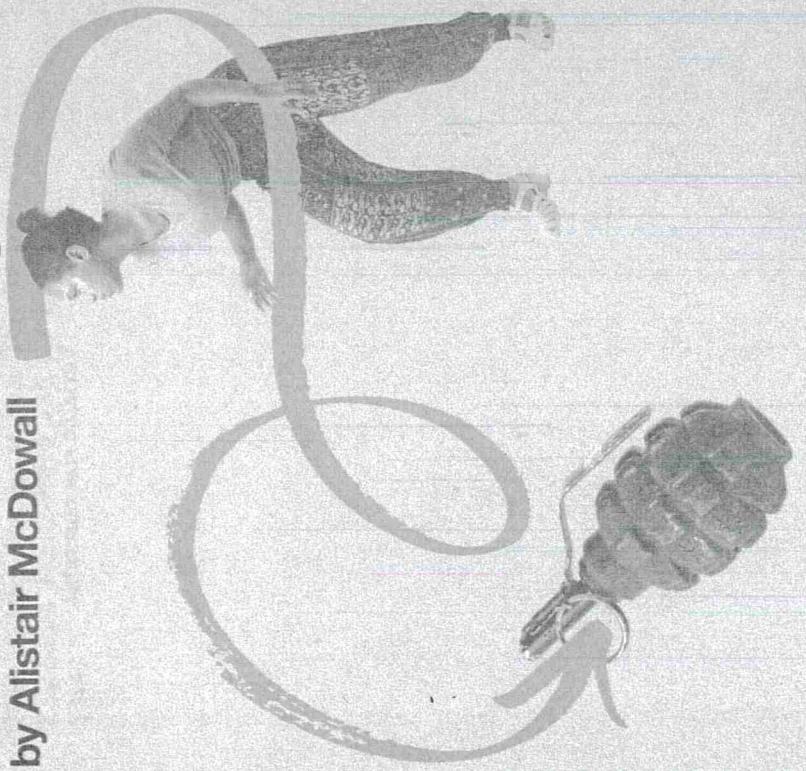


Zero for the Young Dudes!

by Alistair McDowall



One.
RISE.

The Campers eat cereal.

They occasionally eye the audience.

Whisper/mutter.

Laugh at something secret.

It's somewhat threatening but hard to tell why.

*When the bell or buzzer yells they stand and head to leave
a rabble*

half

draining bowls of milk

half

hollering laughing pushing.

Two.
PLEDGE.

The Campers line up to pledge in unison:

I PLEDGE MY TRUE ALLEGIANCE
TO THE NATION THAT SHELTERS, CLOTHES,
AND FEEDS ME.

LAND OF MY BIRTH,
HOME OF MY PEOPLE,
WHOSE VALUES AND BELIEFS I SHARE,
AND WHOSE LAWS I UPHOLD AND OBEY.

I AM GRATEFUL TO BE A CITIZEN OF A COUNTRY
SO PROSPEROUS, FAIR, AND FREE;
AND SHALL GIVE UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE
AND RESPECT

TO THOSE THAT SEEK TO SECURE

A BRIGHT AND RIGHTEOUS FUTURE

FOR ME

AND ALL THAT FOLLOW.

I PLEDGE MY LIFE AND BLOOD TO THIS CAUSE,
SO HELP ME GOD.

Three.
RUN.

A clearing in the woods that look over the camp.

Two Campers are here in shorts and t-shirts.

One holds a hand grenade proudly, showing the other.

— When though?
— This morning.
— Just this morning?
— I said.
— Under your pillow?
— Under my pillow, I said.

Pause.

— Four others, too —
— Four others have them?
— At least.
— You saw?
— No —
— You actually didn't see though.
— No, but I know because there's, there's like a nod —
— You're nodding at each other.
— We're not *nodding* at each other, we're just, you see someone, across the dinner hall or whatever, and you see them, and you look at them, and you just . . . (*Nod.*)
— And that means —
— That means you both, you both *know*.
— That you both have them.
— That we both have them.

Pause.

— Are we allowed them?
— No, we're not allowed them, we're not allowed shoelaces, why would we be allowed grenades?
— But how come you have one then?
— Because I found it under my —
— Yeah, but how *come* though?
— Because someone's putting them under pillows in the dorms —
— Yeah, but *why*?

Pause.

— Is there a plan?
— . . .
— Is there a plan no one told us about?
— . . .
Like a secret plan. For the whole camp.

Do you think?
— I dunno.

Pause.

— Does it smell?
— (*Sniffs.*) No. Not much, anyway.
— Is it new?
— Looks it.
— Looks pretty new.
— It's from our war, you think? Not some old war.
— Maybe . . .

Beat.

— Can I hold it?
— Get your own.
— I don't have my own though!
— Put a note under your pillow.
— I just wanna hold it for a few seconds.
— . . .

Just for like five seconds.

...

Please.

...

Just for one second.

Pause.

The grenade is handed over.

— Wow.

She walks around, holding it aloft, rapt.

Inspects it.

— That bit pings off.

— Duh.

— You pull the pin and then when you let it go, that bit pings off.

— I know already.

— We never had these before . . .

Pause.

— OK, give it back now.

— (*Miming throwing it.*) Bloody Japs!

— You had it long enough —

— Bloody Japs! Kamikazes!

It's snatched back.

— Knob.

— (*Grim.*)

— Japs?

— It's racist for Japanese.

— I know.

— When d'ya think they'll tell you the plan?

— I don't know there *is* a plan.

— I bet there is. You don't hand out grenades without a plan.

...

Maybe we're going to war again.

— . . .

I dunno.

...

Someone's coming.

Another Camper runs on.

— What are you dildos doing — What's that?

— Nothing —

— It's a hand grenade.

— Oh. (*Beat.*) Have you got a fag?

— No.

— Pfft.

She shoves her hands down her shorts and rustles around.

— I hate cross-country.

Produces a cigarette and lighter after much rummaging, lights it.

— You'll get done if they catch you smoking.

— My socks are wet as fuck . . .

Four.

WASH.

The Campers stand with towels, queuing for the showers.

Two Campers talk as the line occasionally moves forward a few steps.

— The jeeps?

— The jeeps they patrol —

— Yeah, I know which jeeps you mean, but how are you gonna get one of them?

— Because sometimes they just, when they need to run into the office quickly they leave them running outside sometimes —

— Not often though.

— Sometimes they do.

— Not often though.

— Well say they do, they do one day —

- For like thirty seconds.
 — So in those thirty seconds I get in it and I drive —
 — You can't drive.
 — I can drive.
 — You don't have a licence —
 — You don't *need* a licence to drive.
 — Yes you do.
 — Well, legally, yeah, you have to be twenty-one and have a licence, but what I'm saying is that anyone *can* drive, it's not a hard thing to do.
 — I dunno . . .
 — It's easy!
 — There's the clutch, and . . .
 — Trust me, I can drive. I drive the jeep. I wait till they leave it outside the office and I get in and drive it —
 — And you just happen to be there when that happens.
 — I take my moment — I take my moment and I drive, I drive away wicked fast —
 — They're shooting at you —
 — And I'm weaving the car —
 — You're dodging bullets.
 — I'm not *dodging* bullets, I'm just weaving the car, I'm *weaving* it.
 — You're getting shot all over —
 — I'm not —
 — You're like (*Rattling with the impact of a hundred rifles.*)
 uhuhuhuhuhuhuh —
 — I might get *some* minor injuries.
 — Your guts all fall out —
 — My guts don't fall out —

Another Camper has come on, looking lost.

- Is this where we go to get our orders?
 — Join the queue.
 — How come we have to get them in the showers?
 — / It's —

- We're having a conversation here.
 — But I don't have my towel, I can't —

Others in the line start piping up:

- Hey, no pushing in —
 — Who's pushing in?
 — Get to the back of the line.
 — Move it, dude.

He heads to the back of the line.

- So you're driving —
 — Did everyone else get a grenade?
 — / Shhh —
 — Shut the fuck up, what's wrong with you?
 — Moron.

Beat.

- Where do you drive.
 — I drive up the hill, up to the woods, where we do cross-country.
 — Your guts are hanging out . . .
 — My guts are not hanging out.
 — You've lost an eye —
 — I've got both eyes.
 — You're mowing down kids doing cross-country —
 — I'm *driving* up there, where the most isolated section of fence is.
 — And what?
 — And I smash straight through it with the jeep.

Beat.

- What.
 — I smash into it —
 — It's not one fence, it's three.
 — I smash through *them* —
 — And razor-wire, and those things with the spikes —
 — I'll be going a hundred miles an hour.

- And it's electric.
 — ...
 Then —
 — That kid ran into it last week and burst all over the place.
 — Well, then, I'll —
 ...
 Okay,
 So,
 I'll take the big —
 You know the big tarp sheet things we cover the track with when it rains?
 — Yeah.
 — I'll have one of those in the jeep —
 — So you have to roll up this huge sheet thing.
 — I do that before.
 — And carry it, have it with you —
 — Yeah —
 — At the exact moment the jeep is free for thirty seconds —
 — I —
 — And in those thirty seconds you have to get this thing, I mean, they're *huge*, those sheets, they cover the whole track —
 — I throw it in the jeep, I drive up to the woods, I stop at the fence, I throw the tarp over the fence so I don't *touch* it, then I climb up and over and out!

Pause.

- Then what.
 — Then,
 eventually,
 I go round and free all the other camps —
 — All of them.
 — One at a time.
 — Just on your own?
 — I've got fantastic muscles and fabulous reflexes.
 — There's a few holes in this plan.
 — I free the Titches first, because they have the least security.
 I get them out and then I have a small army to help me free

the others, free our Generals and everything, and then once everyone else is free, I come back here, I *lead* everyone back here (cos by this point they've all voted and made me a General), and we come and we storm *this* camp, and the counsellors and the guards are all like 'Hey, isn't that the kid who escaped just —' BLEGH — head shot!
 — This is not even a plan.
 — It's a brilliant plan.

Another Camper has come on:

- Is this where / we —
 — (Both.) *Yes.*
 — It's a terrible plan.
 — It's better than whatever it is they've got planned tonight.
 — You don't even know what we're doing yet.
 — It won't be as good as mine.
 — The point is to make a big gesture, not just have one of us escape. There's no point doing anything if they don't even notice.
 — They'd notice —
 — London wouldn't. Kids escape all the time — or they're shot *trying* to escape.
 They don't report it in the capital.
 — How do you know?
 — Because why would they?
 — I reckon I could cause enough of a stir —
 — No way.

Another Camper has come on:

- Is this where we get our orders?
 — Why is everyone asking me?
 — You're tall.
 — How come we have to get them in the showers?
 — Do we have to get naked?
 — I have a verruca —

- Can everyone shut up? They're just over there, you wanna give everything away?
- The showers are the only place they don't watch us.
- They're scared of people thinking they're paedos so they don't go in the showers, okay?
- Someone did a big shit on the floor in there last week and no one cleaned it up and all the water made it spread round everywhere.
- Yeah, well, that's the downside.

Five.
DIRT.

There is a huge pile of earth.

Two Campers are steadily moving it from one side of the stage to the other.

They shovel up a pile, walk it across the stage, and dump it on the growing new pile.

- Sometimes I even forget how long I've been here! Sometimes I try and, like I'll think, hey, how long *has* it been? And I can't even remember!
- I remember how many times I've moved this pile from here to there, but I didn't have to do it every day, and they only started making me do it about a year ago so I can't work it out from that.
- How long have you been here?
- Three months, seventeen days.
- You see, you're smart cos I bet you started counting when you got here, but I didn't even think to *do* that. It was so long ago, and I never actually moved camp, I've always been in this one, this is the only camp I was ever even *in*. My unit got cornered in this supermarket and they rounded us up and brought us here and most of them got moved to other places but I'm still here, I've been here the whole time so it's just a

big blur with how much time it actually is, and obviously they don't let you have calendars here, or watches, and there's only the clocks in the dorms and the dinner hall so you can't even really keep track that easy. Some of the kids in my dorm keep scratch-marks on their beds so they know, you know? But I never did that.

They move dirt in silence for a while.

- Sometimes I even forget where I came from in the first place! Haha!

They move dirt in silence for a while.

- Sometimes when I try and remember what it was like before I have a total brainfart. All I can remember is the guns, because I used to work with the armoury? So I'll be trying to remember what toys I used to have when I was really small, but my head'll just be all like M4 Carbine, M4A1, AK47, SA80, L7A2 GPMG, L115A3, M80, And I don't think I had any of those when I was little, unless maybe I had very liberal parents! Haha!

She laughs for a while.

- Oh . . . boy.

They move dirt in silence for a while.

- My parents died in the bombings.

They move dirt in silence for a while.

- Sometimes it even gets in my head when I'm not *trying* to remember.

Like they'll be asking me a question in class, or I'll be in the queue for lunch or doing the pledge or something, and my head'll just be like M4 Carbine, M4 Carbine, M4Carbine M4CarbineM4Carbine, over and over and over making me go mental, or I'll just be totally obsessively thinking of this guy's head I saw blown up once, or this finger I found on the floor of a bank we stormed and my brain'll just be like fingerfingerfingerfingerfingerfinger, you know?

And then whoever asked the question or whatever, they'll be trying to get my attention, but I'll just be totally spaced out, and not saying anything, and I'll mess up, and I think that's why I get dirt duty a lot.

...

I never actually obsess on the things that happen *in* the camp, just the things in the war, isn't that weird?

...

...

Do you like Harry Potter?

— (*Strugs.*) It's alright.

— Dumbledore's the coolest!

I once had a dream where I was a wizard, 'cept it wasn't like Harry Potter, I wasn't at Hogwarts or anything, I was just here in the camp 'cept I had magic powers, and I was using them to zap all the guards and the counsellors and then I used my wand to bust the fences, some of the fences I could melt with a special spell I had, oh and also I was flying? And then we all got freed and all of us were running out of the camp all cheering and everyone was shouting my name because I was the hero, but then when we got outside everyone's head just suddenly started melting! Everyone stopped running and there was this kind of *fizzing* sound and then everyone's head was all just bubbling and popping like Rice Crispies and their eyes were drooping down their heads and their mouths went from big smiles to big frowns and everyone was like, grabbing at their heads saying No! No! No! Don't melt my head! And they all thought it was *me*, because I was the one with the magic! They were all looking up at me with their runny eyes saying Don't! Stop! Stop melting our heads! Why would you free us just to melt our heads?! And I'm like I didn't, I didn't! I'm trying to tell them it's not me, it's not my fault, but their ears have all melted so they can't even *hear* me! So I try to do a spell that'll make their heads go back to normal except now it's like all my magic is *gone*, I can't do magic any more for some reason, but it's too late anyway because now everyone's head is just a big pink puddle on their

necks and they're all falling down dead. And then the last one who still has half a head comes up to me and he was trying to keep the shape of it like he was trying to hold melting ice cream into some kind of structure and he looks at me with his eyes that are like dripping yolks and his mouth was all waxy like a candle and he just looks straight at me and just says — Why?

...

And then he falls down dead like the rest.

...

...

...

...

What do you think that means?

— ...

(*Strugs.*)

I dunno.

They move dirt in silence for a while.

— How long did they give you?

— Four hours.

— Me too! What for?

— I did a shit in the shower.

— Wow! That takes confidence!

Well I bet this four hours is gonna pass by like nobody's business. They think it's some big punishment to make us do this until our legs don't work any more but I actually take a lot of pleasure from it. Once I get all the dirt from this side to that side I always take a moment and look at it, even if they yell at me, because I like to take a second and notice the impact I can have on the world and the elements around me. Don't you think?

It's much better than solitary too, in solitary it's just so *boring*. No one to talk to. Just *quiet*. *Quiet* all the time.

Quietquietquiet. I mean, sure, that's great if you just want some peace, and actually I do sometimes want peace and quiet, but not when I'm on dirt duty, no way, I like to really

cut loose out here. And we have so much in common we can just talk the time away.

We can talk about all kinds of interesting subjects!

Like we can talk about *food*, and what *friends* we have, and what types of clothes we used to wear, and we can tell our war stories, and we can talk about *cats*, and we can talk about keeping fit, and we can talk about the other camps you were at and do like *comparisons* and we can talk about ghosts and scary stories, and we can talk about politics and we can talk about *fruit* and we can talk about where we used to live and we can talk about people we know that *died* and we can talk about *space*, and we can talk about *hair products* —

— Why'd you get dirt duty?

— Talking too much. Hey, what's your favourite type of smell?

Six.

Dear Mum,

I am having a really [redacted] time at camp. The counsellors are all [redacted] and one of them told me [redacted].

I'm sure learning a lot about [redacted] and [redacted]. There is a lot of time to [redacted] in here.

I have [redacted] and in [redacted] we get to [redacted] in the lake and [redacted] and sometimes we [redacted].

Don't [redacted].

If they decide [redacted], then know that I [redacted]. And that everything [redacted] has [redacted] into [redacted] and I am ready [redacted].

All my [redacted],

Seven.

SOLITARY.

In solitary confinement, a Camper bounces a ball off the walls.

We watch this for a while.

— Hey.

Pause.

— Hey.

— (*Unseen, outside.*) What.

— How long am I in here for again?

Pause.

— How long am I —

— Two days.

— Two days?

...

Actual full days?

Pause.

— How long have I done so far?

Pause.

— I said how long —

— Twenty minutes.

— Twenty minutes?

...

That can't — Twenty minutes, really?

He tries to count the remainder but struggles.

Pause.

He goes back to bouncing the ball.

— How long till lunch?

Pause.

— I said how lo / ng —
 — A long time.
 — Yeah, but *how* long?
Pause.
 — How long though?
 ...
 How long though?
 ...
 How long till lunch though?
 ...
 How long till —
 — I'm not allowed to talk to you.
 — How come?

Pause.

— How come you're not?
 — Because you're in solitary.
 — Yeah, but ...

...

Pause.

He bounces the ball for a while.

— How long has it been now?
 — I'm not telling you every — What's that noise in there?
 — What?
 — What are you making noise with?
 — This?

He bounces the ball.

— What is that.
 — It's a ball.

Beat.

— A ball?
 — Yeah.
 — You have a ball in there?

— Yeah.
 — You're not supposed to have a ball in there.
 — Why not?
 — Because you're not.
 — Why though?
 — Because it's solitary.
 — Yeah, but, I gotta have *something* to do.
 — You're not allowed to have a ball in there —
 — How old are you?

Beat.

— How old / are —
 — I'm not allowed to talk to you.
 — Why?

...

— Are you a grown-up?
 — Yes.
 — You don't sound like it.
 — I am —
 — How old are you then?

Pause.

— Like thirty ...?
 — I'm twenty-one.
 — Pff. That's not that old.
 — Stop talking.
 — That's not that old at all.

Pause.

— Were you on their side or our side?
 ...
 Whose side were you on?
 Before.

...

Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one ... You must have been on our side, right? If you're only twenty-one now.

- ...
You were with us, yeah?
Pause.
— Did you have to go through this camp?
...
Did you do one of the camps before you worked here?
— What's it to you.
— I'm interested.
Pause.
— Yes.
— You did?
— Yes.
Pause.
— Did it work?
Like it's s'posed to?
...
Did it, like, change you to being on their side?
— There's no sides.
— Yeah, right.
...
Were you captured or did you turn yourself in?
Pause.
— You still there . . . ?
— I'm not talking to you any more.
Pause.
He bounces the ball again.
— I bet you did really well to get to be a guard.
...
You must've only just got out, too. They only let you out when you're twenty-one. And only then if you did well.
...
Were you one of those ones that did their whole dorm in?

- King Rat?
...
Do you wanna be a counsellor one day?
...
Do you wanna be like the ones / who —
— What are you in here for.
— What?
— Why are you in solitary.
Beat.
— ...
I wouldn't pull this kid's fingernails out.
— Why not.
— ...
(*Shrugs.*) I dunno.
...
Didn't want to.
...
Maybe that's how come I won't get to be a guard like you.
I bet you did anything they —
— Shut up.
— Hey, are you worried what'll happen to you if there's a breakout?
...
Some kids hate the ones who turned even more than the actual grown-ups.
...
Are you worried we'll do all the things to you that your lot are making us do to each other?
...
I bet it'll —
— Be quiet.
Pause.
He bounces the ball some more.
Looks around.

*He shoves his hands down his pants and pulls his grenade out.
Inspects it.
Picks his nose.*

— What time is it now?

Eight.
FEED.

In the dinner hall.

Two Campers serve the lunch line. The one in charge wears an eye-patch.

The lunchline passes in front of them, a few Campers at a time.

— He's a traitor.

— For that?

— If he doesn't do it then they do it.

— Yeah, but —

— You've not got one? She hasn't got one —

The Second Camper hands a grenade to a Camper in line.

— Vi / va la revolucion.

— Viva la revolucion.

— We all agreed.

— Yeah —

— We all agreed. No more violence at their hands.

— I get all that —

— If I'm having my fingernails dragged out, I want it done by one of my brothers or sisters, looking into their eyes and knowing it's an unwilling act, done with compassion and solidarity. I don't want my body mutilated by my oppressors. My enemy.

— He was a Titch —

— So?

— So you can do that to a six-year-old?

— I can do it knowing the alternative is worse.

He still got his nails pulled out, except now by one of them.

And they enjoy it.

...

It's all the same anyway.

...

They put some of us in one type of school, the others another. Some of us get healthcare, some of us don't.

They always wanted us at war with ourselves, consuming ourselves, all they've done here is made the process more honest. And I'll take a brutal honesty over a lie.

— You're unbelievable.

— You're an idealist.

— I'm an idealist? You thought we could set up the new state without an economy —

— Because we would have.

— An economy is a, a, it happens naturally,

— Him, him —

The Second Camper hands out a grenade.

— Viva la / revolucion.

— Viva la revolucion.

— Money works based on agreement. And we all agree we don't want it.

— Whatever you have — trading, fruit, whatever, whatever it is, that will eventually become the same system you destroyed.

— Not on my watch.

— But if we're all taking this pill at twenty-one, then you're dead.

You've only got a few years to —

— Age corrupts.

— So what's the —

— Absolute revolution has to be absolute.

— You're such —

It doesn't matter anymore, I don't know why we're even —

— Look at the state of you. Look at that — Look at it!

— What?!

— Do you have some kind of syndrome? Stop throwing the

- food at them –
 — I'm fine –
 — Watch. Watch me. Look at that arm action. If I'm serving you your lunch, I'm *servng* you your lunch. There's commitment. Intention. You serve it looks like you have something wrong with your brain or your arm or both.
 — Why's it matter?
 — Oh, why's it matter? Sorry for expecting a little pride in your work. Is it too difficult feeding your comrades with essential nutrients and – She needs one, give her one.
- The Second Camper hands out a grenade.*
- Viva / la revolucion.
 — Viva la revolucion.
 — Get your act together dude, fuck. I'm embarrassed to be stood next to you.
 — I'm only –

The First Camper picks something out of the food, flicks it away.
 Pause.

- What was that?
 — What?
 — What you picked out?
 — What do you think?

They serve some more.

- Well don't –
 — What do you want me to do? Starve them?
 — It's –
 — This is lunch. Shut up and serve.

...
 Everything changes tonight anyway.

...
 Give him his.

The Second Camper hands out a grenade.

- Viva la rev / olucion –
 — Viva la revolucion.
 — You don't say it right. Say it better than that.

Nine.

TARGET.

Shooting range.

Two Campers lie on their fronts. The rifles are bolted to the floor.
They fire.

Start reloading, etc.

- Bollocks.
 — It's not –
 — That's not true.
 — It is.
 — It's obviously bollocks.
 — It's not, it's true, before they, like, before *this*, before all this, they used to teach us about it in *schools*.
 — You're lying.
 — Some of the other kids, the older ones, the ones with parents still, they said . . .
They're aiming.
 Pause.

They fire.

Start reloading, etc.

- They said the grown-ups used to teach us about sex.
 — Why?
 — What?
 — Why would they do that?
 — Because – You gotta learn about it somehow.
 — What would the point be? For them, what would the point be for them.
 What do they gain?

- What do they gain making us do this?
- They're not *training* us to shoot are they. They're training us to shoot for *them*.
- It's just something you need to learn, it's an important thing, isn't it?
- ...
- I think they're lying to you.
- One of the older ones said that, before, they used to argue about it.
- The grown-ups. It wasn't just some thing they all agreed about — Some wanted us to learn, like, really *young*. *Really* young. And then others didn't want us to learn about it at all.
- Like the army.
- I dunno.

They aim . . .

- I bet the army didn't want us to learn.

Pause.

Fire.

- Aim higher, they go down cleaner.
- If it's so important how come they don't teach us now.
- Because things are different now, they don't want us learning *now*. This was before the war and everything. Imagine if we all started doing it and having babies now.
- We still know about it though.
- Yeah, but they don't *tell* us. And they're rounding us all up and putting us in places like this, and that's *part* of it, it's not just about the war, cos I heard they've started telling the Titches all kinds of stuff about why you're not supposed to do it, and how, like, *God* and all that, and it's like the *opposite* of what it used to be. Cos if we started all doing it *now*, and having babies, and keeping the babies for ourselves, then suddenly there's this whole other group —
- An army —
- A whole other army of kids, in *waiting*, you know?
- That we can say whatever we want to, and we can tell them,

you know, we can teach them whatever. And make them do whatever we *want* them to do. They want to control when we have them, and, you know, how *many* and all that.

- I dunno, that still sounds —

Another Camper has sidled up, unnoticed.

- Hey.
- Oh —
- Don't look at me, they're looking, don't look at me.
- Soz —

They pretend to aim.

The Third Camper looks around for safety.

- There's a full dorm inspection at ten fifteen.
- Ten fifteen?
- Ten fifteen, you deaf? Be ready at ten fifteen.
- *Alright*.
- Don't be a dick.

They go back to actually aiming.

Pause.

- You're the dick.

He leaves.

Fire.

- I forgot what I was even —
- Sex.
- Oh yeah, well, apparently they did anyway.
- How do you even teach it?
- I dunno . . .
- Maybe they got to watch porn.
- What's porn?
- It's videos of people doing it.
- Oh right, yeah. Well. I guess so.
- How else do you learn 'cept by watching?

They take aim . . .

— Apparently everyone used to watch porn. Even grown-ups.

Pause.

Fire.

— *Shit* —
— Fucking hell, you *scalped* him.

. . .
His head looks like a yoghurt lid.
— (*From off*) Nice job, dickhead.
— He's wriggling all over the place.
— I'm gonna finish him —
— No, you can't, don't. They don't let you do that. Just wait.
You just have to wait.

They watch impassively as the target writhes and kicks.

— Look at him go.

He takes a while to bleed out.

Pause.

— . . .
— Yeah, that was a mess.

Ten.

REVISE.

In class, Campers are silently copying something from one piece of paper to another.

Time passes.

— Psst.

Pause.

— Pss —
— What?
— I'm new.

Pause.

— I'm new —
— So?
— So I don't —
— Sh / hh —
— Shut the fuck up —

She leans in.

— I don't get this.

Pause.

— I don't get —
— Get what?
— I don't get what /we're —
— Shut up —
— You just copy it out.
— Yeah, but —
— You just copy it out again.

Pause.

— It's not true though.

Pause.

— It's not —
— *What?*

— Do you have the same as me, cos mine says —
'After a fourteen-day stand-off a battalion under the order of General Hallmayne stormed the power station outside of Birmingham and freed the hos / tages —'

— Shut / up —
— Be quiet —
— . . .

(*Quieter.*) 'And freed the hostages who had suffered unthinkable torture at the hands of the Youth Rebels. After a vicious firefight with major casualties on both sides, the stranglehold placed over the city's power by the Rebels was removed, and the station was reclaimed and reactivated, continuing to fuel our homes and businesses today.'

Beat.

— So?

— But —

I was there. We didn't have any hostages. And we held the plant for like a *month*.

— So what?

— So why do we have to write it out if it's not true.

— Are you really that thick?

— I —

— Shut your fucking mouth.

Beat.

— But it's not what happened —

— Why do I —

— Just copy it out, you're supposed to have twenty copies by three —

— ...

— Copy it out.

Pause.

She goes to stand up —

The Second Camper yanks her back into her seat.

— If you question it, they'll put you out on the firing range —

— It's a *lie*.

— It's *all* lies. They beat us, they get to write whatever they want.

— They'll make the Titches read it —

— Not after tonight.

...

Alright?

Pause.

They go back to writing.

Time passes.

Someone farts.

A low chuckle.

Eleven.

[EDIT.]

Dear Mum,

I am having a really [GOOD] time at camp. The counsellors are all [PAIR] and one of them told me [I AM MAKING PROGRESS]. I'm sure learning a lot about [SOCIETY] and [ORDER]. There is a lot of time to [DEVELOP MYSELF] in here.

I have [LOTS OF NEW RESPONSIBILITIES], and in [LESSONS] we get to [SWIM] in the lake and [LONG DIVISION] and sometimes we [LEARN PRACTICAL SKILLS].

Don't [WORRY ABOUT ME].

If they decide [I HAVE ACHIEVED MY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS], then know that [I AM THANKFUL TO THE CAMP AND ITS COUNSELLORS]. And that everything [I WRONGLY BELIEVED BEFORE] has [PASSED] into [INSIGNIFICANCE] and I am ready [TO BECOME A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY].

All my [RESPECT],

[YOUR SON].

Twelve.

SWALLOW.

A group of Campers sit eating dinner from trays. Occasionally another will sit down and join the conversation.

— What about Leicester?
— Yep.

Pause.

— What about Leeds?
— Mm-hm.

Pause.

— What about Birmingham?
— Yep.

Pause.

— What / about —
— What about Sheffield?
— (Nods.)
— What about Reading?
— Yeah.

— What about Nottingham though?
— Yes.

Pause.

— Derby?
— (Nods.)
— Liverpool.
— Yeah.
— Ipswich?
— Yes.
— Bristol?
— Yes.

Pause.

— Wolverhampton?

— Yes.

— Brighton?

— Yes.

— Harrogate.

— Yes.

— Halifax.

— Yes.

— Oxford.

— Yes.

— Cambridge.

— Yes.

— Durham.

— Yes.

— What about Scotland though?

— Scotland too.

— Glasgow?

— (Nods.)

— Edinburgh —

— Yes.

— Inverness.

— Yes —

— Middlesbrough.

— / Y —

— Middlesbrough's not in Scotland.

— No, but —

— Yes, Middlesbrough too.

— The Isle of Man?

— Yes, everything, yes. They're all —

— The Titches —

— The Titches too, they're just the same —

— Ireland —

— Ireland.

— Wales —

— Yes. Cardiff, Swansea, they're all —

— At ten fifteen.

— At ten fifteen. Everyone is ready for ten fifteen, so just . . .

Don't worry about it.
Alright?

Pause.

— What about London?
— There's no kids in London, bell-end.
— They'll *hear* it in London. They'll know it's all happening.
— How come it's all the same time?
— That's the whole point.
— But what if they don't have a dorm inspection then?
— / Everyone has an inspection at the same time, their orders are all centralised.
— They all do.
— It's so they can move us from camp to camp easier.
— She never went to another.
— You just went here?
— I'm new.
— Yeah, but, not new to —
— This isn't your first camp though.
— If it was you'd have been here ages.
— I don't, I mean . . .

Beat.

— What?
— . . . my —
— my parents kept me hid.
— / For fuck's sake —
— / (*Shakes head.*)
— / Why do we always get sat with these ones —
— Calm down, she still fought. You fought, didn't you?
— I, yeah, I mean —
— Where.
— I did —
— Tell us where.
— . . .
— She's lying.
— I'm not lying, I did.

— So where then.
— . . . Marston Moor.
— / See?
— Me too.
— She's lying.
— Course she's lying.
— Why would she lie?
— She says Marston Moor cos it was so big no one can check.
— I was there —
— Everyone was there. Except her.
— My parents live in York —
— So you just stepped outside to join in then ran home afterwards?
— / No . . .
— Leave her alone.
— Why?
— She's / here now, isn't she?
— Some people had different situations —
— Her situation is that she's a pussy. Let me feel your hands.
— Why?
— I want to feel them —
— Don't listen to him.
— I want to see if they feel like our hands, or if they feel like soft coward's hands.
— / Bit harsh.
— Don't be a dick —
— She didn't fight for tomorrow!
— . . .
— We're all here —
— We're all *meant* to be here, in their eyes.
— We gave them *reasons* to lock us up.
— . . .
— . . .
— I fought at Marston Moor.
— I did.
— And so did thousands of us.

So did kids six-seven years old.

...
I took down three power stations, and closed *six* schools.
I held my friends as they bled out in the streets.
They all fought and died because they believed in taking what
was ours by birthright, before *they* used all of it up.
Before there was nothing left to inherit.

...
We rose up and fought for our home.
This country. This planet.
Clean air. Housing for everyone. Free healthcare. Equality.
No money. No ownership.
A tomorrow for all of us.
We did all that for *you*. While you sat in your house with your
parents, content with whatever scraps they threw you.

...
I should tell them -- I should tell all of them they're wasting
time on you, they don't need to force you into anything -- you
were never on our side in the first place.
I bet you still *write* to them, don't you.
Don't you?
-- ... we're allowed ...
-- I don't care about what they *allow* us to do.

...
When the war started I burned my parents' house to the ground.
...
We gathered in the streets.
We tore down the town hall.
The museum.
Schools.
Everything.
Smashed it to pieces.
Nothing left standing.
Everything they thought was firmly in their grasp we
destroyed, because
If you butcher my future, I will massacre your past.

Pause.

-- I didn't mean to --
-- You didn't fight at Marston Moor.
-- I --
-- Did you.
-- ...
...
no.
...

Pause.

His point proven, he goes back to his food.

-- You make it up to us tonight.

Thirteen.

HOLD.

*Night has fallen.
Outside, round the back of one of the dorms, under a dim light,
a Camper stands waiting.*

Time passes.

*Eventually another Camper hurries on.
Very out of breath.*

-- Hey.
-- I nearly left.
-- I couldn't --
I couldn't get away --
they were marching us --
one of the guys in my unit did something, so they were
marching us --
and I couldn't get away.
...
...
I didn't think I was ever gonna get away, I thought they were

just gonna march me to my dorm and then I wouldn't – But they stopped eventually.

— And you're here.

— I'm here.

— Made it.

— Yeah.

Just.

... sweating ...

She catches her breath.

— I can't stay long.

— No.

— Cos of, well. You know. What we all –

— Ten fifteen.

— Yeah.

— Not long.

— Yeah.

...

Nervous!

...

Pause.

— I thought cos of – You know. I wanted to try this.

...

I thought, I thought I'd try it.

And I nearly missed you!

— Nearly.

— Yeah. Phew. Haha.

— (*Smiles.*)

Pause.

— Do you want to start?

— Oh, yeah. Yes. I mean – I can't stay long, so we, like we said, so. Yeah.

Have you done this before? I mean, duh, course, course you have.

Stupid.

...

I don't know how to, um, start, so –

— Relax.

— Relax, yeah, yes.

— Just relax, and –

Voices or vehicle noise nearby. They freeze until it passes.

— Close.

— Just relax.

...

Breathe in through your nose like this ...

— ...

— ... and then out through your mouth like this ...

— ...

— Just keep going like that till you feel relaxed.

They breathe for a while while looking at each other.

— And now I'll start by just getting closer to you.

— ...

— Really close, okay?

— Oh –

She finches a little.

— S'alright, just relax.

— ...

— There, see.

...

Just keep breathing.

...

She stands very close. They breathe together.

— ...

— And I'm going to put my head on your shoulder and you put yours on mine.

— ...

They gradually come to rest their heads on each other's shoulders.

— . . .
— And then the last bit is just . . .

She brings her arms up to embrace her, closing the hug.

Pause.

The Second Camper raises her arms awkwardly and hugs back.

Pause.

— This is it?
— This is it.
— . . .

Pause.

— What do we do now?
— We just stay like this for a while.

Pause.

They separate.

— There.
— That's it?
— That's it.
— . . .
— We can do it for longer if you want.
— . . . Nah. That's alright.
— Okay.
— It was pretty good I guess.
— It's nice.
— Yeah. Nice. I guess.

— . . .
I dunno . . .

— . . .

— . . .

— . . .
Are you scared about tonight?
— No.
— No.

— . . .
Me either.

— We have to take our own tomorrow or they'll force us into theirs.
— Yeah . . .

Pause.

— I better go.
— Alright.
— I'll see you anyway.
— Okay.
La tierra es vuestra.
— La tierra es vuestra.

Beat.

She leaves.

Fourteen.

CLEAN.

In pyjamas and dressing gowns, the Campers play a spirited and chaotic game of Blind Man's Buff, a giggling Camper stumbling around the washroom with his dressing gown/pyjama top pulled over his head.

Others watch while brushing teeth, yelling, mouths foaming with toothpaste.

The game should be played for real, at length.

Lots of laughter, shouts and calls, lots of improvising.

Sometimes the game tumbles into playfighting or wrestling. Campers squirming on the floor in laughter, dogpiling each other, splashing water.

At a peak of excitement, chaos and laughter, a Camper walks in briskly, heading straight for a sink.

His arms and torso are coated in blood, his clothes soaked in it.

The energy of the room gradually calms as the Campers all notice their bloodied room-mate frantically washing himself.

They watch him for a while in silence.

Eventually, one of the Campers goes over and helps him wash.

One

By

One

They all walk over and help wash the blood away.

Fifteen.

HOME.

Dear Mum,

I am having a really good time at camp. The counsellors are all fair with me and one of them told me I am a good worker. I'm sure learning a lot about the war and my part in it. There is a lot of time to think about things in here.

I have made lots of new friends too, and in our free time we get to swim in the lake and play sports and sometimes we hear stories about how things were before.

Don't worry about me.

If they decide it's better for everyone if I never see you again, then know that I was okay in here. And that everything I ever did to you through anger has drifted out of me into dust and nothingness and I am ready for a tomorrow that can be better for all of us.

All my love,

Shelby.

Sixteen.

OUT.

The Campers are hurrying to their beds –

— Hurry up, hurry up –

— Quick, come on –

— Hurry up –

They all stand on their beds and look to the door.

The clock above is almost at 10:15.

They watch it tick.

Someone giggles.

— /Shhh –

— Shut up, you'll ruin it –

They watch the clock.

Seconds pass.

— Ready –

In unison, the Campers all pull their grenades from under their mattresses.

They hold them as if ready to throw.

Seconds pass.

— Pull –

In unison, the Campers all pull their pins.

The second hand begins to creep towards twelve.

The yells begin –

— La propriété, c'est le vol!

— (All.) Property is theft!

— La propriété, c'est le vol!

— (All.) Property is theft!

— Tear down fences!

- (All.) Burn down walls!
- Tear down fences!
- (All.) Burn down walls!

Perhaps we can hear the approach of Guards.

- One future!
- (All.) Our future!
- One future!
- (All.) Our future!
- Seize tomorrow!
- (All.) Destroy the past!
- Seize tomorrow!
- (All.) Destroy the past!
- A new nation!
- (All.) Conceived in liberty!

Footsteps near —

The clock hits 10:15.

- This land is yours —
- (All.) This land is ours!

In unison the levers of their grenades are loosed —

Each Camper stuffs his or her grenade into their mouth —

The doors begin to open —

Black.

Zero for the Young Dudes!

BY ALISTAIR MCDOWALL

Notes on rehearsal and staging, drawn from a workshop with the writer, held at the National Theatre, October 2016

How the writer came to write the play

ALISTAIR MCDOWALL 'I wanted to write a play for a gang or a unit or young people. It seemed the most fun way to fulfil the Connections brief. At first, I was writing about a bunch of kids who meet for a campout and one of them has a grenade. That was a piece with specific characters, but I eventually decided that the best way to fulfil the brief was to write something that could be performed by five kids or fifty kids. So I returned to the original idea of a prison camp. I'd been interested in the kinds of discipline camps popular in America — featured in various documentaries on TV — so I ended up fusing the grenade with the camp, and pursued that metaphor in more literal terms. What's the logical and surreal endpoint of that image of a child holding a grenade?

'The play ended up as a revolution, and that seemed like a fun idea. Kids are often treated slightly like live grenades themselves — possible explosions waiting to happen. The title of the play is half inspired by 'All the Young Dudes', the Bowie/Mott the Hoople song, and a short film called *Zero for Conduct*, by Jean Vigo (this is the film that *If*... was heavily influenced by, about schoolboys who start a revolution). A constant influence for me that is more present here than usual is the *Peanuts* comic strip. I'd always wanted to write a play that's like a *Peanuts* strip in presentation. I love the form and tone, and I think it's probably one of the truest representations of the fear, anxiety and depression that comes with growing up.

'I also loved that the adults were never seen in *Peanuts*, and that worked with the form of the play — the adults are all seated in the audience, observing.

'I start thinking about audience very early on in the writing, and for this project the audience was very specific: almost entirely made up of the parents of the actors performing the play. I thought it would be fun and in keeping with the spirit of Connections to make a play that indicted the audience. The kids are telling a story in which the audience are the enemy – I wanted there to be a slight sense that the cast could burst into the audience and start causing havoc – an energy and tone that fosters a bit of unease.

'I'm aware that the play sounds fiddly when you're reading it out for the first time, and at a glance it can be slightly tricky to work out who's speaking. But with a bit of work I hope the format will reveal huge freedoms to you without sacrificing story clarity. You can work out the breakdown on your own beforehand or do mini read-throughs with your groups and explore the best solutions for every scene. It should work with any number of people. There aren't many scenes that can't be split in a variety of ways – a few obvious exceptions being scenes like the solitary confinement one, or the dirt-shovelling scene, or the hug scene towards the end.

'I remember when I was a kid at school, and plays for kids often were very immediately "issue"-based. I presume that nowadays it's the same but with different "issues". I was never as interested in those plays as a teenager (though of course there are some great ones!), and so I've written a play for myself at sixteen, with the hope that others might share my interests. I hope it feels honest. I hope it has the chaotic and mischievous energy of being young.

'Oddly, the play was written in early 2015 and seems to keep getting more relevant. In the context of the whole nation and Europe splitting, the themes underneath the play feel more immediate. It's purely accidental. I was writing a play about these kids at this camp and everything else bubbled up underneath from my unconscious.

'It does feel bleak, though there are some positive elements in there – the kids are able to unify despite their differences and

rise up. They lose and end up in these camps, but despite the horrors they're subjected to they remain spirited and human. In the end, though, the ending doesn't feel triumphant, but hollow, empty and tragic. Violence only breeds violence and there should always be another way. With a cast of characters so articulate, a lot of it seems a plea to stop acting and start listening.'

Approaching the play

Vicky Featherstone, lead director, took the group through an exercise to answer some important questions that you and your group should engage with when approaching this play. The key questions were: why are the young people inside this camp and what is the world like outside the camp? Vicky asked the group to investigate what messages there are in the play towards answering these questions.

DISCOVERING FACTS

The best way to investigate messages is to make a list of facts when reading the play. A fact is something that is true before the play begins.

The group came up with a large list of facts, listed here.

This is by no means a complete list, but an example of some helpful facts, big and small:

There has been a war.

There are no kids in London.

The kids are plotting a revolution.

There are several camps.

Some parents hid their children.

There are woods surrounding the camp.

There are grenades.

Someone is giving out grenades.

There is no surveillance in the shower.

Kids are being killed.

It has been three years since the war.

Harry Potter still exists in this world.

Power stations, museums and schools were attacked.

The camp is surrounded by three rows of fences, one of which is electrified.

The camp censors letters.

The kids are not allowed to leave the camp, but they are moved about from camp to camp.

Solitary confinement exists.

The Titches are the younger children and they are kept separately.

There is no sex education.

There is centralised control of the camps.

Twenty-one is the official age of adulthood.

There are guards.

There are counsellors.

There are campers.

There is a pledge that they all know.

Children are still forced to do cross-country.

Kids are being forced to punish and harm other kids.

The camps are rewriting history to give to the Titches.

There was a large battle at Marston Moor (*Marston Moor was a bloody battle in the English Civil War*).

Kids are being made to kill each other.

The kids started a war and they have lost the war.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE PLAY

Alistair and Vicky talked about how companies should approach this as if it was happening 'now', as if the war that led to the events in the play could start today. Alistair has purposely not suggested a specific regime – we could be

anywhere in the British Isles, and, as a result, companies don't have to create a fictional foreign regime. These characters are young people of now, just three or four years in the future after a revolution and civil war. All the circumstances that led to the revolution are present in society right now. As healthcare, economy, environment and education are threatened and mishandled, the young people realise that this is the future that they will inherit and they start a revolution.

Alistair stated that he imagined that this revolution could have started in one or two schools, and then everyone realises that it's possible to violently overthrow the adults. Vicky suggested that this could be fun to work out with your company in rehearsals: 'How did the war start? Did it start quickly or was it a cascade effect?' Your history of the play's world should be precise and logical, and should help to tell the story.

RESEARCH

You could investigate the things present in the world today that show intolerance or a lack of future for young people.

You could ask your company to research and think about what things would break them and push them to war or revolution – they shouldn't make these up, they should be logical extensions of things that exist today.

It's important for your company to own this play in their own way. Vicky suggested that you should allow them to discover this information for themselves, rather than giving it to them.

Themes

Vicky pointed out that although the play has fantastic resonance with contemporary politics with its themes of war and revolution, a production should not be weighed down by these themes. One great thing about this play is the balance between these themes and the fun of the camp and naivety of the young people housed there. The playfulness should be