Dungeons and Dragons is one of the most popular tabletop roleplaying games 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 feed her curiosity about the game inspired me to write a play about a party.

The Concept

There are two versions of How to Survive Adulthood with a Critical Fail. In both scripts, the five protagonists’ Dungeons and Dragons campaigns are real-time and changes the story based on those rolls. The first script, called the straight script, has a fully written narrative that is performed like a traditional play. The second 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 outcomes for: 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 truly live and exists only in the moment it is performed.

The Characters

The Players

- REGGIE: F, English major, dungeon master for the group
- KARINA: F, works in childcare, player for KIPPI
- GRAY: Nil, works in insurance, player for JOURNEY
- TARA: Pre-med, player for TORRELAI
- HEIDI: F, art major, player for THAUNDEGAUGE

The Party

- KIPPI
- TORRELAI
- THAUNDEGAUGE
- JOURNEY
- KARINA
- HEIDI
- GRAY

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 longing for an inner strength to stand up for herself. Reggie must fight against her own feelings of 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—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.

Excerpts from the Game Script

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