

Dungeons and Dragons is one of, if not the most popular table-top roleplaying game in history. Players create fantastical characters with wondrous abilities and act out their lives in the world created by the dungeon master. In recent years, the game has seen a boom of popularity thanks to better access to materials as well as popular campaigns being streamed online like Adventure Zone or Critical Role. The beloved game has become a source of relief from societal pressures and daily responsibility as it offers everyone a chance to be a fantasy hero for a few hours a week. That aspect of the game inspired me to write a play about a party.

So why a play?

Dungeons and Dragons is inherently theatrical. The very notion of roleplaying is just a form of theatre in itself, just with much more improv. It's live storytelling, which makes them a perfect match. This has already been seen in the popular play *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen in which a young woman seeks to understand her sister's passing by playing her D&D module. The play included the basic mechanics of the game, but the focus was on the main character and her sister. For my play, the game is front and center and interweaves through the lives of our protagonists.

## The Concept

There are two versions of *How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail*. In both scripts, the five protagonists' Dungeons and Dragons campaign leaks into their everyday life. Often times, people create characters that represent parts of themselves when they play the game— and this is no different for our main characters. The game characters interact with the real world by rolling for the protagonists' ability checks, roleplaying scenarios, and fighting real-world NPCs.

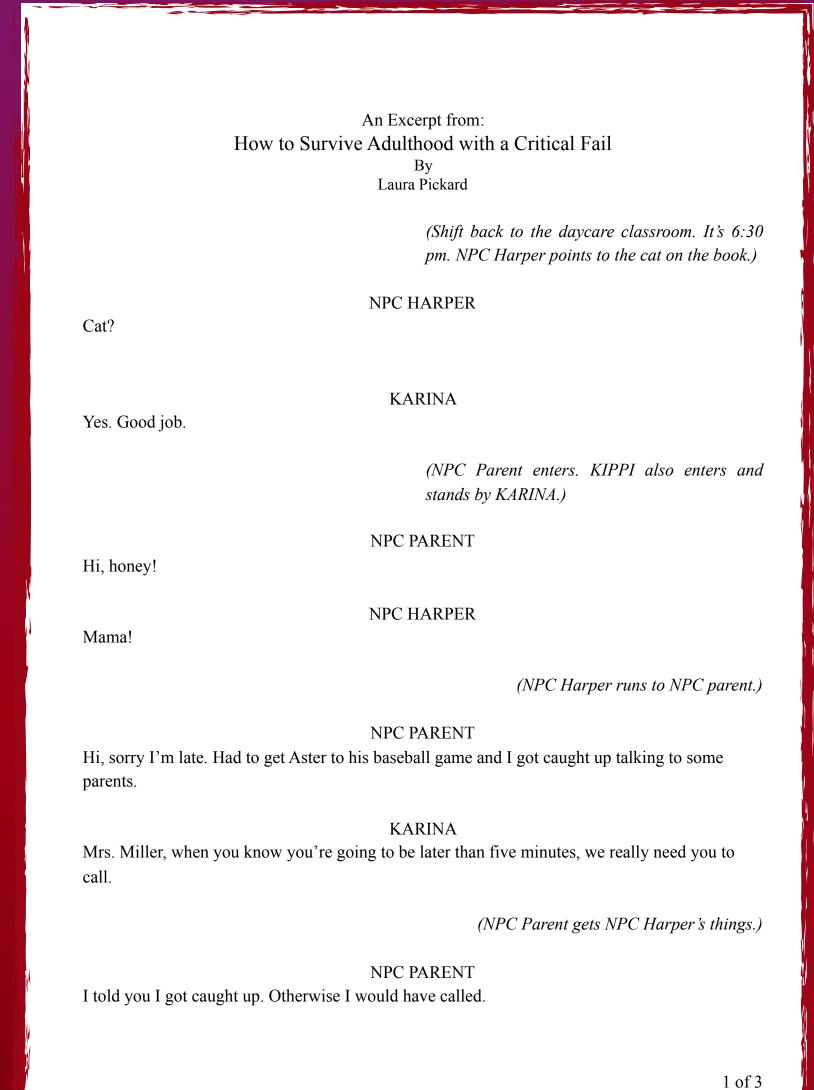
The first script, called the straight script, has a fully written narrative that is performed like a traditional play. The second script, called the game script, allows the cast to make some of the rolls in real time and changes the story based on those rolls. Each decision has four options for outcomes:

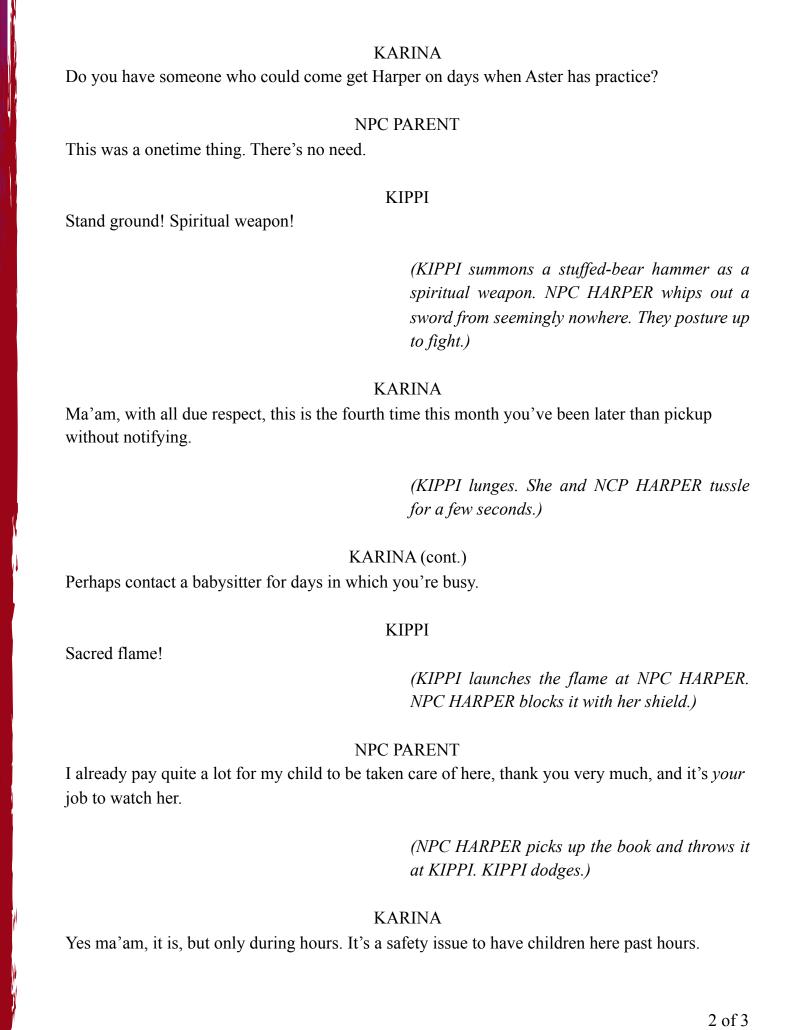
- 1. A roll above ten for a good outcome.
- 2. A roll below ten for a bad outcome.
- 3. A natural twenty for a perfect outcome.
- 4. A natural one for an awful outcome.

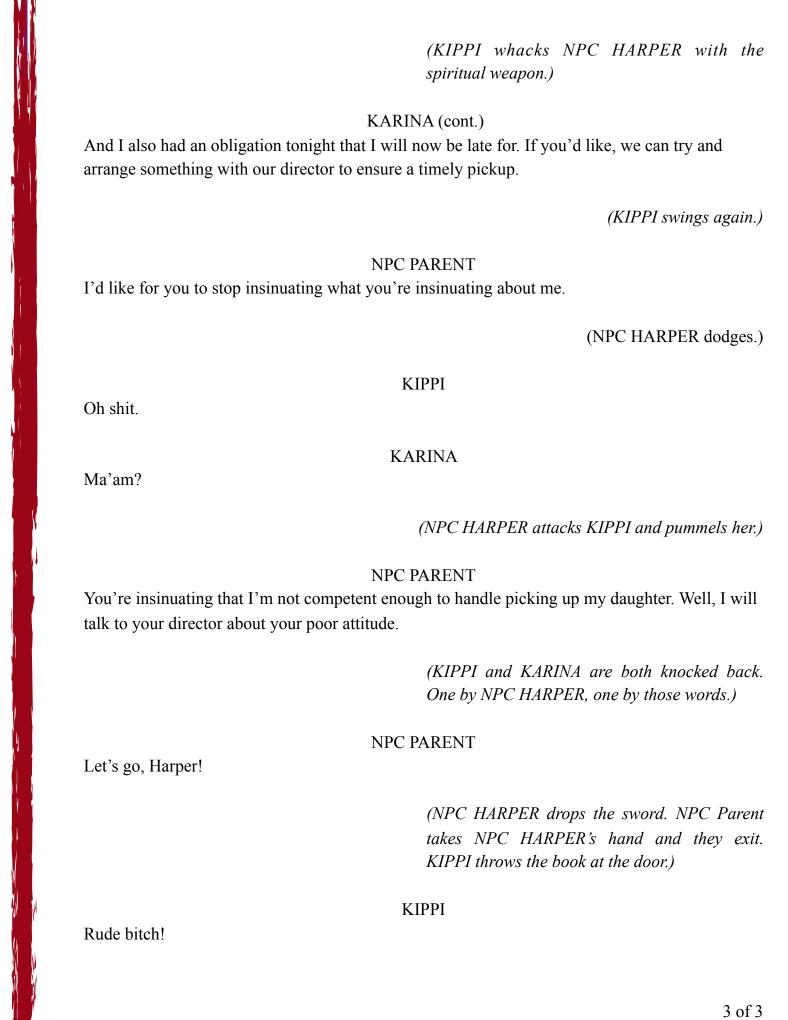
This mimics the mechanics of the game and reinvigorates the idea that theatre is truly live and exists only in the moment it is performed.

# How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail An MTSU URECA Creative Project by Laura Pickard

#### An Excerpt from the Straight Script









#### The Characters

CHARACTERS	
The Players	
REGGIE	F, English major, dungeon master for
	the group
KARINA	F, works in childcare, player for KIPPI
GRAY	NB, works in insurance, player for
	JOURNEY
TARA	F, Pre-med, player for TORRELAI
HEIDI	F, art major, player for
	THAUNDEGAUTE
The Party	
KIPPI	F, Cleric, ratfolk, shitposting
	trickster
JOURNEY	M, Fighter, half-orc sweetheart
	with southern accent
TORRELAI	F, Bard, elf, dancer and singer
THAUNDEGAUTE	M, Rogue, centaur, clumsy with bad
	luck

#### Exerpts from the Game Script

#### An Excerpt from: How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail Laura Pickard (A stage. An NPC stands, finishing up singing their audition song. It's pretty good. There's applause. TARA enters and takes her place at center stage. TORRELAI follows behind.) Hi, I'm Tara. I'll be singing [insert song here cause copyright]. NPC PROCTOR Alright, go ahead. (TARA takes a deep breath. TORRELAI rolls a d20 for performance.) (Music starts. TARA sings and TORRELAI moves in tandem with her, like they're tethered. It's beautiful. TARA absolutely kills it. She owns the stage. As she finishes, there's thunderous applause. TARA takes a bow and exits. TORRELAI follows.) (Music starts. TARA sings and TORRELAI dances around her. It's lovely. She moves about with ease. As she finishes, there's applause. TARA takes a bow and exits. TORRELAI follows.) (Music starts. TARA sings and TORRELAI dances around her. After a moment, she loses her breath and has to cough. TORRELAI stumbles in her dance. TARA struggles to get back into it. As she finishes, there's some applause. TARA hurries of the stage. TORRELAI follows.) (Music starts. Then stops. Then starts. TARA tries to sing and TORRELAI tries to dance but the

music keeps skipping. NPC PROCTOR hits the boombox and it plays normally. TARA takes a deep breath and sings. TORRELAI cautiously moves around her. Oh no. TARA's forgotten the

words. She hums. It's painfully awkward. She, "finishes." There's pity applause. TARA

practically runs off the stage. TORRELAI follows.)

now to surv	ive Adulthood with a Critical Fail  By
	Laura Pickard
Night. Don't stay up too late.	HEIDI
Night. Don't stay up too fate.	
No promises.	REGGIE
	HEIDI
You cool if I turn the light off?	
	REGGIE
Yeah. Lamp.	
	(HEIDI hits the lights and exits to her room REGGIE turns off the TV and turns on the lamp. She picks up the book and read Apartment A. TARA picks up her mass of studenterials.)
	TARA
Goodnight, all.	
N: 1.	GRAY & KARINA
Night.	
	(TARA exits. KARINA begins to pack up. H phone rings. GRAY looks at the ID.)
	GRAY
Tis your mother figure.	
	(KARINA swipes it and ignores the cal

KARINA I'm going to bed. Don't be up too late. I'll try my darnedest. KARINA (KARINA exits. GRAY continues to play. REGGIE continues to read. GRAY turns off the game and begins to leave. GRAY is stopped as they see their reflection in the mirror. GRAY studies themselves. REGGIE puts down the book and picks up a bottle of pills. She pauses. She picks up a D20 sitting on the coffee table. REGGIE rolls it.) NATURAL 20 (GRAY looks themselves up and down and grins. They turn off the light and exit. REGGIE sighs, takes two pills, and turns off the lamp.) (GRAY adjusts their hair a bit. They smile, turn off the light, and exit. REGGIE sighs, takes one pill, and turns off the lamp. She checks her phone for a brief moment before turning it off, *engulfing the room in darkness.)* (GRAY touches the mirror and tilts their head in disappointment. They sigh turn off the light, and exit. REGGIE hesitates, then takes one pill. She turns off the lamp and picks up her phone. She'll be up for a while.) (GRAY pushes their body around to be less feminine. The stifle a sniffle. They shake their head, turn off the light, and exit. REGGIE looks at her pill bottle and ultimately puts it back down. She turns off the lamp and picks up her phone. She'll be up for a while.)

### The Story

How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail follows Reggie, Tara, Karina, Heidi, and Gray as they navigate their lives as young adults of the twenty-first century. They have to balance classwork, their careers, their family lives, and their mental health. Each of them has their own goal:

Tara has a desire for a career her parents don't approve of. Heidi a longing for an inner strength to stand up for herself. Reggie must fight against her own feelings hopelessness. Karina has an ache to be free of painful familial ties. Gray has a desperate need to be their truest self in the face of persecution.

Their favorite way to escape is to play Dungeons and Dragons in which Tara, Heidi, Karina, and Gray play a rag-tag group of adventurers with Reggie as their dungeon master. Unfortunately, adult life doesn't always work with the game schedule and the group must face their individual struggles alone— or so they think. How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail is about the power of games like Dungeons and Dragons to not only help you fight your own demons, but help your friends fight theirs as well.