

Victoria McNally

Brooklyn, NY | vamcnally@gmail.com | 908-723-4659

Writing Samples

1. [Are awards shows like the Emmys meaningless?](#) - Talker, 2022
Although the bulk of my work with 72Point was geared towards client projects, occasionally we would produce evergreen data-driven articles based on current events for the company's public facing site, Talker.
2. [Are you the sore loser? Study finds how well Americans get along on game night](#) - SWNS, 2021
A more traditional example of the writing I typically did for 72Point, this news copy was based on a primary market research survey sponsored by Z-Man Games, who served as the brand partner for this project.
3. [How Reactive Packaging Can Give Your Brand An Edge](#) - Suzy, 2019
As Content Writer, I leveraged consumer insights gained from the Suzy platform to write articles like this one, and also edited submissions from a service of freelance writers.
4. [Your Guide to Queer Identity and Metaphor in Star Trek](#) - Startrek.com, 2019
A long, in-depth article written for the branded website's Pride Month content calendar, featuring secondary research from all over the web.
5. [8 Things We Learned From The Black Panther Set](#) - Nerdist, 2018
A recap of a set visit I was invited on for the original "Black Panther" film, incorporating quotes from group interviews and details from my own notes during the event.
6. [Compass Points: Nikki Finch Soars in SECRET WEAPONS #0!](#) - Valiant Entertainment, 2018
At the end of every Valiant Comic issue is a brief editorial spread letting fans and readers know about upcoming projects, promotions, and other news. One of my duties at Valiant Entertainment was to lead the creation of these pages.

Are awards shows like the Emmys meaningless?

Published to [Talker.news](#) on September 7, 2022.

Unimpressed by the sight of rich celebrities patting each other on the back for doing their jobs well? You're not alone.

According to new research, 42% of Americans agree that entertainment awards shows are "meaningless."

The survey of 1,000 people, conducted by OnePoll, found that just 34% plan to watch the upcoming 74th Primetime Emmy Awards on September 12.

This despite the fact that 61% have reportedly watched the Emmys at least "sometimes" in the past, pointing to a potential decline in the glitzy event's popularity,

Unsurprisingly, those who claim to watch no TV at all are the least interested in the Emmys, with 93% of those expressing that attitude.

However, more than half (53%) of those who watch the most TV — 15 or more hours weekly — weren't interested in it, either.

When asked to pick winners for the night's two main awards, Outstanding Drama Series and Outstanding Comedy Series, the most popular choice for both was "no preference" (33% and 34%, respectively).

Following that, the Korean phenomenon "Squid Game" (17%) and "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" (15%) both stood out as the second-most chosen options.

This overall lack of interest may explain why four in 10 respondents (44%) believe the Television Academy is out of touch with what the average TV fan likes to watch, and why a similar number (43%) think they could do a better job picking the major Emmy nominees.

The sheer volume of available content may also be a contributing factor, as the average respondents already has eight shows on their to-watch list.

Respondents also struggled to name this year's nominated performers, especially by which characters they played.

From a list of names, only four actors were identified by more than 10% of the panel — most notably “Squid Game” star Lee Jung-Jae, who plays Seong Gi-hun, and Winona Ryder, a.k.a. Joyce Byers on “Stranger Things”

When shown photos of the celebrities, respondents fared a little better.

One-third correctly identified Sandra Oh as the star of “Killing Eve,” while “Euphoria” star Sydney Sweeney (29%) and “Atlanta” creator Donald Glover (21%) were also easy for the panel to recognize.

On the other end of the spectrum, Nicholas Braun, who plays the hapless Cousin Greg on HBO’s “Succession”, was the least identifiable (7%) by respondents.

Survey methodology:

This random double-opt-in survey of 1,000 General Population Americans was commissioned by OnePoll between July 18 and 20, 2022. It was conducted by market research company OnePoll, whose team members are members of the Market Research Society and have corporate membership to the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR).

Are you the sore loser? Study finds how well Americans get along on game night

Published to [SWNS Media Group news wire](#) on September 6, 2021

One in five people have banned a board game for causing problems on Game Night, new research suggests.

And out of those who've brought down the banhammer, it's Monopoly that stands out as the most debated — and most forbidden — board game of all time.

In a recent survey of 2,000 U.S. residents, 20% say that their game nights with friends or family members are often or always disrupted by competitive or unfriendly behavior.

Commonly cited antics included someone quitting because they were losing (46%), someone accusing another player of cheating (44%), and two or more players getting into an argument (44%).

Thankfully, according to data reported by OnePoll on behalf of Z-Man Games, only 11% of respondents said they've witnessed a physical fight break out.

Still, these occurrences have consequences; not only have 22% banned certain games, but another 22% have had to ban a particular player from their game night.,

Thirteen percent even confessed that they themselves are the problem player "every time" or "most of the time."

Age may have an impact, as boomers aged 57 and older were far more likely to say they're "never" the problem (71%) compared to Gen Xers aged 41 to 56 (57%), Millennials aged 25-40 (38%), and Gen Zers aged 18-24 (24%).

On the other hand, younger gamers were more likely to report having banned a player in the past — 32% of Gen Z and 24% of millennials compared to 11% of Gen X and 5% of Boomers.

This may be in part because Gen Z respondents were also more likely to prefer games where they work with a team against other teams (38%), particularly compared to Boomers, who prefer to compete on their own against other players (48%).

"Competition brings out the best in some people but the worst in others," said Justin Kempainen, Director of Brand Management at Z-Man Games. "This can manifest in

small ways, like low-level grumping and sulking while playing, but it can blow up into shouting and strife, which can ruin a gaming experience. Looking beyond just competitive games could be better for your gaming group to avoid conflict.”

Despite the rise of social distancing, many game enthusiasts are finding creative ways to get together remotely, leading to only a 13% decrease in game nights last year compared to the previous average.

While many respondents agreed that in-person games are much more “intense” (52%) and “competitive” (42%) than remote ones, four in ten describe remote games as more “relaxed.”

In fact, half (50%) said that remote games are either just as or more fun than in-person ones.

And although winning is an important reason for playing games for 41% of respondents, only 29% are actively concerned with “beating everyone else.”

“Being on the same team and battling against a common foe in a cooperative game can create a sense of shared triumph during a victory or shared mourning in defeat,” Kempainen added. “Better yet, any negative emotions get directed toward inanimate cardboard instead of people!”

But for three-fourths (75%) of people, winning isn’t nearly as important as the No. 1 reason for playing games: having fun.

TOP TEN MOST POPULAR TABLETOP GAMES

1. Board games (i.e. Monopoly) - 86%
2. Card games (i.e. Poker) - 80%
3. Dice games (i.e. Yahtzee) - 58%
4. Party games (i.e. Charades) - 51%
5. Knowledge or pub quiz (i.e. Trivial Pursuit) - 47%
6. Strategy games (i.e. Settlers of Catan) - 35%
7. Tile games (i.e. Mah-jong) - 33%
8. Role-playing games (i.e. Dungeons and Dragons) - 29%
9. Pen and paper games (i.e. Hangman) - 28%
10. Miniature games (i.e. Warhammer) - 15%

TOP FIVE MOST-FREQUENTLY BANNED GAMES

1. Monopoly - 44%
2. Uno - 37%
3. Sorry! - 27%
4. Scrabble - 25%
5. Jenga - 24%

How Reactive Packaging Can Give Your Brand An Edge

Published to [the Suzy Blog](#) in 2019

The odds are pretty good that at least one out of every ten products you see in an average supermarket has a picture of a superhero, "Star Wars" character, or other popular pop culture icon plastered on the front. Many of those promotional images are the result of strategic partnerships between the entertainment industry and other business verticals, and are planned out far in advance of when these TV shows and movies are typically released.

However, our culture moves much faster than it did even ten years ago; these days, a viral meme can rise and fall over the course of a single 24-hour period. There now exists a unique opportunity for brands to capitalize on organic, unscripted connections between products and consumers – and to do that, they need to act fast and utilize the right tools to find out which trends are worth pursuing.

- When football superstar Marshawn "Beast Mode" Lynch was filmed eating Skittles on the sidelines of a 2011 Seattle Seahawks game, his lifelong love for the candy became a viral phenomenon. Identifying an opportunity to capitalize on the sensation, the Wrigley Company made two limited-edition packs – the "Seattle Mix" in 2014. and "Marshawn's Pack" in 2018 – and produced a Skittles-specific "press conference" with the notoriously tight-lipped Lynch. The good publicity ultimately generated a 19.2% increase in sales following the 2015 Super Bowl.
- If you've ever heard a man referred to as a "Human Dorito," you have the Avengers fandom to thank for it. Shortly after the release of "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" (2014), fans online began using the term to describe the triangular, athletic physique of actor Chris Evans. So when Frito Lay collaborated with Marvel on "Avengers: Age of Ultron"-branded Doritos in 2015, you can bet they made sure Captain America was prominently featured on a bag – which all but guaranteed that someone in the press (specifically, MTV News) would get footage of Evans himself eating them.
- No one involved with "Stranger Things" expected the supernatural series to be such an overnight success – least of all Kellogg's, which permitted the production to use Eggo Waffles prominently in the first season. After the show exploded, Eggo found clever ways to leverage their newfound spotlight, including offering free downloadable replicas of their '80s package design for cosplayers online (and, presumably, for nostalgic food packaging enthusiasts). Altogether, their

efforts reportedly earned them over \$200k in paid media value, and sales rise noticeably every time a new season premieres.

It's clear that understanding how your brand fits into the larger culture is more than just a clever internet marketing ploy – it can translate to real, tangible growth for your company.

But is it truly worth diverting your attention from the day-to-day marketing strategies you need to implement for your business, and risking potential backlash if you miss the mark?

Just how interested are consumers in packaging that reflects trending cultural conversations, and can packaging enable brands to keep pace with the speed of culture?

What We Found

We tapped into Suzy's panel of one million consumers and asked 500 of them what they thought about the intersection of product packaging design and pop culture.

On average, 60% of the men and women we surveyed said that they approve of brands that make references when selling their products, compared to only 4% who disapproved. (The rest were neutral).

What do you generally think of brands that demonstrate knowledge of pop culture, news, and other trends when marketing their products?

- I strongly approve - 30%
- I slightly approve - 30%
- I feel neutral - 37%
- I slightly disapprove - 3%
- I strongly disapprove - 1%

As to be expected, most people like to imagine that they aren't susceptible to marketing gimmicks, so a plurality of our survey-takers said that packages with references on them didn't make a difference to them. However, about 7% more people said they felt inclined to buy them than people who said they wouldn't.

When faced with a choice between a normal package design and one that features a timely reference to something you already enjoy (ie: a TV show, movie, athlete, meme, etc), which are you more likely to buy?

- I'd buy the package with the reference on it - 31%
- I'd buy the regular package - 24%
- It doesn't make a difference to me - 40%
- I'm not sure - 5%

Next, we asked our panel what types of trend-makers are most likely to catch their eye. Not surprisingly, the entertainment industry came out on top – but just underneath them at 21% was internet personalities like YouTubers, Twitch streamers, bloggers, and other online influencers,

Which of the following do you think has the most impact on what you choose to buy?

- Entertainment (fictional characters, actors, comedians, directors, writers, etc.) - 26%
- Internet personalities (YouTubers, podcasters, bloggers, etc.) - 21%
- Sports (athletes, commentators, coaches, etc.) - 13%
- Musicians (rappers, pop stars, producers, etc.) - 10%
- None of the above - 31

Finally, just for fun, we wanted to see what cultural trends people are currently excited about and asked everyone to pick their favorite three from a list. It makes a lot of sense that “Avengers” and “Game of Thrones” ranked pretty high. More interestingly, “Stranger Things” – and “Fortnite,” which became one of the world's biggest gaming brands in 2018 (and which currently has its own “Avengers” tie-in going on) – didn't register all that much in comparison.

Which current or upcoming cultural trend appeals the most to you right now?

- “Avengers: Endgame” - 51%
- “Game of Thrones Season 8” - 39%
- “Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker” - 24%
- “Stranger Things” Season 3 - 21%
- “It: Chapter 2” - 12%
- “Fortnite” - 12%
- NBA Playoffs - 11%
- “Beyoncé's Homecoming” - 9%
- The regular MLB Season - 9%
- The first live-action “Pokémon” Movie - 8%
- NHL Playoffs - 7%
- K-Pop tours in the United States - 4%

Suzy™ Says

Business owners need every advantage they can get in the competitive world of agile marketing, and making sure you know what your potential customers care about beyond your industry is a great way not just to seem relevant and exciting, but to get your product out in front of them. However, ultimately the best method is to capitalize on trends just as they're really blooming, or maybe even before they start. Creating a "Stranger Things" or "Fortnite"-related package design, for example, just isn't going to have the same effect on consumers as it would have when both properties were first making headlines.

Of course, not every company has the cash to react quickly to memes, which is why it's so important for businesses to get smarter about how they find and identify gestating trends before they become fully-grown phenomena. That's where Suzy can help connect you directly to your target audience to test exactly what they're thinking about, and how they might react to the next big thing.

Your Guide to Queer Identity and Metaphor in Star Trek

Published to Startrek.com on June 20, 2019 [Reposted in 2020]

Star Trek has always been positioned as a franchise that celebrates humanity's potential for tolerance and understanding. In many ways, it has succeeded in that ideal – *The Original Series* was groundbreaking for its portrayal of people from all different walks of life coming together to explore the stars, and subsequent series have followed suit over the years.

However, like all science fiction, *Trek* wasn't handed down to us by an enlightened galactic benefactor; it was created by contemporary people who had their own hangups and prejudices to unpack. Even Gene Roddenberry had to publicly acknowledge the ways in which he had to evolve his thinking over the course of creating the series, especially concerning the LGBT community. "My attitude toward homosexuality has changed," he told *The Humanist* in 1991. "I came to the conclusion that I was wrong [...] I gave the impression of being thoughtless in these areas. I have, over many years, changed my attitude about gay men and women."

Despite Roddenberry's own admission of bias, the franchise did not immediately go out of its way to correct itself where this type of representation was concerned. Even after his death, it took another 28 years for the first gay character to appear in *Star Trek's* television series (although yes, novel tie-ins, comics, fan works, and other non-canonical media featured a markedly improved number of LGBT Starfleet officers). Instead, queer identity was mostly relegated to the world of metaphor, rumor, and interpretation — often from fans and activists who desperately wanted to see themselves in Starfleet.

Star Trek: The Original Series

Given that the first openly gay recurring character on television wouldn't appear until the comedy *Soap* in 1977 (and played by Billy Crystal, so not exactly a nuanced character for most people. Of course, much of what *Star Trek* did to highlight actors and characters of different ethnic backgrounds would have been pretty far-fetched for many television audiences of the time, too – so what made gay stories different at the time?

Actor George Takei, who himself publicly came out in 2006, often shares the story of speaking with Roddenberry "theoretically" about the prospect of discussing LGBT rights on the show. However, he was told that the timing wasn't right. "All I need is another firestorm and this show will be canceled, and I won't be able to make those statements

that I've been making with the show," Takei said, echoing Roddenberry's words in a 2011 Salon interview

In a 2015 video for Big Think, Takei elaborated on this story, implying that it happened at some point after the airing of "Plato's Stepchildren":

"In one episode we had a biracial kiss; Captain Kirk and Uhura had a kiss. That show was literally blacked out in the south. Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia didn't air that; our ratings plummeted. It was the lowest-rated episode that we had. And [Roddenberry] said, 'I'm treading a fine tight wire here. I'm dealing with issues of the time. I'm dealing with the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and I need to be able to make that statement by staying on the air.'"

Of course, anybody who's spent any amount of time on the Internet knows that what a television show canonically chooses to represent on screen and what the audience takes away from it can be very different. *Star Trek* fans, who in many ways pioneered much of what we now consider to be modern fandom, are certainly no exception. Early enthusiasts with access to typewriters and Xerox machines would distribute self-published *Star Trek* zines to mailing lists around the country, writing their own stories with the characters and using TV film clips and old newspaper clippings to create screen-accurate fanart. Some wrote their own "drawerfics," which were only meant to be privately shared among friends, but were sometimes spread far and wide against the author's wishes anyway.

One of the best known *Star Trek* drawer fics-turned-viral-sensations, 1968's *The Ring of Soshern*, imagines a scenario (complete with romantic illustrations) where a stranded Kirk and Spock must engage in the Ponn Farr mating ritual to save the Vulcan's life, and quickly realize that they've actually been in 'capital L' Love with each other this whole time and didn't know it. Eventually the term "slash" – coined for the virgule mark in between K/S, or Kirk/Spock – became synonymous with erotic same-gender fanfiction, not just in *Star Trek* but across other fandoms (like *Starsky/Hutch*, which, I swear to you, was 100% a real pairing people shipped in the '70s.)

Many readers were scandalized by this type of content, claiming that making K/S publicly available would invite Paramount to censor them and destroy the fandom from within (which, according to Judith Gran's K/S essay, "Censored," was a concern in both the original '70s fandom and the Internet age). But still others were inspired – enough that Kirk and Spock's enduring connection to one another has remained a potent symbol of homosexual love for *Trek* fans.

Star Trek: The Next Generation

During a 20th anniversary convention in 1986, show creator Gene Roddenberry was asked by a founding member of a Boston LGBT science fiction group (called, charmingly, the Gaylaxian Network) whether or not the recently announced *The Next Generation* would introduce gay characters to Starfleet. "[The fan] made the point that *Star Trek* had been a leader in bringing Black and Asian characters to television, that this was the next step," writer David Gerrold told Salon in 2001. "Gene agreed. He said, 'Sooner or later, we'll have to address the issue. We should probably have a gay character.'"

That same year, Gerrold (who's best known for writing the *TOS* episode "The Trouble With Tribbles") began working on a script which revolved around two gay characters becoming afflicted by an incurable, intergalactic blood disease that mirrored the spread of HIV. He hoped the story would raise awareness of the then-ongoing AIDS crisis, and even inspire *Star Trek* fans to donate their own blood to benefit real-life victims. However, the now-infamous episode, "Blood and Fire," was never made (save for a fan-made reworking that was produced in 2007 with Gerrold's blessing), and Gerrold quit the show in protest.

Despite this, Roddenberry still seemed committed to making good on his promise to the Gaylaxians, who by 1990 had begun a letter-writing petition (spurred partly by Gerrold's stories of his episode's demise at various convention appearances). In a letter to *The Advocate*, Roddenberry wrote that "in the fifth season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, viewers will see more of shipboard life in some episodes, which will, among other things, include gay crew members in day-to-day circumstances." Unfortunately, Roddenberry died unexpectedly in October 1991, and the day-to-day circumstances he envisioned never materialized.

While the show never explicitly made mention of sexual orientation, it did begin to play around with themes of shifting gender. In the Season 3 episode, "The Offspring," Data creates his own artificially intelligent child and allows her to select her own race and gender presentation; Season 4's "The Host," introduces the parasitic Trill, who have no gender of their own and who take on the pronouns and gender identity of their hosts instead (and who are effectively pansexual as a result).

The most obvious allegorical LGBT messaging of the series appears in Season 5, in an episode called "The Outcast." While working with the J'Naii, a rigidly androgynous species, William Riker strikes up a romantic relationship with a J'Naii named Soren, who

publicly identifies herself as female and seeks asylum from her people. Despite the oddness of a metaphor for gay rights that involves what is ostensibly a heteronormative couple at the center, Soren's story is still the closest that '90s *Star Trek* ever came to addressing issues and themes specific to the LGBT rights movement, particularly the idea of conversion therapy. The National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, an organization that still promotes this harmful practice, was founded that same year in 1992.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

Deep Space Nine is widely regarded among fans to be the most subtextually queer version of life in Starfleet – so much so that it definitely deserves its own, more thorough exploration. Part of that comes from the inclusion of Dax, a Trill officer whose previous host was Commander Benjamin Sisko's elderly male mentor and who takes on different female forms over the course of the series. As Jadzia, Dax engages in the first same-gender kiss on *Star Trek* in "Rejoined," after reconnecting with the wife of a former host. When new host Ezri is introduced in Season 7, her mirror universe counterpart is implied not to have any interest in relationships with men at all in "The Emperor's New Cloak" – instead she seeks out both the Intendant and a Mirror version of Leeta, and the two are later portrayed as spouses in a non-canonical tie-in novel, *Rise Like Lions*.

These days, however, the creators of *Deep Space Nine* freely acknowledge that they could have done more to elevate LGBT representation – not with Dax, but with the Cardassian spy-turned-tailor, Garak, who actor Andrew Robinson deliberately played as being much more than platonically interested in Doctor Julian Bashir.

"I wish we could have done a little more with the Garak character," showrunner Ira Steven Behr told Comicbook.com in an interview while promoting his documentary *What We Left Behind: Looking Back at Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. "I talk about it in the doc. I mean, he was clearly gay or queer or however you want to say it. I think I would have loved to have taken that and seen where that went and how that affected his relationship with Bashir."

Star Trek: First Contact

According to fan rumors, early drafts of the screenplay for *Star Trek: First Contact* made some mention of a minor character, Lieutenant Hawk, being gay, which was quickly denied by producer Rick Berman (a supposed first draft that surfaced online refers to Hawk as a naive young Ensign, not a Lieutenant). In any case, Hawk's identity was

eventually made more overt in Section 31: Rogue, a non-canonical, prequel tie-in novel that depicts him as being romantically linked to other male Starfleet officers.

Of course, Hawk is also assimilated by the Borg and killed before First Contact ends, which dips into some unfortunate trope-filled territory for LGBT+ characters who are often treated as more expendable than straight ones.

Star Trek: Voyager

After *The Next Generation* ended in 1994, *Voyager* was both the next tentpole for the franchise and a flagship series for Paramount's brand-new TV channel, UPN. As such, the show got a lot more attention and scrutiny from fans and producers alike (which, to hear Ira Steven Behr tell it, is part of the reason *Deep Space Nine* got away with so much).

While *Voyager* never explicitly featured a gay character, there were certainly behind-the-scenes conversations about doing so. As *Voyager* writer (who would go on to create *Star Trek: Discovery* before leaving the project in 2017) Bryan Fuller told *AfterEllen.com* in 2006:

"There was a pregnant ensign – Ensign Wildman – and she was going to have gay godparents to her child," said Fuller, explaining the show's potential plotline – that never got made. But Fuller found the characters so two-dimensional that he wasn't disappointed it didn't air: "It sounds weird to say – but I was kind of glad they didn't do it the way it was written. Because it became really cliché."

In 1996, a group of science fiction writers, fans, and activists associated with the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation launched an online petition known as the "Voyager Visibility Project," which at its height gathered more than five thousand signatures from fans in every U.S. state and 26 different countries. The group even secured the support of Roddenberry's step-grandson, Richard Comton Jr., who said in a public statement: "Gene Roddenberry promised us representation on *Star Trek*, where is it? Must there be closets in the 23rd Century, too?"

As was the case with Lieutenant Hawk, the *Voyager* tie-in novels often boldly went where the show would not, albeit only with ancillary characters; Harry Kim's roommate at Starfleet Academy is portrayed as gay in *Pathways* and there are several same-gender couples depicted in passing throughout the book.

In 2002, after *Voyager* had ended, actor Kate Mulgrew spoke about having brought the issue up to Rick Berman at the time:

"I've approached [Rick] many, many times over the years about getting a gay character on the show — one whom we could really love, not just a guest star. Y'know, we had Blacks, Asians, we even had a handicapped character — and so I thought, this is now beginning to look a bit absurd. And he said, "In due time." And so, I'm suspecting that on Enterprise they will do something to this effect. I couldn't get it done on mine. And I am sorry for that."

Star Trek: Enterprise

Despite Mulgrew's suspicions, *Enterprise* didn't fare much better than *Voyager* did. Rumor had it in 2001 that Dominic Keating's character, Malcolm Reed, would be written as gay, but it never came to pass (although Keating has since made jokes about having played him that way).

Which isn't to say that *Enterprise* never played with sex and gender – it just did so in the same way that TNG before it did, veiled through metaphors and alien cultures. In "The Cogenitor," a Season 2 episode that evokes TNG's "The Outcast," Commander Charles Tucker III befriends a genderless, uneducated slave who is given to a Vissian couple to facilitate childbirth, almost like a Handmaid of Gilead. Although the episode contains no trace of a romantic connection between Tucker and "Charles" (they eventually name themselves after Tucker) like the one that Riker and Soren shared, it is notable for featuring a male performer in a role marked by subservience, marginalization, and reproductive rights.

That same season, *Enterprise* also tried its hand at an episode about HIV, as did many other Paramount-owned television productions as part of Viacom's "KNOW HIV/AIDS" PSA campaign. Of course, the visible gay representation that "Blood and Fire" episode would have given to TNG was not present here – instead, the episode, "Stigma," revolved around T'Pol contracting a degenerative Vulcan illness through a mind-meld, which at this point in *Star Trek's* timeline was considered taboo.

"How you're infected shouldn't matter," actor Scott Bakula told HIV Plus Magazine about the episode. "That's the lesson we all had to learn in this country. Here, AIDS was originally a gay disease, and certainly in the middle of the country that's how it was widely perceived and sometimes still is perceived to be. But it's an issue that affects everybody."

Star Trek: Beyond

Although the J.J. Abrams-produced *Star Trek* reboots weren't set in the same timeline as the official canon of previous series and films, they did collectively rake in upwards of \$1.2 billion at the box office, so of course the news that *Star Trek Beyond* would feature the first gay character in the franchise made national headlines. The excitement compounded further when it was revealed that the character in question was already known to fans – Hikaru Sulu, the character once played by George Takei, was depicted holding hands with a husband (played by co-screenwriter Doug Jung) and a young daughter.

"I liked the approach, which was not to make a big thing out of it, which is where I hope we are going as a species, to not politicize one's personal orientations," actor John Cho told the *Herald Sun*, noting that director Justin Lin wanted to nod to Takei's real-life struggles with acceptance and gay rights activism.

While the intentions were certainly good, reactions were mixed. For his part, Takei expressed public concerns that retroactively making his character gay did more harm to the show's legacy than good. Others wanted to see something more substantial from *Star Trek's* first gay officer than a small detail in the background of a scene – especially when actor John Cho revealed that a "welcome home" kiss was cut from the final edit. Still, for many fans who'd been waiting to see themselves represented in *Trek* for their entire lives, it was a step forward in the right direction.

Star Trek: Discovery

From the second that *Star Trek: Discovery* was first announced in 2015, it was a safe bet that the new series would finally be correcting the five-decade absence of LGBT characters in Starfleet. "Absolutely, we're having a gay character," series co-creator Bryan Fuller said at the Television Critics Association conference in 2016. "Alex Kurtzman, the straight man in the team, was telling me we would need a gay character."

Fuller departed from the series in October of that year, but the show stayed true to his word. Not long after, it was revealed actor Anthony Rapp would play the first gay *Star Trek* character in a television series, Paul Stamets, and that Wilson Cruz would play his husband, Dr. Hugh Culber. The portrayal was not without its bumps – Culber's death in Season 1 caused an uproar among fans, although he did eventually return – their love for one another has remained an integral element of the series from the very first episode of *Discovery*.

Possibly even more noteworthy than the appearance of queer characters, though, is how casually the show now treats their existence in the 22nd century. Wilson Cruz may have technically missed the boat on being the first gay man in *Star Trek*, but he is the first person to say the word out loud on the show – an incredulous “You do know he’s gay, right?” at Mirror Georgiou when she attempts to flirt with Stamets in front of him. “Don’t be so binary,” she shoots back.

In 1966 when *Star Trek* first aired, that conversation would have been inconceivable. Now, in 2019, it’s expected. Hopefully, Trek can continue to boldly push pop culture in more forward-thinking ways for even more decades to come – but with a more condensed timeline.

8 Things We Learned From The Black Panther Set

Published to [Nerdist](#) on January 24, 2018

Way back in 2014, when Marvel Studios first announced that its plans for Phase 3 included a film starring the first-ever black superhero in comics, *Black Panther*, fans were ecstatic. When the hero arrived on the scene in *Captain America: Civil War*, he completely stole the show. Now, at long last, Wakanda's gates will be open to outsiders for the very first time when Black Panther hits theaters on February 16.

In February 2016, Nerdist was invited to Screen Gems Studios in Atlanta, where the cast and crew of *Black Panther* was hard at work at a pivotal action scene featuring T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o), Everett Ross (Martin Freeman), Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis), and Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) In between takes, the actors were able to sit down with us and share some of the secrets behind what's shaping up to be the biggest MCU movie of all time.

At the start of the film, T'Challa is still in mourning for his father.

Black Panther may not have been the title character of *Captain America: Civil War*, but a lot sure happened to him anyway. His father, the King of Wakanda, was killed; he joined a giant Avengers airport brawl to hunt down who he thought was the killer; and then, when faced with the actual culprit, he ultimately chose not to pursue vengeance.

Now, T'Challa must return to his homeland, where he's not going to be able to solve his problems with only his vibranium claws. "It's shortly after *Civil War* has ended so he's still mourning. There's unrest in Wakanda," Boseman said. "So what he's dealing with, his being the king, is making the transition to filling the footsteps of his father. So it's probably going to feel like it's more about the political unrest than the superhero [stuff] initially."

Of course, he won't be completely out of his element. "He's been prepared for it his whole life. He's groomed, so to speak," Boseman said. "Like if his father had decided that he was going to step down, 'I'm too old, I can't do it anymore,' then that would be a different scenario. But because he died in the last movie, I think the transition has to do with that mourning process."

The action sequences are going to be especially intense.

While *Black Panther* will focus heavily on political drama, it certainly won't skimp on the action either – and director Ryan Coogler, who cut his teeth on the boxing scenes in *Creed*, approaches these kinds of scenes in a very particular way.

“I think one of Ryan's strengths is that he always finds the real moments, even in the sci-fi or larger-than-life atmosphere and environment. When it comes to boxing, he wanted real hits. He wanted it to look like if it was a brawl, it was gonna be a brawl, you know? We really took our time with each punch; each punch represented a different line. So in a sense, we're having a scene and dialogue within the fight. That was something that I found very interesting with that attention to detail,” Michael B. Jordan, who worked with Coogler on *Creed*, said.

With this film, “it's a different approach cuz there are a lot of weapons and you're also using a lot of hand-to-hand combat and stuff like that, so there's a lot more action, so to speak,” Jordan added. “Just trying to find the realness in the larger-than-life Marvel universe. I think that's something he's definitely striving for.”

“Ryan is an incredibly collaborative director, and he's very responsive to our needs, our suggestions. So it really feels like team work when we are all on set,” Lupita Nyong'o pointed out. “He has the mind of a fighter in a way that I really need. Because sometimes I'm like ‘I don't know what a fighter would do?’ So to have someone who has that instinct has been very very helpful. “

Expect Shuri to be a total standout.

It's amazing to think that at the time of this set visit, Letitia Wright's role as Shuri, the younger sister of T'Challa, hadn't even been announced yet. Now, with only a month to go before the film's release, young girls are already sharing their cosplay of her on social media – and that admiration is only going to get more intense once everyone gets to know Shuri better.

A 16 year old girl “who's smarter than Tony Stark,” (at least according to producer Nate Moore) Shuri leads the Wakandan Design Group and, as we learned in the trailer, is responsible for upgrading the Black Panther's suit. Her presence also adds an interesting dynamic to the Wakandan Royal Family that's rare in the MCU – that of the kid sibling. “It's not very often that you see a superhero with a little sister,” Chadwick Boseman noted. “It's not unheard of, but it's an unusual thing, so I think it brings out a different part of [T'Challa's] character.”

According to Boseman, Wright was especially good at embracing that familial bond. “A little sister can poke at you, and you’re protective of her, but she still thinks she’s your mother – all those different things,” he said. “And [Letitia] has those qualities. I think she just makes you happy as soon as you see her. Everyday she comes in you’re like, ‘Oh shoot!’ It just changed my attitude about everything.”

In fact, all the women of *Black Panther* are badassess.

But Shuri isn’t the only important woman in T’Challa’s life – he’s surrounded on all sides by strong, capable warriors and diplomats alike in the form of his mother, Ramonda, (Angela Bassett), and Wakanda’s highly-trained fighting force of Dora Milaje, led by Okoye (Danai Gurira). Lupita Nyong’o’s character, Nakia, also has a special role within the Dora Milaje that takes her outside of the country and into Nigeria; Nyong’o referred to her as a “war dog” whose job “is to spy around the world and report back to Wakanda, to keep Wakanda safe.”

In a departure from their comic origin, the Dora Milaje are not meant to be potential wives-in-training for the King – they just kick ass. “I would say that what Ryan and [co-screenwriter] Joe Robert Cole have done with this film maybe deepened our understanding of the role of women in Wakanda,” Nyong’o noted. “The women as we meet them are departures from what we know of them in the comic books.”

Michael B. Jordan agreed wholeheartedly. “[Ryan]’s always very conscious of that, and we want to be as realistic as possible, a reflection of the time, of today. And I feel like Lupita’s character definitely exuberates strength and brains and brawn. I think you get a chance to see all layers of a woman, all different sides and shapes and colors – I feel like you get a full 360 view of what a woman can do, very very much so.”

You might end up rooting for Killmonger.

In the comics, Erik Killmonger is a displaced Wakandan native who seeks revenge on T’Challa for exiling him from his homeland. Michael B. Jordan wouldn’t confirm how his version of the character might be similar or different from that base point (“I guess I’m the best representation of America?” he pondered), but did note that Killmonger’s ultimate goal might not exactly be outright villainous. “If we do our jobs the right ways, hopefully Killmonger is somebody you guys can root for, too,” Jordan said.

Indeed, it seemed like Jordan found a lot to admire about his character while getting into his head. “I feel like Killmonger is very selfless,” he said. “I feel like he’s looking at the bigger picture. I think he’s always looking at the bigger picture, since he was really

young, which is why he's a great thinker and a great strategist, 'cuz he's had time to look at the big picture and try to figure it out. And to the best of his ability, I feel like he figured out – it makes sense to him."

But does that make Killmonger a leader, or a hero? Jordan cautiously consulted with a member of the production crew before offering up this response: "He's a revolutionary."

Everett Ross is more than just the token white guy.

Black Panther has such an incredibly stacked cast that no one will blame you if you completely forgot Everett Ross (Martin Freeman) – is also going to be in this movie. Fans last saw him in *Captain America: Civil War* attempting to bring first Bucky Barnes, and then Baron Zemo, into custody (and on that note – sorry, Bucky fans, but Marvel's made it pretty clear there's no plan for a Winter Soldier cameo). In *Black Panther*, he'll be working with T'Challa to bring in Ulysses Klawe (Andy Serkis), the now one-armed arms dealer who made his first appearance in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

"I think we've all seen the idea of the goofy white guy among cool black people going, 'What the hell?' I've seen that about four billion times today, so, I don't really need to do that again," Freeman said, still in Ross's American accent. "I had early conversations with Ryan about that. Both of us were very keen that that wouldn't be the case in this, you know? He has moments of comedy, he has moments of levity and there was humor there, but that's not his purpose."

After all, Freeman noted, the guy is a CIA operative who works with superheroes. "It would be slightly incredible for him not to be good at his job and not to be competent at this position that he's at. He's good at his job. He's well traveled. He's well versed in the ways of the world. Wakanda is gonna be a surprise to him. But, in terms of meeting diplomats, kings, that's not particularly fazing to him."

Andy Serkis has the Hulk to thank for his Black Panther role.

Most of Andy Serkis's most iconic roles are done via performance capture or motion capture, so it's a rare treat to actually get to see his whole human face for once. But as Serkis admitted on the set of *Black Panther*, he's only in the movie because his studio, Imaginarium Productions, trained Mark Ruffalo and James Spader in performance capture during the production of *Age of Ultron*.

"[Director] Joss Whedon said, 'Hey, this is crazy, why don't you come and be in the show?' And I thought, 'Oh, alright, that'd be fun,'" Serkis said. "So that happened and

then, of course, when this came along, I knew that he was part of the Black Panther story. It's just really great being back."

Which isn't to say that the people at Marvel Studios didn't have *Black Panther* in mind when Serkis was developing the character. "We decided that Klaw, we would make him South African, a very strong Afrikaans, quite bullish, in a very... edging towards not being a politically correct person," he said. "It was quite a smart decision, I think. It gives him a real edge. Also, because of the relationship to Wakanda as well, a misunderstood African nation, it fits very well politically that he was of South African descent at a time when, of course, he grew up through Apartheid."

The cast knows how huge this movie is going to be.

It should be obvious that the hype for *Black Panther* is more than just talk – last week, pre-order ticket sales beat the previous MCU record held by *Captain America: Civil War* in under 24 hours. But even during filming, every member of the cast was fully aware of just how much fan expectation there is for their movie – with the exception, perhaps, of Chadwick Boseman, who intentionally keeps himself in the dark on the details ("there's a certain removal I have to have from it in order to play it," he said).

When asked which she thought was the more intense fan experience – being a part of *Star Wars* or being a part of *Black Panther* – Lupita Nyong'o didn't hesitate. "This!"

Compass Points: Nikki Finch Soars in SECRET WEAPONS #0!

Published in Valiant Comics, 2018

As SECRET WEAPONS star Nikki Finch knows, life can come at you pretty fast – one day you’re quoting Broadway musicals with your friends, the next day you’re running across rooftops while a flock of pigeons cheer you on. And this January, SECRET WEAPONS #0 will reveal exactly how Nikki got to that point and then some.

Earlier this year, Nikki and the rest of Livewire’s band of psionic misfits made their mark on the Valiant Universe in SECRET WEAPONS, which quickly became 2017’s best-selling limited series from an independent publisher. And it’s no surprise that their struggle to matter in a world that’s dismissed them as useless resonated so deeply with readers. After all, who doesn’t love rooting for the underdog? Especially when they’re so gosh darned relatable?

So it’s lucky that SECRET WEAPONS writer Eric Heisserer has crafted yet another amazing tale to share with us! On January 3rd, he’s teaming up with comics legend Adam Pollina – who’s returning to interior art for the first time in over a decade, by the way! – for an all-new standalone prequel in SECRET WEAPONS #0.

Set in the year before Amanda McKee first meets her new team of young psiots, the comic will explore how Nikki went from an ordinary high school student to a Harbinger Foundation recruit, to the badass bird-whisperer we now know and love.

But this isn’t just any run-of-the-mill origin story – it’s also loosely inspired by the viral second-a-day video challenge, which makes Nikki’s story all the more powerful to witness.

Rest assured, you will definitely want to be Nikki Finch’s best friend by the time you’re done reading (and you might even get a little choked up, too!). And who knows? If SECRET WEAPONS #0 achieves success, maybe the rest of the team will get their own moment in the spotlight, too...

‘Till Next Time,
Compass Points