

methuen | drama

ALISTAIR McDOWALL

PLAYS: 1

BRILLIANT ADVENTURES

CAPTAIN AMAZING

TALK SHOW • POMONA



Foreword by Simon Stephens

B L O O M S B U R Y

Alistair McDowall

Plays: 1

Brilliant Adventures, Captain Amazing, Talk Show, Pomona

Brilliant Adventures: ‘Alistair McDowall’s fascinating debut plays by its own rules.’ *The Times*

Captain Amazing: ‘This is a terrific piece of writing – full of crackle, invention and heart.’ *The Guardian*

Talk Show: ‘The play’s energy seems effortless, with subtext swimming in and out of view. The humour, often very funny, oozes desperation . . . In the end, the play . . . asks one simple question: why is it so difficult for people to draw strength from each other?’ *The Other Bridge Project*

Pomona: ‘Alistair McDowall’s slippery, gripping dystopian thriller . . . enthralling, unexpectedly funny and expertly maintained. . . . Clever, creepy and compelling.’ *Financial Times*

Alistair McDowall grew up in the north east of England. *Brilliant Adventures* was awarded a Bruntwood Prize in 2011. Other plays include *Talk Show* (Royal Court), *Captain Amazing* (Live Theatre) and *Pomona* (Royal Welsh College/Orange Tree Theatre/National Theatre/Royal Exchange). His work has been translated and produced internationally.

ALISTAIR McDOWALL

Plays: 1

**Brilliant Adventures
Captain Amazing
Talk Show
Pomona**

*with an introduction by the author
and
foreword by Simon Stephens*

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
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Contents

<i>Select Chronology</i>	vii
<i>Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
Brilliant Adventures	1
Captain Amazing	115
Talk Show	193
Pomona	299

Alistair McDowall

Select Chronology

- 2011 *Brilliant Adventures* awarded a Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting.
- 2012 *Brilliant Adventures* part of the Royal Court Theatre's Young Writers Festival 2012.
- 2013 *Brilliant Adventures* premieres at the Royal Exchange, Manchester, before transferring to Live Theatre, Newcastle, in a co-production between the Royal Exchange and Live Theatre.
- Talk Show* opens at Royal Court Theatre, in the Jerwood Downstairs space, as part of the Open Court season.
- Captain Amazing* opens at Live Theatre.
- 2014 *Pomona* is commissioned and performed by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, in collaboration with the Royal Court.
- Pomona* subsequently produced at the Orange Tree Theatre, London.
- 2015 *Pomona* transfers to the National Theatre's Temporary Theatre, and then to the Royal Exchange.
- 2016 *X* premieres at the Royal Court Theatre, in the Jerwood Downstairs space, directed by Artistic Director Vicky Featherstone.

Foreword

I have only a handful of ideas about playwriting. I know only about three jokes about theatre. Whenever I'm teaching, I tend to repeat these ideas and these jokes. If you are unfortunate enough to encounter my teaching on more than one occasion, you will notice that I fundamentally repeat the same things time and time again. Sometimes I'm more skilled at hiding this than others.

One of the jokes is based on one of the ideas. I have noticed over the years that playwrights tend to be mutually supportive of one another. Actors pretend to support one another, but secretly are defined by their envy. Directors are openly hostile to one another. Playwrights support one another and that support feels genuine.

Perhaps this is because, on the whole, playwrights have little or no power in theatre, so envy is pointless. Partly it's because, while many actors could play the same role and many directors could direct the same piece, there is no way that playwrights could ever write one another's plays. In British theatre, playwrights tend to be the primary artist, rather than the secondary artist. We generate material, rather than delivering material other people have generated. This generation is a unique consequence of our lives and cultures and experiences. We can't copy one another's lives so there is little point envying one another's work.

Of late, I have started to realise, too, that our plays are not only distinct from one another in this way, but they are also dependent on one another. We make one another better. We steal with fearlessness and spar with one another. We stand on one another's shoulders as we try to imagine our nights in the theatre. We stand on the shoulders – not only of every playwright that has come before us – but on those who come after us.

This mutual dependency leads to a natural affinity, rather than envy. We are doing the same dispiriting, exciting, bewildering job as one another, so we may as well look after one

another. In Britain, a country almost uniquely rich in new plays, this dependency – deep and complex – is one I cherish.

I love reading new plays by new writers.

I read about eight hundred new plays when I was the Writers' Tutor at the Royal Court between 2001 and 2006. I've continued reading new writers in my capacity as Associate Playwright at both the Lyric Hammersmith and the Royal Court. I love reading new plays by new writers because the process galvanises me, challenges me to be sharper. My motives are entirely selfish. Reading new plays by new writers makes me a better playwright myself.

No new playwright has excited me or galvanized me, inspired me or touched me, in the time I have been doing this work, with quite the force of Alistair McDowall. No other playwright has made me want to try to be better to quite this extent.

I met him briefly at the end of 2009 and read two of his early plays at the end of 2010 when he sent them to me in my position as Associate at the Lyric. The talent in the plays – one a collection of monologues, the other a brutal study of a girls' boarding school – was undeniable. Already then a recent graduate from Manchester University, Ali wrote with nuance and suppleness. He had a serious engagement with characters attempting to survive with compassion in a world of brutality. He located the essence of this brutality fearlessly in economics. While, on occasion, his early plots felt expositional or inert, the force of his work was raw and undeniable.

I met him on the occasions he would come down to London and read his next play *Jennifer Jane*.

Two things struck me in our correspondence about this early writing. I remember Ali corrected me when I got the title, *Jennifer Jane*, wrong. I had made the title the subject heading of an email to him and erroneously called it *Jennifer James*. Quietly, without drawing attention to it, he corrected my error in his reply. Plays are important things. It matters that we get the titles right. The second thing I noticed was that he was far more specific and astute and unforgiving in his criticism of his own work than I was.

I have not met a writer of any age who takes the gesture of writing for theatre more seriously than did Alistair McDowall in his early twenties and continues to do now.

It was, I think, shortly after I read *Jennifer Jane* that he gave me his new play *Brilliant Adventures* to read. I looked forward to reading it because I liked his first few plays.

I had no idea how extraordinary it was going to be.

It's a play that appears to start as an exquisite example of a familiar form. Two brothers fend off life in their Middlesbrough housing estate with compassion and wit and palpable love for one another. Their world is dislocated and violent. It is beautifully wrought and evokes the forty years of familiar social naturalistic playwriting that Edward Bond's *Saved* most famously articulated in the UK. And then something genuinely remarkable happens.

Alistair McDowall graced two genres together in a way I had never imagined: economic socio-naturalism and science fiction. He did it with astonishing understatement and skill.

I gave Chris Campbell, the literary manager of the Royal Court Theatre, a copy of the play. It felt like it must have felt in the early days of rock and roll as young Teds passed seven-inch singles to one another. It felt like an exchange of something culturally remarkable. Chris's enthusiasm for Ali's work has charged the last four years of his playwriting career.

My enthusiasm was as striking when I saw the Royal Court production of *Talk Show* in the Open Court repertory as part of Vicky Featherstone's first season as Artistic Director at the theatre. Or when I went with my son to see *Captain Amazing* at the Soho Theatre, both of us leaving the theatre with tears pouring down our face. Returning to read the play this evening left me in the same state.

In a sense, three of these plays, while beautifully directed and acted, deserved larger lives. They are significant plays and, if I know anything about playwriting, they will survive. But they were produced in small spaces or on short runs. It took the masterful *Pomona* for Ali to reach the attention he deserved. I saw it during its run at the Orange Tree in 2014. It was

speedily and rightly acknowledged as one of the year's best plays and revived by the National Theatre the next year.

I had been saying for four years that Alistair McDowall had the potential to become the most significant voice of his generation. At last, other people were starting to say it, too.

The plays gathered in this collection share concerns or interests. The playwrights I love most tend to return to the obsessions in this way.

Each of Ali's plays reaches for a form that best articulates its content. This can result in the linguistic collapse of *Captain Amazing* or the chronological disruptions of *Brilliant Adventures* because such collapse and disruption best articulate his ideas.

He is the writer I know – indeed perhaps the person I know – with the most encyclopaedic knowledge of film history. What is striking for such a lover of film is that each of these plays is so theatrical. He writes for and with a love of the theatre. This manifests itself in a confidence of stagecraft and a brilliant eye for stage image. In these plays, Ali is writing fearlessly in three dimensions.

Something that surprises me about him in these plays and those others I have read, including those early plays and others as yet unproduced (Alistair is an excitingly prolific writer), is how each counterpoints originality of form and a fascination with genre. The science fiction of *Brilliant Adventures* is matched by the horror of the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired *Pomona* or the Marvel comic energy of *Captain Amazing*. Originality, Ali understands, doesn't exist solely in inventiveness, but in the tension between inventiveness and a command of form.

His concerns are thematic as much as they are formal.

Each of his plays counterpoints a startling flint and lack of sentimentality with a deep and felt compassion for his characters.

He writes men with particular incision and examines the heartbreak of watching fathers in despair with more clarity than many playwrights of his generation.

His rigorous examination of the dehumanising savagery of poverty is compelling.

His faith in, and frustration with, the English is as marked as his anger at economic inequality. It is an anger that never becomes didactic or even prescriptive. Rather, he continues to look with ferocity into the heart of economic darkness and write with urgency about what he finds there.

I think this political commitment and unsentimental humanity is why Ali's use of genre works so beautifully. He seems to understand that humans are defined by the stories that we tell one another about who we are. We exist in the spaces between the conventions of those stories and the peculiarities of our lives. In his plays, defined both by their compassion and their absurdity (a father chained up and trained as a dog on a leash, a driver circling the heart of hell on a Manchester ring road, a young man hosting a chat show from his own skint basement, a divorced father in a super-hero cape), he dramatises that space. He articulates that tension between the convention and the individual, the genre and the story, with more honesty and commitment to the form than any other playwright this millennium.

SIMON STEPHENS
2016

Introduction

Hi!

Thanks for buying this book, or borrowing it from someone, or just standing around in a shop reading it for a bit. I'm going to do my best to introduce the four plays in here as best I can. I am now on attempt four of writing this introduction, after several ill-advised versions that were endless, tedious exercises in autobiography that no one asked for, so instead I'll try and get to the point . . .

The four plays in this collection bridge the point at which I became a full-time writer. *Brilliant Adventures* and *Captain Amazing* were written when I was still working as a gallery attendant in a Manchester art gallery, *Talk Show* was the first play I wrote after becoming a writer full-time, and *Pomona* was written the same year the other three plays were first staged. It's a bit of an odd mix as the first three seem closely linked in theme and content, and the fourth is quite different. I tend to write quite quickly, so there are plays in between these that would make the transition seem less jarring than it might reading these four in a row, but those ones haven't made it onto the stage as of the time of writing.

*

Spoilers Ho!

*If you haven't read the plays yet,
avoid this part of the introduction until you have.*

*

Brilliant Adventures was written in 2010, when I was still working at the gallery, occasionally doing tours but mostly just standing around telling people not to touch things. A lot of my days were spent not doing much, so I kept a notebook in my pocket and planned my play, then did the bulk of the writing on days off, evenings and weekends.

It was the play that became my kind of calling card, and I think just about every theatre in the UK read it at some point.

It was the play that first introduced me to the Royal Court, National Theatre, and many others I'm lucky enough to still be working with. Then in 2011 it won one of the Bruntwood awards. On the day, Maxine Peake handed me a cheque for £8,000 and I could leave my day job. Which was exceptional timing as I'd just lost my day job the night before.

(To this day I feel a bit odd on the rare occasions I bump into Maxine – I realise it wasn't her money, but since she was the one who gave me the cheque I'll always feel kind of in debt to her, and also worried she might ask for it back at some point.)

When you write a play about a flat on an abandoned housing estate with a time machine in it, you get asked quite a lot where the idea came from. I honestly have no idea. It never seemed unusual to me, it was just part of the fabric of the story. The closest I've ever come to explaining the sensation of an idea cropping up is by using a clumsy analogy about finding your keys: when you find your keys, they're always somewhere you put them, and so the feeling when you eventually find them isn't one of discovery but one of 'Oh, of course they're there.' If I'm writing and a moment arrives that feels right for the play, I'll kind of have the same sensation. So with *Adventures*, I had this idea about two brothers and this abandoned estate, and then – oh, of course, one of them's built a time machine. Things feel right or they don't. Eventually I'll work out they feel right because they're speaking from somewhere deeper in the play than the surface of the plot or the characters, and are a way into writing what sits underneath everything else.

I grew up in a small village in North Yorkshire about a twenty-minute drive from Middlesbrough. A lot of my mates lived in Marton, which is a suburb of Boro, and so I spent a lot of my weekends kicking around Middlesbrough's town centre growing up. Despite not living actually within it, Boro's always seemed like my home town as it's the only place near where I grew up that anyone's actually ever heard of; although usually for bad reasons. Middlesbrough has often appeared in the news to document drug problems, the closing down of industry, or decaying estates that have been left to crumble to dust.

When I decided to write a play set on an abandoned estate in Middlesbrough, I wanted to be extremely careful about how I was handling it – I didn't want it to be yet another play dramatising a version of things being 'grim up north'. *Adventures* looks like one of those plays at first – when the lights come up we recognise the scruffy-looking flat set – but then spends the rest of its running time pulling that all to pieces. The plot is concerned with some of the things about the town that make it into the news, but it has a story set apart from that too. I've always been aware of the unspoken rule that certain areas are only allowed certain stories, and I hoped *Adventures* could push against that a tiny bit. Middlesbrough has its problems – but it also has an amazing warmth and brilliantly caustic sense of humour. It's a place with a very defined personality. I hope the play reflects that to some extent.

*

Captain Amazing was written after *Adventures* but opened just before it, at Live Theatre in Newcastle, where it was developed. I wrote an introduction to the playtext when it was first published, so I won't repeat myself with how it was developed – instead we've put that introduction after the play in this book.

*

Talk Show was written in 2012, and opened at the Royal Court in the summer of 2013, as part of Vicky Featherstone's first big gesture as artistic director – Open Court. The play was staged as part of a six-play cycle, all performed by the same rep company of actors. I can't begin to write about the play without first talking about the tragedy that surrounded the first production of it. Paul Bhattacharjee, one of the actors in the rep company, died during the rehearsals for *Talk Show*.

After Paul didn't arrive for rehearsals his part was recast, and we ultimately heard the news after the second performance of the show.

I had only had chance to say 'Hello' to him during the meet and greet on the first day, but I found myself in the middle of a huge amount of grief and sadness and confusion, with nothing

of use to say to anyone about any of it. It was a horrible and bizarre time.

I didn't know Paul at all, but through talking to anyone who ever knew him it's obvious how loved he was – everyone had a story about how kind he was, how brilliant an actor he was, the various amazing things he'd been involved in throughout his life.

All I could do then, and all I can do now, is apologise for having so little to say about such a terrible loss.

*

Talk Show feels, whenever I return to it, like my most personal play. Which I immediately want to cross out as a statement, as they're *all* very personal. So what I think I mean is that the lead character is the most like me of any of my characters.

I didn't intend that to happen – I'm usually desperately trying to avoid it – but I remember watching the show one night, and listening to Sam's long meltdown at the end and realising it was just me on stage, venting my various insecurities and anxieties to a paying audience. It still feels almost comically raw to me.

It's also probably the most straightforward play in the collection – it's pretty much naturalism, it's a family play, it's a version of a particular kind of American family play – but it still plays with form in a way that links it to the other plays. The use of the canned laughter and applause, when employed well, does a strange thing to the feeling of the room – after Sam tells one of his terrible jokes and there's audible laughter, there's usually a beat before the audience laugh themselves, at the laughter. As the play goes on, the real and fake laughter will sometimes kick in at the same time, and sometimes there'll be a delay. The audience might join in with the applause at certain points too, which starts to do a weird thing with the fourth wall. Sam is talking to the audience, but an audience that isn't there – but they are there, as this is a play. The effect makes the audience feel both involved and implicated, and voyeuristic at the same time (I hope . . .). The play is then traditional in form overall, but with a disruptive spirit that matches the characters, and with a fourth wall that's not made of bricks.

*

The first three plays in this collection feel like they share the most in common with one another. They're all filled with characters who struggle to articulate themselves, either through anxiety or other problems. They all play some kind of game with the audience – the talk show in *Talk Show*, the character switching in *Captain Amazing*, and the biggest one: the cardboard box in *Brilliant Adventures* that the audience collectively agrees to believe is a time machine.

The biggest similarity I think, though, is that they're all preoccupied with what happens when women leave the picture. The boys in *Brilliant Adventures* are a pack of lost boys, seeming much younger than they are. The central character in *Captain Amazing* briefly flourishes out of his passivity when women enter his life. And the men in *Talk Show* all seem completely unable to make ends meet or even express basic emotions once the women in their lives leave.

They also share a shifting relationship between fantasy and reality. The fantasy in each play either exists in fantastic onstage elements (time machines) or as escape for characters from their own heads, which then bleeds out into the real world (superheroes and talk shows). The next play also toys with fantasy, but in darker realms than the previous three.

*

Pomona is a real place. A lot of people who saw the play thought I'd made it up, but it's in Manchester, it's on the tram line, it's slap bang in the middle of the city.

I'd been haunted by it for a long time, this funny little overgrown island surrounded by roads and canals and rails – not unlike the setting for J.G. Ballard's *Concrete Island*. The street lights have never worked there in my experience – so at night it's an inky blackness that appears as though someone forgot to fill the rest of the city in.

As I write this, it's in the process of changing into somewhere less mysterious. Despite a local campaign to turn it into a park, it's to be the site for new expensive flats.

Though it's sad to lose the place itself, it doesn't matter so much to me that the play will be geographically out of date – and as I said, people just thought I'd made the place up anyway.

Pomona is a play that could take place in any major city in the UK. It's not about Pomona, that's just a place for the play to circle and prowl. It's a play about my own fears and anxieties made incarnate. It's a play about cities written by someone who spends vast amounts of time travelling between two major ones. It's a play about the first decade-and-a-bit of the twenty-first century. Too much internet and coffee. Too much information. All of it crippling. The characters consume frantically and are ultimately consumed themselves.

It was a surprise to me that the play connected with as many people as it seemed to – I thought it was so insular and bleak it would mostly alienate people. I wrote it during a bad patch and, reading it again, I think it wears its mood on its sleeve.

Despite seeming quite different on the surface to the other three, *Pomona* is, like the others, a play about lost people. The difference being the characters in the previous plays have some awareness of how they came to be lost – in *Pomona* it's just a by-product of contemporary life.

Searching for other connections between this play and the others, I think they all sit quite neatly within genres – if not the ones I think they first appear to be. Despite featuring sci-fi elements, *Brilliant Adventures* is more of a western – an abandoned and lawless estate is thrown into further danger with the arrival of an outsider. *Captain Amazing* has obvious superhero connotations but it's written more like a children's play, with one character performing a cast of thousands in short snatches. *Talk Show* is absolutely in the tradition of the American family play, which is a genre in itself, and *Pomona*, despite all the horror elements, is a detective story without the detective – the audience fills that role themselves.

As a side note, I'd add that Ned, the original director, swapped out the Rubik's Cubes in the text for dice, which I think was a really smart way of tying the events of the game and the rest of the play together very cleanly, if you prefer to read it that way.

*

Thanks again for buying/borrowing/reading; I truly appreciate every bit of support I've had for my writing from childhood to

now. So here's a short list of people I have to thank, as this book wouldn't exist without them:

The casts and creative teams of all these plays were all an absolute joy and inspiration to work with, without exception.

In alphabetical order, Ned Bennett, Clive Judd and Caroline Steinbeis directed these plays and gave me notes on each that improved them immeasurably, and continue to have impact on every play I write.

Other people who helped me hugely with redrafting each of these, again in alphabetical order: Suzanne Bell, Leo Butler, Gez Casey, Chris Campbell, Vicky Featherstone, Sarah Frankcom, Carissa Hope Lynch, Simon Stephens, Nils Tabert.

The theatres that produced each of these plays throughout their runs: Live Theatre, National Theatre, Orange Tree, Royal Court, Royal Exchange, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Thanks to Peter Moore, Stu Kiesow and Steep Theatre Chicago for letting me use their beautiful image from their production of *Brilliant Adventures* for the cover.

Thanks to Anna Brewer and Bloomsbury Methuen Drama for continuing to publish my work.

A special thanks to my agent Howard Gooding for years of support, guidance, and friendship.

To Simon Stephens for being my mate and theatre big brother for years, always being available when I've gotten stuck with anything. And more than likely helping shift a few tickets with his very vocal support of these plays.

To Jan Hunter and the sadly missed Davod Hunter, two teachers I'd never be able to repay for the encouragement and tools they gave me at key points during my childhood and adolescence.

To my family for always supporting my terrible financial decision to pursue a career as a writer, and for sitting through these plays which I know aren't really your thing.

And I dedicate this collection as a whole to my wife Amy, for being everything I could never hope to put into words.

ALISTAIR MCDOWALL

2016

Brilliant Adventures

*for sean, lizzie, and callum
and
for the north-east, and the people there*
THE N.W.R.A.

Brilliant Adventures was first performed at the Royal Exchange, Manchester, on 8 May 2013 in a co-production between the Royal Exchange and Live Theatre, Newcastle, with the following cast and creatives:

Luke	Robert Lonsdale/Lee Armstrong
Rob	Joseph Arkley
Greg	Ian Bonar
Ben	Laurence Mitchell
The Man	Michael Hodgson

Director Caroline Steinbeis

Designer Max Jones

Lighting Designer Kay Haynes

Sound and Music Richard Hammarton

Characters

Luke, *nineteen, anxious, irritable*

Rob, *twenty-six, energetic, quick-tempered, never seen without his baseball cap on*

Greg, *eighteen, glasses, talkative*

Ben, *thirty-two, well-dressed, calm, confident*

The Man, *forties*

Setting

A council flat in Middlesbrough.

Time

2010.

Notes

A question without a question mark denotes a flatness of tone.

A dash (–) indicates an interruption of speech or train of thought.

An ellipsis (. . .) indicates either a trailing off, a breather, a shift, or a transition.

An oblique (/) indicates where the next line of dialogue interrupts or overlaps, thus:

Here, **A** and **B** speak simultaneously:

A / Nice to meet you.

B Nice to meet you.

Here, **B** interrupts **A**:

A Nice to / meet you.

B Nice to meet you.

Act One

One

A small council flat. The ground floor of a converted house.

Across the back wall is the front door with several locks and an intercom, a serving hatch and doorway to a small kitchen, a small table and two chairs. On the table is a large goldfish bowl with a fish in it. There are also hundreds and hundreds of books and a tower of DVDs stacked from the floor up.

Stage left is a doorway to the bedroom and bathroom; stage right is the window, which has curtains tightly drawn. Leaning against the wall next to the window is a single mattress and a rolled-up duvet. Downstage centre is a tired-looking sofa and a television with DVD player balanced precariously on top.

Downstage left is a tall cardboard box, perhaps from a fridge-freezer, standing on end. There is a door flap cut into one side, and on the other are several cardboard dials and switches.

Luke *is lying on the sofa, playing a Gameboy.*

The intercom buzzes.

Beat.

He gets up and goes over to it; it buzzes again before he can get there.

Hang on.

He presses the button.

H-hello?

Intercom Lerrus in!

He presses a button, then opens the door and sticks his head out.

(Off.) What are you doin'?

Greg *(off)* Is that your horse out there?

Luke comes back in and goes back to the sofa. **Greg** follows, holding a pizza box. He shuts the door behind him. During the following he goes to the kitchen, gets a knife and fork, then sits down on the floor near **Luke** and eats the chicken parmesan out of the pizza box.

Luke What?

Greg Is that your horse out the front?

Luke Why would I have a . . . horse?

Greg There's a horse knocking about outside your door.

Luke There's loads of em round here.

Greg Thought it was gonna charge me.

Luke Ch-charge you?

Greg Head-butt me or sommit. People get killed by horses all the time, they stomp on you and that.

He stuffs a huge forkful of parmo in his mouth.

Greg (with mouth full) Vywaa aah, ohrss. ('Violent as, horses.')

Luke Can I have . . . a bit?

Greg No you can't, man, I'm starving. And I had to bloody nick a fiver off me dad to get this.

Luke Just a bit.

Greg You can have one chip.

Luke (taking a chip) Tight . . . bastard.

*He grabs a handful of chips before **Greg** can stop him and dashes back to his seat, triumphant.*

Greg Bastard! Cost us four pound, this. And I nearly got killed on me way to get it.

Luke B . . . bollocks.

Greg I did an all! Scallies hoying bricks at us all the way there. They're all stood up in them crumbly houses opposite Pizza

Zeus chucking bits of the buildings about. Fucking outrageous, man. Using the buildings as weapons now.

Luke Just . . . cross the road.

He goes back to his Gameboy.

Beat.

Greg Is your brother comin round today?

Luke Dunno.

Greg I've got to ask him sommit.

Luke He's not . . . interested.

Greg How'd you know he's not interested? He might – How do you know?

Luke I just know he's not.

Greg How though?

Luke Cos he calls you a specky fucking . . . cunt all day.

Greg That doesn't mean he's not interested. Don't have to be friends to be business partners.

Luke He doesn't want you as his business partner.

Greg I can be valuable, me.

Luke You'd be . . . shit.

Greg No, I wouldn't.

Luke You would.

Greg No, I wouldn't, I'd be alright.

Luke You can't even hack little d-dickheads . . . chucking stuff at you.

Greg That's different – And they weren't little either, they were like our size.

Maybe even bigger.

Luke You'd get knifed in five . . . minutes.

Greg Well, I wouldn't be on my own first, would I? I'd be like an apprentice first.

Luke Apprentice . . .

Greg Like Rob's helper or sommit.

Luke What've you got to offer? You can't f-fight, you can't do maths –

Greg I've got GCSEs.

Luke Shit GCSEs.

Greg More than your Rob's got.

Luke He's got other – talents.

Greg I can contribute.

Luke What with?

Pause.

Greg Enthusiasm. Motivation. I want to climb the ladder. The ladder of *business*.

Luke There's no . . . ladder. There's just rungs. And no . . . outer bit. The outer bit of the ladder. So the rungs aren't . . . attached to owt.

Greg What?

Luke It's a metaphor. For something. I guess.

Greg Shit metaphor.

Luke *goes back to his Gameboy.*

Beat.

Greg What you playing?

Luke T-Tetris.

Greg Bit old-school that, like.

Luke It's a classic.

Pause.

Greg *has finished with his parmo.*

Greg Can I have a go?

Luke I'm playing.

Greg Well, it's a bit rude.

Luke Why?

Greg Cos. You've got a guest round. It's rude to your guest. Just sat playing Tetris and not talking to us.

Luke You're here all the time.

Greg I'm still your guest. (*Beat.*) It's very rude.

Pause.

He gets up and walks around the room. He looks at the fish bowl.

Have you fed Proust?

Luke Yes.

Greg (*scrutinising the fish*) He looks thin.

Luke Fish can't look thin.

Greg He does though.

Luke D-don't feed him.

Greg I'm not.

Luke If you overfeed him, he'll . . . die.

Greg I know.

Beat.

Did you think about what I was saying yesterday?

Luke N-no.

Greg You didn't think?

Luke You're . . . not moving in here.

Greg Aw come on, man.

Luke It's a one-bedroom . . . flat.

Greg I can just kip on the sofa, here.

Luke *I* sleep in here.

Greg You sleep on the mattress, I can sleep on the sofa.

Luke No.

Greg Why not?

Luke I like . . . living on my own.

Greg Please, man . . .

Luke What do you wanna live here for, anyway? You sh-shit yourself every time you have to w-walk here.

Greg I'll get used to it. And I won't even go out. You never go out.

Luke You're not moving . . . in.

Beat.

You can k-kip over when you want, but you're not living here.

Greg Can I tonight?

Luke No.

Greg You just said when I want!

Luke You're not – You'll never leave. You'll just k-keep saying that every night.

Greg I won't!

Luke You will. Just pack it in. Stop . . . talking about it. I only just moved out on my . . . own. Need my space.

Beat.

Greg *stands up and heads to the bathroom.*

Greg I'm trying to make a better life, man. I'm trying to do sommit right and, and, and, *develop* myself. And you won't even let us kip on your sofa. *And* you won't even put in a good word for me with your brother –

Luke How can I p-put in a good word for you? He *knows* you.

Greg No friend at all, you.

He exits.

(Off.) No friend at all!

The buzzer goes.

Luke *gets up to answer it, muttering*

Luke H-h –

Intercom Let us in you stuttering dickhead.

Luke Y-you didn't say you were coming r-r –

Intercom Stop / gibbering and press the fucking button.

Luke You, you, no, you – Fine.

He presses the button, then opens the door and goes back to the sofa.

Enter Rob. On a dog lead he has The Man, a wild-looking middle-aged man.

The Man *walks on all fours and is naked except for a filthy pair of shorts, a bumbag, some filthy socks, gloves, and a red scarf around his neck. During the following, Rob ties The Man's lead to the door knob and he scuttles around for a bit before settling on the floor.*

Rob I need to make an appointment now?

Luke N –

Rob You don't want to see us now you've moved into your fancy flat in Cracktown?

Luke I need to – I have to do work.

Rob Oh yeah, you look busy, like.

Luke I'm having a . . . break.

Rob I'm only dropping in.

Luke Need my . . . p-privacy.

The toilet flushes.

Rob Oh, aye. Privacy.

Enter Greg, doing his fly.

Rob This cock's welcome and I'm not?

Greg Alright, Rob?

Rob (*eating Greg's parmo*) I'm having the rest of your parmo.

Greg Aw, come on, man. I had to rob me own dad for that.

Rob That's why you don't deserve it.

Greg I was gonna eat that an all.

Rob Has he told you why he doesn't want me round any more?

Luke I didn't –

Greg He doesn't want me here either, Rob.

Rob Well, I can understand why he wouldn't want a stack of sausage-dog shite like you here, but why wouldn't he want this handsome cunt round?

Rob *grabs Luke's head roughly and kisses his cheek.*

During the following, Greg goes and pats The Man on the head.

Luke Gerroff –

Rob I like to check up on you, living in this fucking wasteland.

Luke I'm fine.

Rob Surprised you've even got electricity –

Luke It's n-not –

Rob – Fucking knobheads keep nicking the wire from the power stations.

You don't even have the curtains open. Smackheads making faces at you?

Luke Will you . . . calm down. You're exhausting.

Rob Alright, alright, alright. Alright.

He sits down on the sofa next to Luke.

He starts rolling a cigarette.

Rob Fuck knows why you want to live round here though, being like you are. Living where I do all my business.

Greg / Rob, about –

Rob Can I smoke in here, or is that not allowed either?

Luke You know you . . . can.

Rob *lights his fag. He goes over to the serving hatch, where there's a little ashtray.*

Greg / Rob –

Rob It's not the sort of place someone like you should be living.

Luke S-s-someone –

Rob Someone like you. Someone who jumps at his own shadow. You'll have a fucking seizure if they knock on your window.

Luke I'm n-not that . . . bad.

Rob This is a dealer's flat, man. You're living in a dealer's flat.

Luke It's . . . not.

Rob Course it is. It's fucking custom-built.

Window in the bog goes right out in the alley –

Greg (*nodding sagely*) Right out in the back, yeah.

Rob Grilles on the front door, main window here overlooking the – well, not the green. The brown.

Luke Stop – coveting my flat.

He gets up and tidies away Greg's pizza box.

Rob I'm just saying, that's what it's made for. Not for living in.

There's not anyone lives on this estate that isn't hooked on sommit.

Greg Ha, yeah.

Rob Even the cameras can't get you, cos of the angle. / It's perfect.

Greg Yeah, I noticed that, Rob. / Noticed the CCTV.

Luke (*returning*) It's my flat. You're not using it.

Rob I know. (*Beat.*) Just saying.

Luke Well, don't. Don't be just saying.

Rob Alright.

Beat.

Greg Rob –

Rob How about if I moved in?

Greg He doesn't want people moving in, Rob –

Rob I can pay rent, dickhead. Unlike you.

Luke No one's . . . moving in. Moved to get away f-from all your . . . shite –

Rob Oh, so you moved *here*?

Luke I just moved where the council p-put us. Disability doesn't pay that m-much.

Rob Disability – What disability have you got, anyway?

Luke F-f-fucking obvious . . . isn't it?

Rob Having a mong voice doesn't make you a mong.

Luke Ch-ch . . .

Rob You talk the talk but you don't walk the walk.

Luke – Charming.

Luke *glances out of the curtains, keeping them tightly shut.*

Greg Rob –

Rob Look at the state of you though.

Luke What?

Rob Terrified.

Luke I'm . . . fine.

Rob You're shit scared of your own estate.

Luke I'm f-f-f –

Rob If I lived here you wouldn't be scared.

Luke If you were . . . here you'd be dealing out my l-living room.

Rob I'd be discreet.

Luke Discreet? Dragging . . . him around?

Rob You know, you're pretty fucking ungrateful considering I paid for everything in here.

Greg Aw, let's not / start –

Rob I bought this. And this. And those. And that. And the fucking keks you're wearing too.

Luke I'm not . . . talking about –

Rob Place would be bare if it weren't for my money –

Greg / Come on –

Luke I-I –

Rob You don't like where it comes from, but you'll take whatever you can get.

Luke L-let me *speak*.

Beat.

Rob Sorry. Sorry.

Beat.

Luke I'm . . . grateful. For your help. But I want to live on my own n-now, and I want to live without . . . your s-stuff going on all the t-time so I can . . . focus on my work.

Makes me n-nervous.

Beat.

Rob Alright, sorry. Just fucking around.

Luke *nods*.

Rob Sorry.

Pause.

Rob *stubs out his cigarette and takes a huff from his asthma inhaler.*

*He kicks **The Man** gently.*

The Man *groans*.

Rob Don't be falling asleep. We're leaving in a bit.

Lazy fucker.

He coughs.

Greg Rob . . .

Rob What?

Greg Have you had a think about what I was asking?

Rob No I haven't, Greg.

Greg You haven't?

Rob I don't need to think about whether I should give you any work, that's a fucking obvious no.

Luke T-t- / told you.

Greg Did you not have a look at my CV?

Rob Why would I want to read your fucking CV?

Greg For my references.

Rob Oh aye, your references. Your schoolteachers. I can tell what they'll say: 'Gregory is a useless dickend who can't tell shite from sherbet.'

Greg They wouldn't say that, man.

Rob They'd say worse probably, looking at your string of fucking 'F's and 'U's.

Stop putting CVs through my door.

Greg Least I've *got* GCSEs.

Rob Yeah, well. Glad you've got that for comfort. What with being a specky . . . shrimpy . . . smelly little wank-addict, you need something to keep your self-esteem up.

Greg I'm not a wank-addict!

Luke / L . . . leave him –

Rob I'm giving you an excuse calling you an addict. If you're not then why the fuck were you wanking on my sofa?

Greg You said you weren't gonna talk about that again!

Luke / Come on . . .

Rob How can I not talk about it? No one can sit on that sofa any more.

Greg I didn't . . . It was the middle . . . I was just . . . Aw, fuck the pair of yous.

He springs up and goes for the door.

Luke I d-didn't / . . .

Greg You're not standing up for us. You can both fuck off.

He leaves, slamming the door behind him.

Beat.

Rob He's a laugh, him, isn't he?

Luke You shouldn't –

Rob He's alright, he knows I'm taking the piss.

Luke He's got a weak . . . c-constitution.

The buzzer goes.

See, he's back . . . already.

Rob *goes to the intercom before Luke can get up.*

Rob *(into intercom)* Yeah?

Intercom *(muffled speech).*

Rob *(into intercom)* In a sec, yeah.

He opens the front door.

Luke Who's that?

Rob A mate.

Rob *leaves.*

Luke A m-m –

Before Luke can go and look, Rob comes back in with a plastic bag and shuts the door.

Rob *(kicking The Man)* Come on, daft arse, we're off.

Luke What are you . . . d-doing?

Rob Nowt –

Luke Y-y-y-y –

Rob He's just giving us my CDs back –

Luke *goes to grab the bag*

Rob It's just my CDs, mate –

Luke You don't h-have a-any . . . / CDs –

Rob Just leave it –

Luke You . . . said you were gonna . . . not do –

Rob It's just this one time, man. Had to be quick.

Luke Now some fucking . . . *s-s-psycho* knows where I . . . live –

Rob He's not a psycho, he's a mate.

Beat.

Luke You fucking bastard man.

Rob Luke –

Luke You said. You *said*.

Rob Calm down.

Luke You –

Rob I won't do it again.

Luke It's . . . not the point, you –

Rob Listen. *Listen.*

A bloke I know has bought the flat upstairs, so it won't affect you.

We'll be using up there now.

Beat.

Luke Upstairs?

Rob I've met this bloke from London. Fucking wadded.

We're going to work together –

Luke W-why's he –

Rob He needs someone with connections round here, so he's investing in me.

Help us expand and everything.

Luke And he's living up . . . stairs?

Rob He's not *living* up there, he's using it to work out of.

Luke And you –

Rob I didn't – It's coincidence. *Coincidence.*

This is good news for us man – The amount of money he's got –
We can have a fresh start.

Luke It's n-not a f-f-fresh start if y-you're still doing the . . .
same sh-*shite* –

Luke *is wandering around his flat.*

Rob We won't be interrupting your precious experiments, alright?

Luke No, but you'll be . . . f-filling the building with
f-f-fucking . . . smackheads.

Rob We have to have a base here, it's the main marketplace
for fuck's sake –

Luke This is where I live!

Blackout.

Two

The same. A few days later. Greg lies on the sofa, playing the Gameboy.

Pause.

Greg (*muttering*) Fucking bent block bastard . . .

Pause.

There's a knock at the door.

Greg looks up. He stands up. He looks down the hall.

Greg Luke, man.

Beat.

Luke man, door.

Beat.

Greg goes and opens the door. **Ben** is standing in the hall.

Greg Ello?

Ben Hi. I'm supposed to meet Rob here.

Greg Oh right, yeah. (*Beat.*) Do you wanna come in like?

Ben Thank you.

He walks into the flat. Greg shuts the door.

Ben Ben, good to meet you.

Ben shakes **Greg's** hand.

Greg I'm Greg, me.

Ben Oh – I thought – Luke? Luke lives here?

Greg Yeah, he does. I think he's just having a shit at the minute.

Have a sit down and that.

Ben sits on the sofa. **Greg** sits on the opposite arm.