ushered in by Chuck Biggs, a local game store employee and Dungeon Master. In discussion with our director, Marianne Kubik, we recognized the play's transitions were so quick (and so many) we knew costume changes would be difficult, if possible at all. In order to facilitate smooth storytelling between the play's 23 scenes, scene shifts (moving set pieces to denote a new setting/location) were almost completely eliminated. This meant that the characters would have to remain in their one costume as either their fantasy character or real world character, with exceptions for the times where the script required a change.



After reading the script, it became clear how many well-known characters, archetypes, and stereotypes there would be in the show that I would either have to faithfully incorporate or lovingly cast aside. Nguyen references many fantasy tropes as the basis for his characters and alludes to many more throughout the script. I made it my mission to first identify how to incorporate *D&D* tropes, such as the sexy She-Demon clad in leather, which would technically be satisfying the needs of the script (and therefore making specific references to the characters costume believable) while also being respectful to the actors portraying them.

Digital Renderings by Cee-Cee Swalling





Iconic characters from popular 90s movies such as *Empire Records* and *Clueless* provided inspiration for the Character of Chuck Biggs

I wanted the high school setting of *She Kills Monsters* to feel familiar and also vaguely sitcom-ish. In comparison to other iterations of this play I wanted the *Dungeons & Dragons* world to seem the more realistic of the two. Where the '90s world would be bright and colorful and reminiscent of what existed in media at the time, I wanted the New Landia world to feel gritty, tactile, and "Fantastically Realistic" (a term I coined during the design process). The overall effect would leave the two worlds separated, with Agnes being the key to both.

## CHUCK

For Chuck I aimed to create a character that was recognizable as a '90s kid as well as a lovable if not stereotypical geek. The script describes Chuck as a heavysset 19 year-old kid, exemplifying an archetype known to comic book store customers nationally. However, the student cast happened to be a Tall, Indian boy. In my efforts to remain true to the script, I wanted this character to show both a geeky side, but I didn't want to push the boundary into insult or too archetypal. I wanted the actor to have his own interpretation of his character without being told he could only be ultra geeky. What emerged, then, was a character who was clad in a dragon t-shirt, Chuck Taylors, JNCO dragon embroidered jeans, a plaid, short-sleeve button up shirt, and (the *pièce de résistance*) a brown wizard's cape. The overall effect, being the recognizable "geeky" '90s kid, with just his own flare.



Photograph by Michael C. Bailey  
Chuck Biggs portrayed by Actor Aaryan Balu





*Characters from 'Boys Meet World' and 'She's All That' inspired the earth tone costume for Miles' character*

## MILES

If Chuck is the quintessential geeky '90s kid, then it became my mission for Miles to be the recognizable jock boyfriend. Inspired by characters like Dawson (of *Dawson's Creek*) or Freddie Prinz Jr. in .... well, anything from the '90s and early 2000s (*She's All That*, *Down to You*, *Boys and Girls*, etc). Where Chuck owns his flare for the dramatic, I wanted Miles to be subdued, safe, the "vanilla" guy.



*Above: Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Right: Photograph by Greg Harris  
Miles portrayed by Ryder Sadler*



In this vein, Miles became the most tame-looking of the entire cast, clad in earth tones with khaki pants, a moss-green sweater, and green down vest. While the muted colors could be seen as boring I wanted to portray a character who should feel familiar, comfortable, and recognizable.

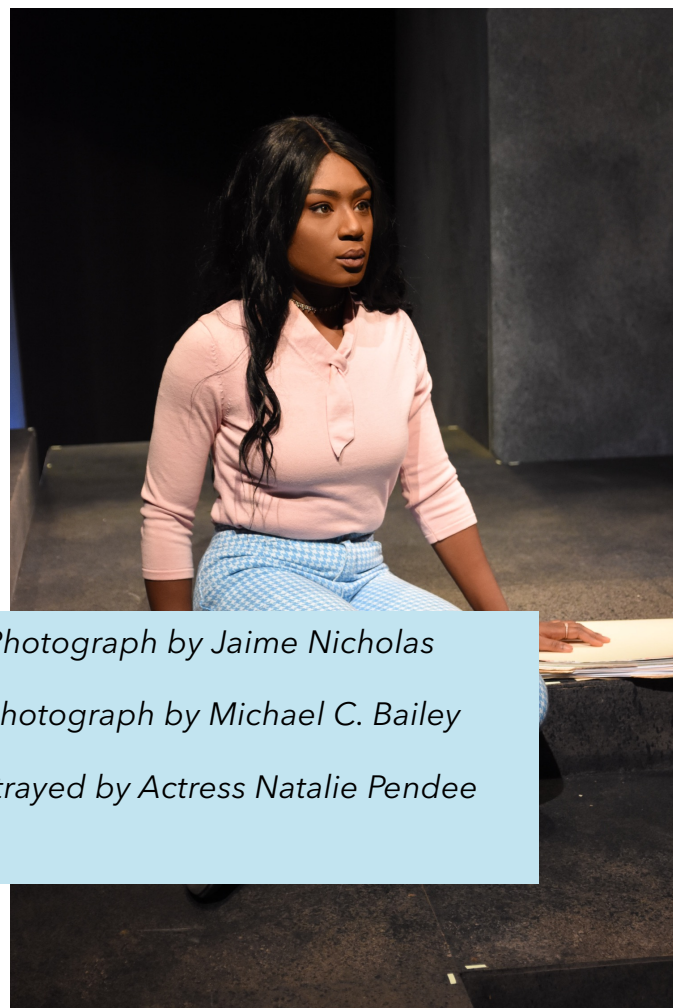




Characters from '10 Things I Hate About You' and 'Clueless' that inspired the character of Vera

## VERA

Vera, the best friend character, is a foil to the main character, Agnes. Where Agnes is lost and confused, Vera is overly confident and cold, but loving. Like Dionne - the sassy, brazen, plaid-wearing best friend from the eponymous '90s classic *Clueless*- as an inspiration I bedecked the character in herringbone print pants, a plaid blazer, and a baby pink sweater. I wanted her to be unequivocally authoritative but distinctly feminine, she would look a part of the times but still distinct from the younger high school students presented in the play.



Left: Photograph by Jaime Nicholas

Right: Photograph by Michael C. Bailey

Vera portrayed by Actress Natalie Pendee



Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling







*Characters like Rachael from the popular 90s tv show 'Friends' (above, courtesy of Warner Bro's Film Studio) and Bianca from '10 Things I Hate About You' (left, courtesy of Touchstone Pictures) inspired the costume for Agnes' character*

## AGNES

If Vera is the confident, sassy, authoritative guidance counselor, Agnes is the lost, angry, and broken best friend. A teacher in her own right, the script belies a young woman in her 20's who feels listless, unmotivated, and directionless in the wake of her family's death. The script indicates she has lost her parents as well as her younger sibling, Tilly, though the parents are never mentioned again and the show focuses on the loss of the sister. Tilly's death becomes the greater tragedy for Agnes, having lost her younger sibling she feels she didn't know at all. As Agnes approaches the idea of marriage and a family of her own, her focus on her younger sibling is a way to try and connect to the person she would have first felt matronly towards.



*Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling*





Left: Tilly's "real" '90s Character

Photography by Michael C. Bailey

Tilly portrayed by Actress Karen Zipor

Agnes portrayed by Actress Tori Kotsen



Right: Agnes

In keeping with the '90s setting, I looked to the iconic films of the time to inform Agnes' costume such as *Clueless*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, and *She's All That*. I wanted an outfit I hoped would emphasize her age and be a background for the changes she would go through on stage as she became more integrated in the

*Dungeons & Dragons* world. The character's color palette would emulate the colors and tones of Tilly's character, bringing the two very different characters closer together.



# CHAPTER TWO: DESIGNING FANTASY CHARACTERS

In beginning to design characters for the fantasy world, there are many iterations to choose from as many fantasy characters have been imagined and reimagined throughout time. While Nguyen had re-named specific character types from the popular *Dungeons & Dragons* tropes, the features of the characters remained the same. I was faced with the conundrum of staying true to stereotypes of characters who might be recognizable to some audience members, while also allowing for growth in the actors we had cast.



Photograph by Martin Kyle

From Left to Right: Aaryan Balu as Chuck, Ingrid Kenyon as Kaliope, Tori Kotsen as Agnes



Photograph by Michael C. Bailey

Lillith (the She-Demon) portrayed by Actress Regan Borucke

Orcus portrayed by Actor Reed Foster



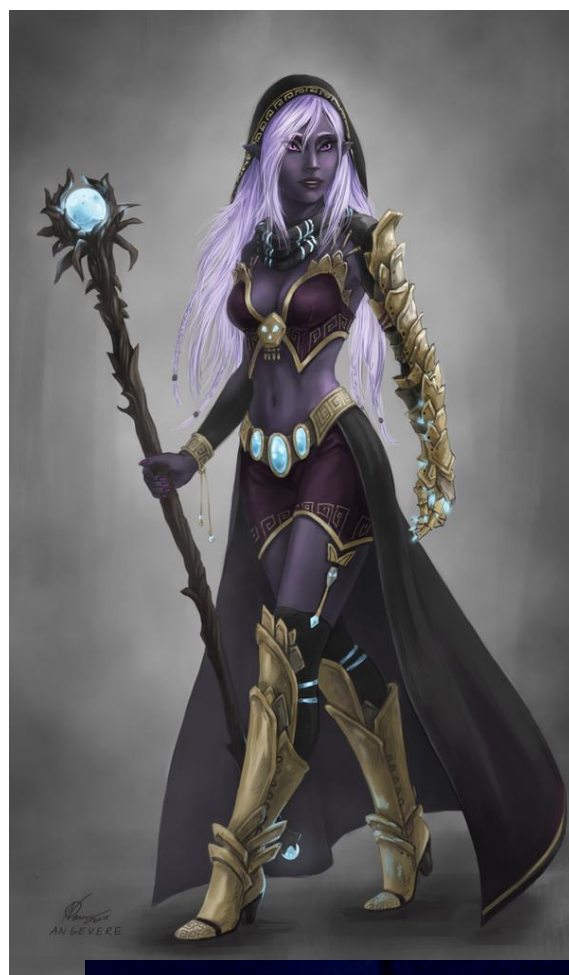


*Photography by Michael C. Bailey*

*Ensemble : Tori Kotsen, Regan Borucke, Hannah Han,  
Karen Zipor, Ingrid Kenyon, Reed Foster*

As with human characters, there are some rules to abide by, and some to cast wildly to the side. The crux of the design had to reside in a believability of the fantasy characters; I required that their look was not campy (though, when portraying red demonic Demi-gods, there really is no avoiding it), but rather “Fantastically Realistic”. I wanted the characters to feel tactile, textured, and incredibly nuanced. For each of their outfits, I wanted a feeling that their armor and clothing had been worn and used heavily. The overall effect should feel like the fantasy characters were more real and nuanced than the “real ‘90s world” that Agnes occupies.





## THE DARK ELF

While in *D&D* the Dark Elf character is considered a Drow, Nguyen took liberties with the character, therefore giving my director and I permission to take liberties as well. Where Drow are typically dark-skinned, we had a light-skinned actress, so I began to play with the idea of how to create a look for her that would be unique, otherworldly and allow her to possess the mystique usually associated with the character. In many iterations, the character possessed purple hues, so I allowed that to drive a monochromatic theme color for Kaliope and to give her a silhouette that was clean, asymmetrical, and feminine while still embracing warrior-like garb. Augmenting the purple wig, Kaliope's ears had to be noticeable pointed to satisfy fan expectations and distinguish her race from even the other fantasy creatures. Kaliope evolved into a mystical, purple mage-like elf with purple hair, pointed ears, and armor-like costume that would allow her to move.

*Above Left: Fan art from Deviant Art depicting D&D Drow*

*Left: Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling.*

*Right: Photography by Michael C. Bailey*

*Kaliope portrayed by Actress Ingrid Kenyon*





## THE SHE-DEMON

As with our Dark Elf, the character of Lillian Morningstar is referred to as a “She-Demon” in the script but the parallel between her and the Tieflings of the official *Dungeons & Dragons* world is unmistakable. With that clear association going forward I was once again handed a new challenge: how do I make a person look entirely red without make-up and also allow for a quick-change? Simple, the answer was not, but with some compromise, I was able to come up with a hand-painted body suit, allowing for the face to remain un-painted. Adding armor at the neck and arms as well tall boots masked the ends of the body suit, so she appeared to be all-red, typical of the *D&D* Tieflings. To finish the look I added a bright-red wig, which I then also used to affix the handmade horns. The combination of the body suit and wig allowed for an overall effective look, while still allowing for ease of movement, quick-changing, and did not add theatrical elements to the show which we were ill-prepared to handle within budget.

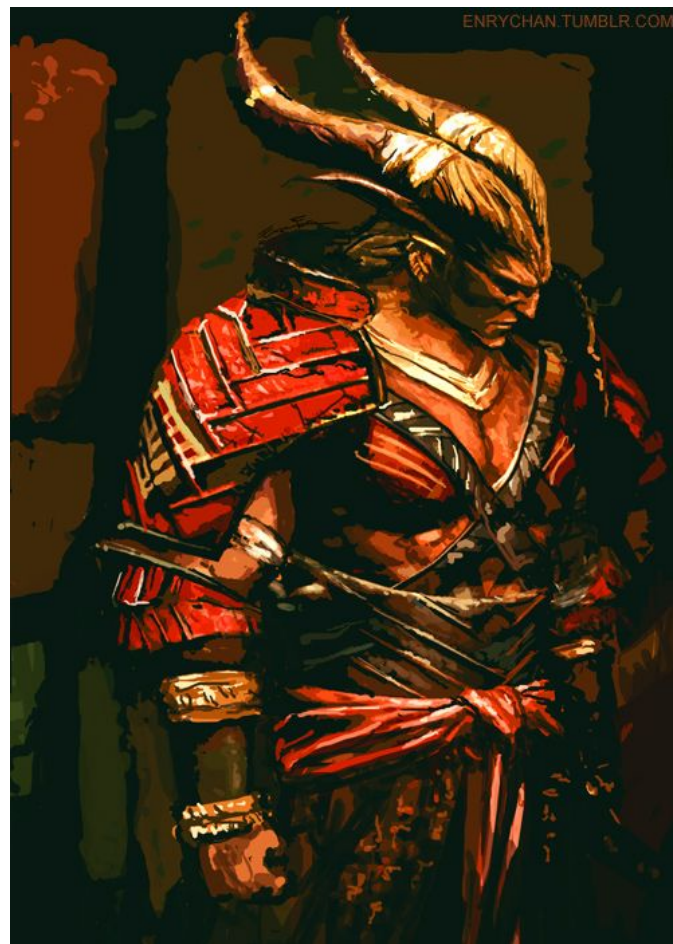
Above left: Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling

Above Right: Fan Art of Tiefling from Deviant Art

Photography by Greg Harris

Lillith portrayed by Actress Regan Borucke





## ORCUS

The (literal) biggest costume challenge was the character, Orcus. Described as a massive, towering 7-foot giant, all in red. Complicating matter, the character should be much larger in his fantastical realm than when we meet him again in his “real world” persona. My dilemma of how to portray an entirely red character without make-up and allow for a quick change in and out of costume. For this character I allowed the work we had done in our armor and leather workshop with Jeff Lieder (Costume Director at Utah Shakespeare Festival, Professor Emeritus at Milwaukee University) and Rosa Lozano (University of Corpus Christi and Head of Crafts at Utah Shakespeare Festival) to inform more of the design and execution. The script references bondage and sexual innuendo, so I wanted to create a look for him that was indicative of “leather daddy” without crossing lines of sexual impropriety in an academic setting. I built out a character who had stacked leather boots, a leather tunic built over football padding, and a massive wig with attached mask, and 18-inch long hand fabricated horns. The addition of each piece on its own began to elongate the actor, but the ensemble together created a towering, overwhelming character- one clearly ready to become overlord of Hell itself.

*Above Left: Digital Rendering  
by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Above Right: Fan Art from  
Deviant Art*

*Bottom Right: Photography  
by Greg Harris*

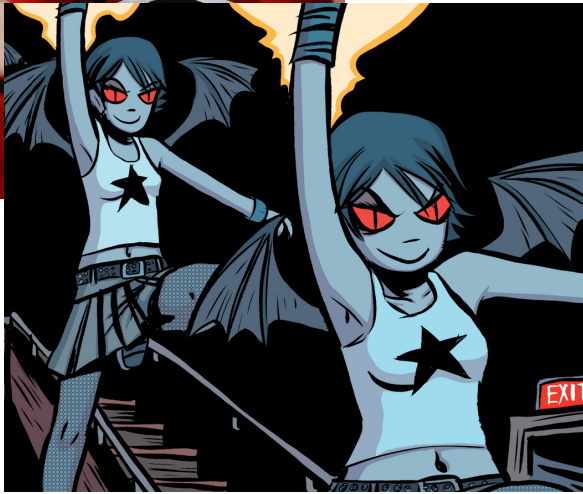
*Orcus portrayed by Actor  
Reed Foster*







*Inspiration for the cheerleaders came from 90s movie 'Bring It On' and the succubi from 'Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World'*



*Left: Photography by Michael C. Bailey*

*Right: Photography by Greg Harris*

*Evil Tina & Gabby portrayed by Actresses Casey Breneman and Avery Erskine*

## THE SUCCUBI

Of all of the fantastical characters that existed in the play, I was most interested in creating a look for the succubi/cheerleaders that tied them extremely close to their real-life personas. I wanted them to not only feel vaguely out of place in New Landia (as it was the world created by and for Tilly's character) but to also emphasize their natural, imbued, evil-ness. The design for these two characters to me was the absolute clearest. I was able to order two sets of

matching cheerleading outfits and simply changed out the coloration from the regular "school" colors to a quintessentially evil color scheme of Black and red for the succubi costumes, adding wire frame wings, wigs, and mini horns to denote the "otherness" of the succubi. The final looks read very clearly, and even gave the two characters a clear connection between their high school personas to their fantastical counterparts.



# CHAPTER THREE: HOLDING OUT FOR A HEROINE

What do you do when your story has two lead heroines? What about 3 or 4? When it comes to *She Kills Monsters* an argument could be made that the story even has eight heroines, given the complexities of the fantasy heroines and their human alter-egos. However, the two most prevalent heroines are Agnes and Tilly. Agnes is the main traditional protagonist (the person who embarks on a hero's journey going from unawareness to awareness) because she changes the most during the plot of the play. Tilly cannot change because her character is dead although the audience perception of her character also embarks on a hero's journey as we discover her hidden sexuality and the love she feels for another teenage girl through Agnes' perspective.



Photograph by Michael C. Bailey

Actresses Ingrid Kenyon, Karen Zipor, Regan Borucke

Agnes is “The Girl Who Never Left Home”, and it is her journey that sets everyone else's in motion. While I discussed the aesthetic of the character in an earlier chapter, it is not especially what she is wearing that becomes symbolic of her heroine status, but rather her ability to adapt. In the script Agnes is portrayed as an average feminine teenage girl who grows up to be an average young woman. The comparisons between herself and her sister create a modern (read: '90s) girl who enjoys music, shopping, and talking on the phone with her boyfriend.





Photograph by Michael C. Bailey  
Actor Ryder Sadler and Actress Tori Kotsen

The playwright then establishes that this character would be “normal” or mainstream. In keeping with the ‘90s stereotype, Agnes was clad in an outfit that would seem familiar to an audience. I looked to mainstream media such as the movie *Clueless* to create a character that portrays as put-together, upper middle class. In addition, I even wanted to delicately weave in the fact that, at this point in her life, she is also a high school English teacher. Going beyond these influences I then had to factor in two distinct rules for the character 1) that she never leaves stage and therefore she would have no opportunity to ever really change her outfit and that 2) whatever her “base” costume was, it would have to have room to adapt to accommodate for adding armor and allowing the character to naturally change. With that in mind, I sought to create a costume dynamic enough to establish the character, but basic enough that, when armor and *Dungeons and Dragons* type embellishments were added to her costume, it would signify the character moving deeper into that world and away from the world that she once knew.





Photograph by Greg Harris

Actress Tori Kotsen

As Agnes' costume evolved, I used garments that would emulate armor. Her combat boots became both a symbol of the time as well as a reference to actual combat, her sweater vest evoked images and feelings of an armored chest plate, and a pleated skirt to evoke armored skirts akin to what Wonder Woman or Xena, Warrior Princess would wear. It was important, however, to keep the silhouette of Agnes' costume away from Lillith's more pronounced She-Demon tabard skirt. Agnes' costume emerged, with the armor elements proving the evolution of her character in the *D&D* world. While the armor never looked "natural" per se on her costume it became a symbol of bridging the gap between the '90s high school world and the fantasy New Landia world.



Photograph by Michael C. Bailey



Through multiple readings of the play, the connection between Tilly and Agnes became apparent to me. The play is truly a love story about two sisters who were never able to find a real connection in life and who are forced to confront their inner selves. When I first started designing Tilly I spent a lot of time exploring what being a Paladin meant in the *D&D* world and what the character would look



Photograph by Michael C. Bailey  
Actresses Tori Kotsen & Karen Zipor

like in teenage girl form. In my research into *D&D* paladins the images that kept recurring were those that aped a look similar to the Knights Templar, heavily clad in armor with tabards that bore their insignias and made them look regal and heroic. In design meetings the subject of sexuality frequently came up and to make sure that none of the characters were sexualized in our academic setting (no small feat in a play where sexuality, innuendo, and constant comments about the scantily cladness of its heroines) , but I did want to retain femininity with the heroic. As I worked on the costume, I focused on what it truly means to be feminine and

strong. What does that look like? How do we portray a female warrior without sexualizing her? This was a problem even the script seemed to struggle because a lot of female imagery that exists is hyper-sexualized, perhaps due to the male gaze which created the fantasy *D&D* world.





Digital Fan Art courtesy of  
Deviant Art

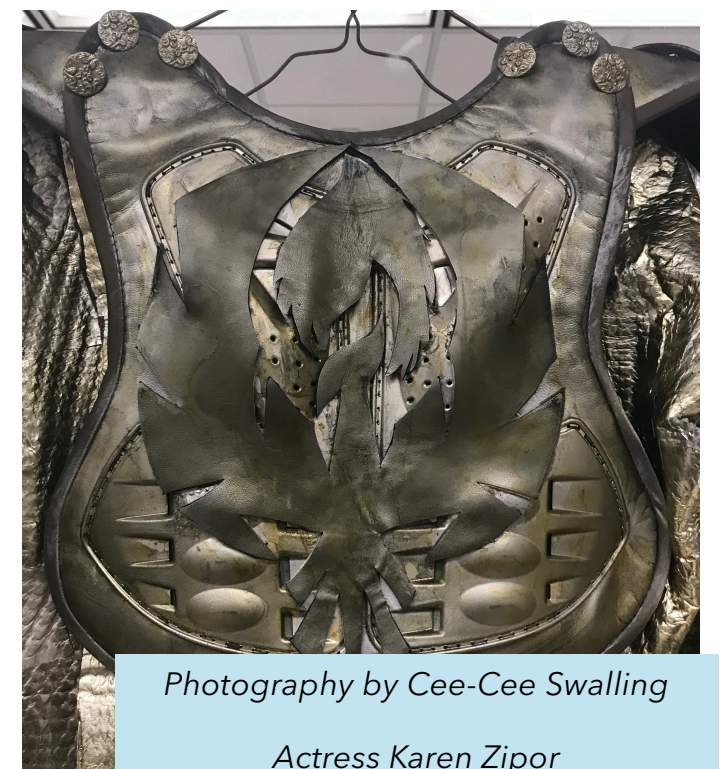


For Tilly I focused on what would make a self-proclaimed “nerd girl” feel safe and feel strong. If it happened to make her feel sexy as a byproduct, I wanted to encourage that feeling. I also wanted to build up the character’s strength from within versus the tired trope of creating a scantily clad warrior *a la* Xena, Warrior Princess or Wonder Woman. The character needed a larger-than-life persona. I added wedge boots to give her height, emphasize a feminine silhouette, and lightly accentuate female sexuality. Heels tend to be synonymous with female sexuality as they force women to stand more erect with chest out and encourages leading with the hips. The second element I thought would help would be giving her a luxurious long curly wig to match the actress’ natural hair color, bringing the character into the fantasy world with her She-Demon and Dark Elf compatriots also clad in long fantastical wigs curated to their own look.

From there, I sought to create a silhouette adhered to female Paladins in the *D&D* world. I focused on creating a look that would fit her form exactly right but would also flow and swirl about her while she fought.



After an armor workshop with Professor Rosa Lazaro (University of Corpus Christi and Head of Crafts at Utah Shakespeare Festival), I took her suggestion of using motocross armor and Katie Stomps ( MFA Costume Design & Technology Graduate student and Draper) repainted and covered them in silver leather to emulate real armor. After the armor was recovered I followed my Professor Marcy Linton's (Costume Technology Professor and my academic advisor) instructions on distressing armor using French Enamel (FEV) varnish to weather it down and added the key design elements that would take it away from looking like motocross gear. I also employed techniques I learned from a dye workshop I had done with Jeff Lieder, (Costume Director at Utah Shakespeare Festival, Professor Emeritus at Milwaukee University) and purchased a lightweight sweater to cover in iron on vinyl and ape the look of chain mail without forcing my actress to wear something as heavy or unwieldy as chainmail.



*Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling*  
*Actress Karen Zipor*





*Photograph by Michael C. Bailey*

*Actress Karen Zipor*



*Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling*

The end design of Tilly showed a character who was brave, beautiful, strong, and fearsome. The armor I later embellished with a Phoenix, a symbol of Tilly's rebirth. The blue of her character tied her both to her sister and allowed me to make a nod to religious iconography of the Virgin Mary, a symbol of bravery to women, and even a small hint at Tilly's undeveloped sexuality.



# CHAPTER FOUR: LET'S GET TECHNICAL

Of course it is all well and good to discuss fantasy creatures in a theoretical sense, but it is an all-together much harder task to make them believable and functional for a live audience who will be able to see the elements of the characters close up. For the fantasy characters I had critical line items to meet, including distinguishing their difference from the human characters (though they are all humanoid and bipedal in their own character rights) and to create seamless and cohesive ensemble costumes. From researching previous productions of the play, Prof. Kubik and I agreed that we wanted to have an aesthetic that moved beyond street clothes with fantasy elements and that we both wanted to see cohesive designs that emphasized the "otherness" of the fantasy character. I moved forward with how to put together elf ears, demon horns, bat wings, and turning a scrawny man into a hulk of a Hell-bred. No sweat, right?



*The beginning of the positive form that  
would create the Orcus mask*

*Photograph by Cee-Cee Swalling*





*Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Actress Regan Borucke*

We did not have the budget for full-body makeup so I began to look into how to give the Elf, She-Demon, and Hell-bred costumes that would still give them the ethereal skin tonality that comes from fantasy characters. The first solution I had was to give each character vibrantly (unnaturally) colored wigs. Having spent extensive time working with wigs at Arena Stage as a Wig Dresser, I knew my best bet would be to acquire and create wigs that had lace fronts and strong wig caps to sew into. Once those elements came into place I found a supplier for silicone ears on Etsy for the Elf and Fairy. The materials were lightweight enough and, after matching to their skin tone, I was able to place the ears directly on both wigs. The utility of sewing the ears on meant they would always be placed correctly, we could execute quick changes easier, and there would be no need to apply the ears with glue to the actress' own ears. The silicon ears and horns sewn into the fantasy characters wigs were essential to establishing the fantasy characters and the natural blending into the wigs allowed for easier transitions and dressing.





*Photograph by Cee-Cee Swalling*

Amongst the larger concerns for the fantasy characters were our dancing cheerleader succubi. The script describes the characters as having bat-type wings and I sought to find a solution that would allow the actresses to perform their cheerleading routine while the wings both stay in place and move around them without throwing off their center of gravity. Thankfully, with helpful suggestions from my advisor and implementing techniques taught during a wireframe workshop with Prof. Lieder, we were able to come up with a seemingly low-tech solution that appeared high-tech. Measuring out the general shape on butcher paper, I created a mock-up of the size and width of the wings. Once I received approval and director buy-in, I began to use piano wire to work out the shape of the wings and then connected them together by cutting out strips of black stretch vinyl and wrapping them together.





I cut the shape of the wings out of the same stretch vinyl and hand sewed the fabric to the frame. Originally, we wanted to add snaps to the wings to be able to fasten and unfasten them to the outer cheerleader shirt , but we found the choreography was too vigorous to let that happen. Instead, the wings were sewn directly to the Cheerleading shell since the actresses were provided an under cheerleading top that could be laundered and this created the best, most stable solution.

*Photograph by Michael C. Bailey*





With the wings under control, wigs donned, I addressed the matter of horns for both the succubi and Orcus. I had originally hoped to source these items, but as the budget dwindled I took inventory of what could be completed in-house. In conjunction with my costume crafts graduate coursework I began to work with Prof. Linton on what final techniques could get our costumes to a realistic place. I found several sheets of Wonderflex (a thermoplastic that, when heated, can be molded into any shape) in stock and I researched on YouTube how to work with the material to apply it for the purposes of the play. Employing what I learned on YouTube, I created two foil molds that would be used as a positive form for my wonder flex to be molded around.





I found that, once the horns were formed, the material stuck to the aluminum foil and became difficult to pull out of the bottom of the costume horns. I wrapped the molds in duct tape and added duct tape handles to the bottom that would allow the molds to be pulled out easier. Once formed and removed from the mold, I used hot glue to create ridges around the horns and covered in tissue paper and glue to close off the pores of the thermoplastic to give a smooth surface to paint the horns. With the horns covered, painted, and distressed, I drilled holes into the bottom which would allow me to sew the horns directly on to the wigs without having to constantly worry about placement as well as eliminate any further elements to quick changes.



Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling





*Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling*

Orcus' character received the same wig and horn treatment as the succubi and She-Demon, and I set to work creating a look for him that would make him look like a giant red beast. The script calls for a thin, nerdy character (seen above and to the right) to turn around and play a 7-foot-tall Demi-god. Knowing what our end goal was, I used what resources I knew I had in the costume shop to build his costume up and off of his body to create a larger-than-life character.



*Photograph by Michael C. Bailey*

*Actor Reed Foster*





Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling

Beyond the wig and horns, I turned to professional friends, Tory DePew (Assistant Professor at University of Central Missouri) and Erik Teague, (Costume Designer, Washington, DC), who had created in their work ornate, leather masks for horned demons. Using their work as inspiration I first created a temporary mold of what I wanted for the Hell-bred mask and, with the help of our Properties Master, Sam Flippo, created a negative mold using a vacuu-form machine ( a machine that heats up a very thin piece of plastic, and using suction wraps the plastic around it). Having created this mold, I then used it to create a positive mold in Plaster of Paris. It was important for me to have an extremely solid mold as I was going to be stretching wet leather over it and leaving it to dry so that it would take on that shape.





Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling



With the mask formed, I cut out the jowls allowing enough space around the mouth for breathing and speaking, painting on shadows and contours that would play up the hellish looks.





The bulk of Orcus became about adding elements that would beef up his chest and body. I found a pair of Frankenstein Monster boots that would add six inches to the actor's height and found football padding that would be the base layer of his fantasy form. Using the information we had learned in our Leather workshop Katherine Stefl, (MFA Costume Design Graduate student Draper) began to create a tunic form made of leather to fit over top of the football padding to cover the actor's upper body and create a seamless look to bulk him out at the same time. With warrior drapes, oversized pants tucked into the pants, the additional six inches of shoe, the twelve inches of hair, and eighteen inches of horns, the look transformed our scrawny teenager into a hulking beast of a demon.

*Photograph by Michael C. Bailey*  
*Orcus portrayed by Actor Reed Foster*



# CHAPTER FIVE: THE FAIRY-EST OF THEM ALL

In our design meetings, Prof. Kubik and I were clear that we wanted the costumes to be high-functioning as well as extremely detailed. With the idea of “Fantastical realism” in mind, I began to design and aim for fairy wings that were sturdy, functional, and visually appealing. I also hoped to create them to be as light in weight as I could make them to facilitate ease of motion in the fight scenes. I aimed to create the fairy wings differently from the succubi because I wanted the overall look to emulate real-life dragonfly wings, a look that would be more difficult to accomplish with piano wire and fabric.



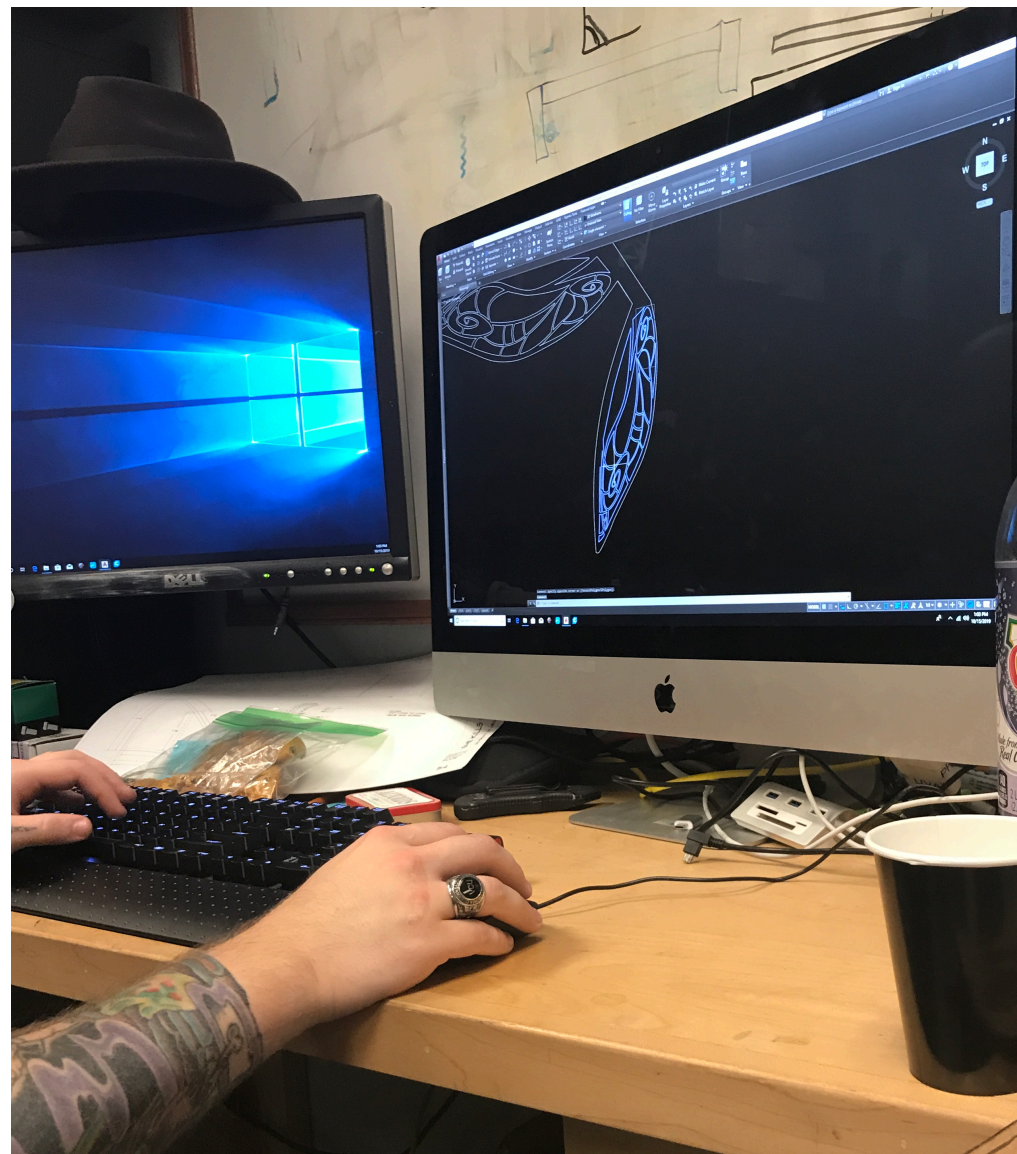
*Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Actress Hannah Han*





I started the process of fabricating the wing by creating a cardboard mock-up of the wing and adjusting the size and span on my actress. I took the mock-up to our MFA Technical Direction Graduate Student, Jaime Nicholas, who helped me digitally draft a pattern of the the wing into AutoCAD (a computer program specifically for creating digital patterns of life-size pieces) and adjust the size and dimensions according to the mock-up.



*Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling*

*Left: Actress Hannah Han*

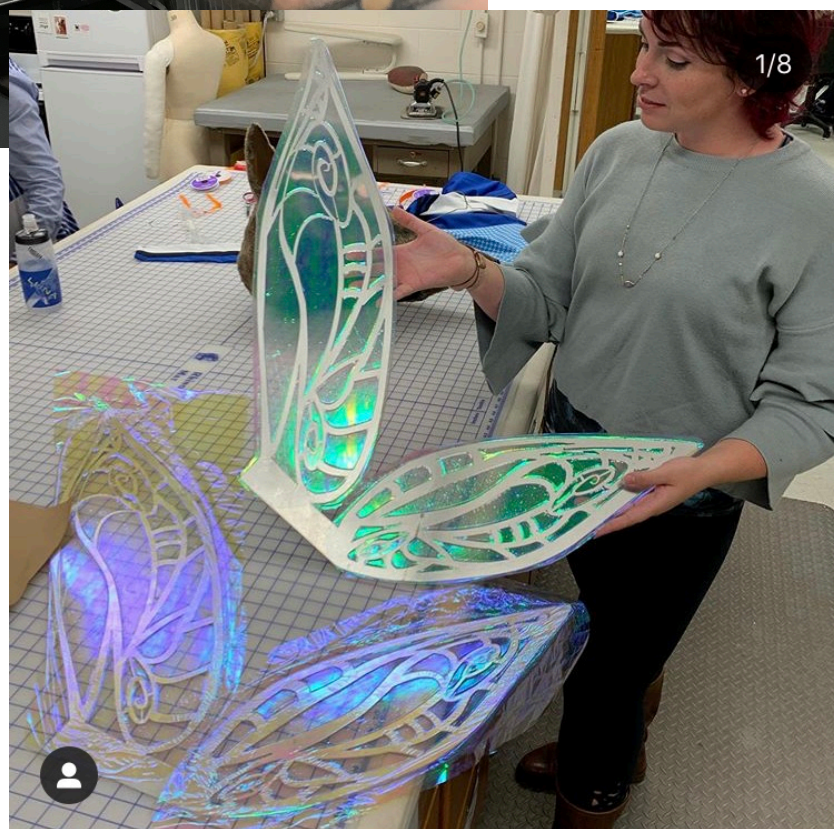
*Right: Jamie Nicholas drafts the wings in AutoCAD*





Above: Technical Director  
Chris Rybitski and MFA  
Technical Direction Graduate  
Student Jamie Nicholas  
Inspect the cut aluminum  
form

Photo by Cee-Cee Swalling



We sent the file over to our Plasma CNC router where we fabricated the wing out of a thin aluminum sheet, which allowed for durability, flexibility, and lightness. Next up was sanding down the wings to make sure all rough edges from the CNC router were safe for handling. I covered the wings in translucent iron-on vinyl and iridescent cellophane, both to create the appropriate look for the wings as well as to safely cover the aluminum edges. I used a heat gun and rubber heat gloves to adhere the two materials together and to make sure the seal was finished off smoothly without any bubbles or ripples. In the final fitting we assessed the movement of the wings. The two separate wings were routed together on a single rectangular piece of aluminum that was bent into a clip shape to fit snugly down the actress' leather bodice.

Left: Costume Designer Cee-Cee Swalling  
shows off wings prior to completion

Photo by Jack Dunkenberger





*Photograph by Cee-Cee Swalling*  
*Actress Hannah Han*

We wanted to steer away from straps to allow full range of motion for her fight scenes. After testing the movement, we added one single leather belt to anchor the wings around her waist and provide some much needed stability. The wings gave us exactly the look we wanted- the wings were light, durable, and flexible. They allowed for full-range of motion on my actress and gave us a look that was extremely detailed, unique, and “fantastically realistic”!



*Photograph by Greg Harris*  
*Actress Hannah Han*





Photography by Greg Harris  
Fairy portrayed by Actress Hannah Han



# CHAPTER SIX: WERE-RATS? THERE RATS

If this fantasy show wasn't technical enough, the final challenge I was presented with during the design process was to create a fantasy creature called the "Wererat" a creature which, as you can tell by the name, is part rodent, part werewolf. Ultimately, we were looking to create a bipedal monster with a Rat head, which also needed to perform in an intensely difficult choreographed fight scene in costume...naturally.

To say I was flummoxed on how to begin this project was in understatement.



Digital Rendering by Cee-Cee Swalling





Fan Art courtesy of Deviant Art

After some experience making headdresses in my course study and at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA felt sure the one way to implement these Wererat heads would be to mount them on something lightweight that could be adjustable. Over the summer at the American Shakespeare Center I had worked with designer Murrell Horton on *Antony & Cleopatra* and we had used the bases of hard hats in order to mount our headdresses. In working with Prof. Linton we decided after some research on costs that our best solution would be styrofoam bike helmets, which would keep the weight of the headdress down and give us an adjustable under the chin strap. I then set to problem-solving the overall shape of the head. For a children's production of *Midsummer's Night Dream*, I had found and used a template from Etsy to create large shaped heads through geometric paper folding. We found a shape that we liked, printed it out, and then began mocking it out of card stock in order to give us an overall shape to make out of foam.



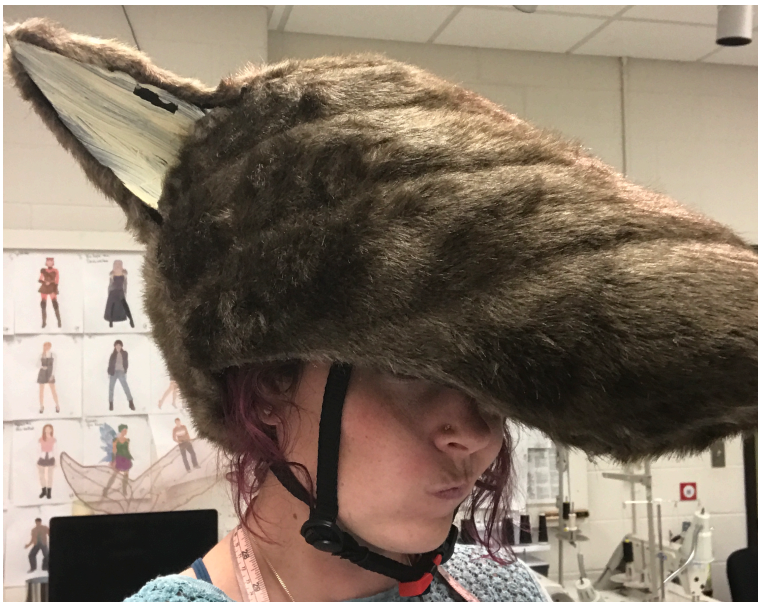


Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling



Using EVA cosplay craft foam we began to make the shapes of the rat skulls by first creating a circular base to cover the back and then creating the front cone-shaped snout. Using Barge (a contact cement glue) we shaved down the joins of each piece so they would become flush with each other and then let them sit overnight to allow the glue to set fully. Once the pieces were cut, glued, and assembled I then began sealing the foam off with Sculpt or Coat which would then seal the pores of the foam allowing us to paint it and glue fur to it without the glue seeping through.





Photography by Cee-Cee Swalling

I found an awesome fake fur in stock that would suit our purposes and then set to trimming it down with electric trimmers to give the rats a mangle less Nutcracker-Rat look. Once trimmed down I then set to painting contours and shadows to give the rats a creepier and scarier vibe. With the help of our MFA Scenic Design Graduate student and Puppet Designer for the show, Jessica Burnam, we then created gnarly teeth out of foam, painted them, and affixed them with expanding insulating foam. Once that was completed we painted the foam to look like gums and then covered them with fur which gave the cone-like face a little more jaw emphasis.





*Photograph by Cee-Cee Swalling*  
*Actress Natalie Pendee*



*Photograph by Greg Harris*  
*Actress Hannah Han*

The overall effect, added with the costume and stage lighting created the exact frightening creature we were going for. The lightness of the helmets and foam gave the actors full mobility plus the added bonus of having full vision, including peripherally. Having now made such an elaborate headdress out of such lightweight materials, I would be hard-pressed to create them in any other way!



# CHAPTER SEVEN: THIS IS THE END

**W**hile there were a lot of challenges we anticipated there were even more we hadn't.

Some of the elements we spent the most time on, such as the Wererats, spent so little time on stage it makes you wonder if they were worth the man

hours spent, even though the quality of the costumes were high and ultimately forced me to grow as a designer and technologist. If I were to ever approach the material again, I would love to expand or create new looks for the characters. I think there is a lot more to explore especially with the She-Demon and Dark Elf. The success of the design thrived in my ability to incorporate traditional costume practices in new ways (like the wire-frame succubi wings) or and explore new technologies such as implementing the CNC Router to fabricate lightweight fairy wings. But it was only through planning the costume design, technology, direction, and choreography together that allowed all of the elements to merge cohesively and create a dynamic show that looked as realistically fantastical as it felt.



*Photograph by Michael C. Bailey*

*Actress Karen Zipor*