

In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Spring 2020*

Article 18

5-2020

Dungeons and Growing Pains

Philip Nakashian
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ords>

Recommended Citation

Nakashian, Philip (2020) "Dungeons and Growing Pains," *In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ords/vol4/iss1/18>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Dungeons and Growing Pains Philip Nakashian

This was it—the best date Harrison Mann has ever been on. It doesn't matter that this was the *only* date he's ever been on, because cherry blossoms were *literally* raining down on him and the girl of his dreams, Cindy Lophopper.

They paddled away in their swan boat on the serene waters of Chunter Lake.

Harrison couldn't help but stare at Cindy, her dirty blonde pigtails, her centimeter-long eyelashes, her thousands of freckles (which looked more like stars than birthmarks).

"Harrison?" she asked.

"Yeah, Cindy?" he answered.

"Why are you paddling so fast?"

"Uhhhh..." he said, very articulately, "I'm just happy."

"Well," Cindy replied, "I've got news for you."

This was it. She was going to profess her love for him. Finally! After three years of admiring her, she *finally* felt the same way about him as he did for her. She opened her mouth to speak.

"I don't want to be with you anymore, Harry... you're too nice."

"Wait... what?" he thought, "How can a guy be too *nice*?"

Just then, a nearby duck starting quacking in a staccato rhythm.

"Quack—quack—quack—quack."

Harrison Mann woke up to his alarm clock, signifying the end to his paradise and the start of yet another day at his literal nightmare—another day in the sixth grade.

"Of *course* it was a dream," he said aloud, "God, what a trope."

* * *

That night, Harrison was happy to be with his two best friends, Anna and Geoff. It was Friday night, which meant they were doing what they *always* did on Friday nights—play Dungeons & Dragons and drink root beer until their eyes got too heavy for them to think straight.

Harrison loved playing Dungeons & Dragons with Anna and Geoff for a few reasons: One of which was "escapism." He got bullied at school

on an almost daily basis, and this was his way of getting away from that truth. In reality, he was short. So, naturally, he played as a seven-foot tall Aarakocra warrior, which is basically a giant dude with wings and a bird-face.

He wasn't focused on their adventure, though. He was thinking about the dream he had that morning. He was also thinking about homeroom that he attended *after* the dream, because while he was too embarrassed to say anything to her, he could have sworn that Cindy Lophopper (you know, the girl from his dreams) gave him what Holden Caulfield calls "the eye." He didn't particularly like *The Catcher in the Rye*, but he read it for a book report that year and since then, felt he could identify with Holden Caulfield, even though Harrison thought J.D. Salinger was a total hack.

"Harrison?" Anna asked, waving her hand several inches from his face.

"Huh?" he replied, embarrassed. He knew his friends knew *him* well enough to know what he was daydreaming about.

"Come on, man," Geoff said, "when are you going to realize that Cindy Lophopper isn't going to make the first move? If you wanna date her, you've gotta ask her out, yourself."

"It's true," Anna added, "*I've* never asked a guy out, but if I had to *choose*, I'd rather have *him* ask *me* out instead."

Harrison was red with embarrassment.

"Can we just get back to the game?"

"Right," Geoff tried to be as supportive as he can without letting Harrison off the hook *too* easy, "Harrison, do remember what our characters were even doing?"

"Uhhh... fighting?"

"Good guess," Anna said, "but entirely wrong. You guys were skulking around the caves of Huraquek, the Goblin King."

"—Yeah! The Goblin King!"— Harrison finished the sentence with her as fast as he could, "I knew that... uh... and we're after his treasure or something?"

Geoff was fed up. "Harrison, if your heart's not in it, maybe we shouldn't be playing tonight."

"Geoff is right," Anna added, "we can play some other time when your mind is off of Cindy."

"Guys, that's crazy. And by the way, you do realize that if our lives

were a movie, we'd *totally* be failing the Bechdel test right now... except we're dudes talking about a girl."

"No, Harrison. *You* two are dudes. *I'm* a girl who hangs *out* with dudes. There's a difference."

Just then, the doorbell rang.

"...Did you invite anyone else to your house tonight?" Geoff asked.

"...No... should I answer it?" Harrison replied, knowing full well that answering the door at this hour, no matter who you are, is most unwise.

"It's probably just some kid doing a prank," Anna said with an air of certainty.

"I'm gonna answer it," said Geoff ceremoniously, "It's what my character would do."

Harrison stopped him, "Uh, yeah, except this is *my* house. If anyone's gonna answer my door, it's gonna be me... or my parents... but they're out of town for the weekend, so me."

The three of them approached the front door. The doorbell rang again. Harrison's cat, Sir Licks-A-Lot, scampered away from the foyer and into the kitchen, his eyes glowing in the dark as he glared at the three kids with an almost human-level of concern for their well-being.

The doorbell rang once more. Harrison reached for the knob.

"WAIT!" Anna yelled, "Have you weighed out the pros and cons of answering the door? Seriously, what *good* can come of this?"

"Anna's right," Geoff had to agree, "Who in their right mind would knock on someone's door around midnight?"

Harrison stopped in his tracks, "You've got a point," he said to his friends. "BUT! It could be Cindy!"

He turned the latch excitedly, and the door was kicked wide open from the outside, sending Harrison, Anna, and Geoff flying onto the floor.

Before them stood the meanest, dumbest eighth grader they knew— Adam Gygax—an acne-riddled bully who looked about as much like an orc as a human could. His personality didn't help.

"Harrison Mann..." he sneered, "I heard you were ogling my girl, Cindy, at school today."

There was a moment of silence and confusion.

"Wait? What?" Harrison was flabbergasted, "You rang my doorbell at midnight and kicked my *door* down because you *thought* I was looking

at Cindy?”

“I’m not playing, Mann! Cindy’s mine, got it?”

Geoff tried to deescalate the situation, “Look, Adam, we didn’t even know you and Cindy were dating.”

Adam ignored him. He pulled out a bundle of firecrackers.

“I’m gonna burn your house down,” he said.

“O.K. He’s cray,” Anna said with a surprising amount of calm.

Adam lit the fuse on the firecrackers with an oversized lighter, threatening to toss them onto the three kids. He stomped toward them menacingly as they cowered in fear.

But then Harrison’s cat, Sir Licks-A-Lot, pounced onto Adam’s head, meowing ferociously before jumping off and back into the kitchen. Anna, Geoff, and Harrison realized this is probably the most exciting adventure they’ve ever had. They then decided to turn this into the greatest boss battle of their lives. Geoff got up first and kicked Adam in the groin. Anna was next, pulling his shirt over his head so that he couldn’t see where he was going. Harrison knew that this was his moment of glory. He snatched the firecrackers from Adam’s greasy hands and shoved them down the bully’s underwear. He then turned Adam around and gave his butt a little kick so he went scampering into the street, the sound of firecrackers igniting in his pants echoing across the neighborhood. This sound, paired with the regretful whimpers of a poorly misguided teen, was bittersweet music to the ears of Anna, Geoff, and Harrison, who didn’t *enjoy* inflicting pain on others, but were relieved to have mustered up the courage to defend themselves and their favorite place to hold game nights.

“Do you think he’ll call the cops on us?” Geoff asked, a little sweaty from the thought, as well as the encounter they’d just had.

“No,” Harrison laughed, “They would ask where he got the firecrackers. He may be a low-level orc, but I don’t think he’s *that* stupid.”

“Hey, what was all that about him dating Cindy?” Anna asked.

Harrison grinned. “She can have him if she wants, but I’m feeling pretty confident about asking her out on Monday.”