

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Shady Characters

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by Chris Thompson

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EXTRACT

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# Shady Characters

written by Chris Thompson

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## SCENE 1: NO MORE PENCILS, NO MORE BOOKS

As the AUDIENCE enters, BERNIE BONE is sprawled out at the front of the stage, drawing. To one side of the stage is a colourful SWINGSET, including a swing, a ladder and climbing poles. Everyday objects like frying pans, metal pots and hubcaps hang from a bar on the SWINGSET. These objects, and the SWINGSET itself will make percussive rhythms later on. Areas of the SET and the STAGE are like big pages of a drawing book or a big blackboard on which drawings can be made with paint (if the surfaces are white) or with chalk (if the surfaces are black).

On the other side of the stage is a SEE-SAW.

Somewhere on the set are two life-sized drawings. One is 'BB' and the other is THE BIG 'B'. Together, they are the B-TEAM; BERNIE's imagination.

BERNIE is drawing pictures of the B-TEAM.

Suddenly, two figures appear at the back of the stage. It's them. They've come to life. They check out the space. They check out each other. They check out BERNIE.

B-TEAM:

Psst.

BERNIE turns but they're gone. He shrugs and goes back to his drawing.

The B-TEAM reappear. They sneak onto stage, They each stand in front of their cartoon drawing. THE BIG 'B' blows a little horn.

BERNIE turns again, but still doesn't see them. He goes back to his book again.

This time, the B-TEAM sneak right up to BERNIE. THE BIG 'B' taps him on the shoulder and when he looks up, 'BB' snatches his drawings away.

B-TEAM:

(to the audience)

Bernie Bone's imagination has run away with him!

Bernie

(amazed)

Wow!

BERNIE runs to the SWINGSET pretending he's a SPY. He rolls and dives and climbs all over it as 'BB' and THE BIG 'B' pursue him making Spy Thriller sounds.

Eventually, BERNIE flings himself off the SWINGSET as though he's making a daring escape. The B-TEAM follow him across the stage.

'Bb'

Without warning, they were on the move, driving by night so as to avoid detection.

The Big 'b'

He had no idea where they were going or what lay ahead.

They pretend to be a car driving wildly through the night, squealing and screeching as they skid around the corners. Eventually they come to a halt, falling all over the floor.

A Postie whistle sounds and a hand appears, holding an envelope.

BERNIE grabs it, but before he can read it, 'BB' snatches it from him. 'BB' goes to read it, but before he can THE BIG 'B' snatches it away, opens the envelope and reads.

The big 'b'

Please find enclosed the school records of Bernard B. Bone. Bernie is a pleasant and competent student. He has happily joined in class activities, has made lots of friends and is always polite and cooperative with his teachers. We will be sorry to see him...

(this was unexpected)

...change schools.

BERNIE doesn't like the sound of this. He flops down on the ground. The B-TEAM are onto to it, though, trying to cheer BERNIE up with a Super-Hero fantasy.

'bb'

(in superhero stance)

They call him 'BB'.

BERNIE tries this out, but shakes his head. It doesn't work for him.

The big 'b'

(also in superhero stance)

They call him, 'The Big B'.

BERNIE tries this as well, but shakes his head again. This doesn't work for him either.

B-TEAM

(both in superhero stance)

They call him, 'B-Man'.

BERNIE likes this name. He jumps up and joins the B-TEAM in superhero poses.

BERNIE:

B-Man!

B-TEAM:

Word had gotten around: B-Man was in town.

'BB' draws a picture of 'B-MAN THE SUPERHERO' on the set. BERNIE makes a dash for the SEE-SAW. He balances on it like it's the edge of a cliff.

Suddenly, BERNIE's at his new school.

Teacher: (V.O.)

Good morning year six.

Children: (V.O.)

(in unison)

Good morning Ms Teecha.

BERNIE's a bit anxious. He looks around for somewhere to hide. THE BIG 'B' writes the word HIDEOUT in front of the SEE-SAW.

The BIG 'B'

He's on the run and looking for a low profile hideout.

No-one would ever think of looking for him here.

BERNIE hides behind the SEE-SAW.

Teacher: (V.O.)

Now year six, today we are welcoming a new  
classmate. Say good morning to Bernard Bone.

CHILDREN: (V.O.)

(in unison)

Good morning Bernie.

BERNIE pokes his head up from behind the SEE-SAW and waves. The CHILDREN all giggle.

Children:

(V.O.)

(chanting)

Doggie bone, Stays at home

No-one calls him on the phone  
BERNIE ducks back down until he's peeking out from behind the SEE-SAW.

THE BIG 'B'

B-Man positions himself strategically, with one eye on  
the class-room, and the other on the playground.

The CHILDREN race in from everywhere, shouting out sayings and chants like...

CHILDREN:

Umm...arrrr...  
Dibber dobbers wear nappies...  
Liar, liar pants on fire...  
You said it so you are it...

Copy cat from Ballarat  
Went to school and got the strap

You're a pig, I'm a goat  
You stink, I don't

In, out, over, under  
Sugar, scissors, natural, pepper  
They run up to BERNIE who cowers as they point and shout.

CHILDREN

(in unison)

Stacks on!

The SWINGSET is re-positioned... now it's THE PLAYGROUND.

They run off to play basketball, skippy, and other games. There are rhythms in the bouncing balls, their feet on the ground, the slap of the skipping rope and in their chanting.

'BB' and THE BIG 'B' draw a HOPSCOTCH game on the floor. They try to get BERNIE involved in a strange made-up game of Hopscotch/Leap-Frog/Tiggy. BERNIE plays with the B-TEAM for a bit, but he wants to join in with the other kids.

CHILDREN:

(clapping and chanting)

My Aunty Anna plays the piana  
Twenty Four hours a day... Split  
OR...

Under the bamboo, under the tree  
True loves we'll be for ever, true loves we'll be  
When we get married how happy we will be  
To be under the bamboo tree  
OR...

In, out, over, under  
Sugar, scissors, natural, pepper

Eventually the rhythms take over and they play the PLAYGROUND RHYTHM.

BERNIE tries to join in the games and then the rhythms, but he gets it wrong every time.

Eventually, as their rhythm gets really wild, he goes off into his own playful world. The CHILDREN suddenly stop the rhythm but BERNIE keeps going. They all laugh at him and run off chanting.

CHILDREN:

Doggie Bone stays at home  
No-one calls him on the phone.

A whistle blows. It's PE CLASS.

Pe teacher: (V.O.)

Come on you lot, get the lead out. What d'ya think  
this is, bush week? Come on Bone, run.

BERNIE tries to run laps, but collapses on the ground, panting and puffing and gasping for

breath. He pulls out a Ventolin and inhales from it.

B-TEAM:

In the nick of time he finds the antidote.

Mother: (V.O.)

Please excuse Bernie from sport today. He's been a bit snuffley all week and the cold air isn't good for his asthma.

The whistle blows again. It's football.

Pe teacher: (V.O.)

Come on you lot, run for it, run for it. Pick it up, pick it up. Where do you think you are? Kindergarten? This isn't a picnic Bone, kick it!

BERNIE plays kick to kick with the B-TEAM.

B-TEAM:

And it's right on the siren as B-Man lines up to kick the winning goal.

BERNIE tries to kick the footy but he misses and falls on his bum.

Mother: (V.O.)

Please excuse Bernie from sport today. With all this pollen in the air, his hayfever is making his eyes all itchy and swollen.

The whistle blows again. It's swimming.

Pe teacher: (V.O.)

That's it, that's it. Nice even strokes, big breath, strong kicks. Come on Bone, into the water. Let's see what kind of swimmer you are.

BERNIE is embarrassed in his bathers. He gingerly walks up the SEE-SAW. The B-TEAM anchor one end on the ground, as BERNIE lies down on the other, flailing his arms and legs wildly. The B-TEAM hoist the SEE-SAW up and down like it's waves.

B-TEAM:

Without a thought for his own safety, B-Man swims on through the shark infested waters.

The B-TEAM lower BERNIE's end to the ground and he slides off into an exhausted heap. The school bell rings.

Teacher: (V.O.)

Come along children. Please assemble in the quadrangle. Nice straight lines.

The CHILDREN march back in singing the National Anthem.

'BB' draws an Australian flag on the set.

CHILDREN:

Our land abounds in nature strips  
With gum trees everywhere  
Eat Vegemite  
And she'll be 'right  
Advance Australia fair

BERNIE joins in at the end, singing with gusto, much to the B-TEAM's embarrassment.

BERNIE:

In joyful strains then let us sing...  
Advaaaaance  
Austraayyyyyy...  
...leeeerrr fair.

The other CHILDREN giggle. BERNIE is embarrassed.

Teacher: (V.O.)

Thankyou children. That was lovely. Well, year six.  
This is the last time you will all be together. Next year  
it will be off to secondary school for you.

The CHILDREN look excited. BERNIE looks terrified.

B-TEAM:

B-Man isn't worried. He's seen it all before. People  
come and people go. In the end, the only one you can  
rely on is number one.

Teacher: (V.O.)

So enjoy your last afternoon of primary school. Soon  
you'll be all grown up, and in no time at all you'll be  
as old as me and wondering where the time has gone.

The CHILDREN cheer, and run out chanting.

CHILDREN:

No more pencils,  
No more books,  
No more teacher's dirty looks.

It's Christmas. BERNIE's down in the dumps.

B-TEAM:

(singing)

Deck the halls with boughs of holly  
Fa la la la lah, la la, la, lah  
'tis the season to be jolly  
Fa la la la lah, la la, la, lah

They wrap BERNIE in tinsel. He looks a little bewildered. The B-TEAM put a party hat on  
BERNIE's head and hand him a party popper. Now it's midnight on New Year's Eve

B-TEAM:

(singing)

Should old acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind  
Should old acquaintance be forgot,  
For the sake of auld lang syne...

...three, two, one...Happy New Year!

BERNIE fires his party popper. It's a fizzer. The streamers flop pathetically onto the floor.  
He's miserable.

Mother: (V.O.)

Have you packed yet Bernie?

BERNIE shakes his head.

Mother: (V.O.)

Well you'd better get a move on then. We've got a  
long drive ahead of us.

BERNIE tries to pick up the Swingset..

Mother: (V.O.)

You're not taking that with you.

BERNIE sighs and leaves.

The SWINGSET is repositioned... now it's DOT & DASH's BEDROOM.

**Scene 2: welcome to to0tgarook**

MEANWHILE....