



Background

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.

How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail

An MTSU URECA Creative Project

by Laura Pickard



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

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.

An Excerpt from the Straight Script

An Excerpt from: How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail By Laura Pickard <i>(Shift back to the daycare classroom. It's 6:30 pm. NPC Harper points to the cat on the book.)</i>		KARINA Do you have someone who could come get Harper on days when Aster has practice?		<i>(KIPPI whacks NPC HARPER with the spiritual weapon.)</i>	
		NPC PARENT This was a onetime thing. There's no need.		KARINA (cont.) And I also had an obligation tonight that I will now be late for. If you'd like, we can try and arrange something with our director to ensure a timely pickup.	
Cat?		KIPPI <i>(KIPPI summons a stuffed-bear hammer as a spiritual weapon. NPC HARPER whips out a sword from seemingly nowhere. They posture up to fight.)</i>		<i>(KIPPI swings again.)</i>	
Yes. Good job.		KARINA <i>(NPC Parent enters. KIPPI also enters and stands by KARINA.)</i>		NPC PARENT I'd like for you to stop insinuating what you're insinuating about me.	
Hi, honey!		NPC PARENT <i>(KIPPI lunges. She and NPC HARPER tussle for a few seconds.)</i>		<i>(NPC HARPER dodges.)</i>	
Mama!		KARINA (cont.) Perhaps contact a babysitter for days in which you're busy.		KIPPI <i>(KIPPI and KARINA are both knocked back. One by NPC HARPER, one by those words.)</i>	
Hi, sorry I'm late. Had to get Aster to his baseball game and I got caught up talking to some parents.		NPC PARENT I already pay quite a lot for my child to be taken care of here, thank you very much, and it's your job to watch her.		NPC PARENT <i>(NPC HARPER drops the sword. NPC Parent takes NPC HARPER's hand and they exit. KIPPI throws the book at the door.)</i>	
Mrs. Miller, when you know you're going to be later than five minutes, we really need you to call.		KARINA <i>(NPC Parent gets NPC Harper's things.)</i>		Let's go, Harper!	
		NPC PARENT I told you I got caught up. Otherwise I would have called.		KIPPI Rude bitch!	

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Exerpts from the Game Script

An Excerpt from: How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail By Laura Pickard <i>(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.)</i>		An Excerpt from: How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail By Laura Pickard		KARINA I'm going to bed. Don't be up too late.	
Hi, I'm Tara. I'll be singing [insert song here cause copyright].		HEIDI Night. Don't stay up too late.		GRAY I'll try my damndest.	
Alright, go ahead.		REGGIE No promises.		KARINA Night.	
<i>(TARA takes a deep breath. TORRELAI rolls a d20 for performance.)</i>		HEIDI You cool if I turn the light off?		GRAY <i>(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.)</i>	
NATURAL 20 <i>(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.)</i>		REGGIE Yeah. Lamp.		NATURAL 20 <i>(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.)</i>	
ABOVE 10 <i>(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.)</i>		TARA Goodnight, all.		ABOVE 10 <i>(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.)</i>	
BELOW 10 <i>(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 off the stage. TORRELAI follows.)</i>		GRAY & KARINA <i>(TARA exits. KARINA begins to pack up. Her phone rings. GRAY looks at the ID.)</i>		BELOW 10 <i>(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.)</i>	
NATURAL 1 <i>(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.)</i>		GRAY <i>(KARINA swipes it and ignores the call.)</i>		NATURAL 1 <i>(GRAY pushes their body around to be less feminine. The stifle a snuffle. 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.)</i>	

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.