

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



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by David Pledger

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EXTRACT

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# 1 Detention

Spectators mill around an entry area.

## Sound 1:

*Ladies and Gentlemen, due to recent events and in accordance with prevailing public liability regulations over public spaces, random security checks will be conducted throughout the building. Please make available to security officers your possessions and personal articles for their inspection, and before proceeding into the Holding Area. Once security registrations are complete you will then be advised the conditions of the Performance.*

Each spectator possesses a security card received when purchasing their ticket. Spectators use these cards to access the maze of spaces leading to the **Holding Area**. At vantage points, The **Head of Security** and **Security Officers** conduct security card checks, inspect handbags or personal items using metal detectors, and direct spectators to the **Holding Area**.

The **Holding Area** comprises three seating banks surrounding an open square of space above which hangs a network of monitors. On the fourth side, a large screen is framed by two Security Stations, one of which is **The Senior Officer's** Station. On the diagonals, monitor-stacks close off the space. These monitors screen a rotating loop of surveillance images of the **Holding Area**. Three cameras sit atop each monitor-stack recording the information of the performance. This information is mixed and switched live during the process. All other VISION is pre-recorded.

Once in the **Holding Area**, the spectators are greeted by **The Host** who checks their security cards and directs them to wait in seats. At random, she selects spectators to undertake security protocols at **The Senior Officer's** Station. Spectators may be subject to three levels of protocol: a security card verification, a memory scan, and a manual search of personal possessions.

**The Senior Officer** wears a headset. He asks the spectators about their credit card use, travel history, occupation, etc. The tone of these exchanges is polite, respectful. The information is logged into a small laptop. If required, the spectator is invited to undergo a memory scan performed by **The Junior Officer** with a hand-sized, infra-red camera. If further investigation is warranted, the spectator is invited to present personal items for inspection.

If a spectator poses no level of security risk, all monitors are filled with

## Vision 1: Colour BLUE

In the event that a security risk is detected, all monitors are filled with

## **Vision 2: Colour ORANGE**

In the event, the risk is confirmed all monitors are filled with

## **Vision 3: Colour RED**

There are two or three persons in attendance at **The Senior Officer's** Station. A man, carrying a small satchel, is undergoing a memory scan. The screens fill with the colour ORANGE. **The Senior Officer** scrutinises the information on his laptop. He directs **The Junior Officer** to conduct a search of **The Man's** possessions. While the search is being conducted, **The Senior Officer** quietly asks **The Man** some questions. This information is put into the system. **The Junior Officer** takes a book from **The Man's** satchel. The title of the book is put into the system. **The Senior Officer** opens the book noting certain sections have been highlighted. The information scrambles. The screens fill with the colour RED. **The Senior Officer** invites **The Man** to follow **The Junior Officer** into the open space.

## **Sound 2:**

A **Foundation Sound** is activated indicating the system is engaged.

The environment immediately shifts. A hanging network of surveillance cameras and light sensors is activated by **The Man's** presence. The network establishes coverage of the lit area from all possible viewing planes. These surveillance images screen on the monitor-stacks. The whole area is comprehensively mediated. Actions may be specifically directed to certain cameras.

On the perimeter of the lit area, the **Head of Security** and **Security Officers #1** and **#2** form a necklace around **The Man**, facing him in profile. **The Junior Officer** goes to **The Man**. He takes a small device from his pocket and scans **The Man's** temple.

**The Man's** legs give way. His fall is broken by **The Junior Officer** who stands him up.

## **Vision 4: Glitch #1**

A rolling horizontal grey bar and white noise appear on the large monitors followed by:

## **Vision 5: Memory Noise #1**

Graphic digital noise merges into a solarised moving image.

**The Junior Officer** observes this information which is screened on all monitors and screens. He refers to **The Man**.

**The Junior Officer**

You seem surprised ?

**The Man**

Of course I'm surprised. It is my birthday. Can I sit down?

**The Junior Officer**

It's not customary.

**The Man**

I am as a matter of fact very surprised, but when you've spent thirty years in this world and had to fight your way through as I've had to, you become hardened to surprises and don't take them too seriously. Especially one such as this.

**The Junior Officer**

Go on.

**The Man**

I'm not going to say I regard this whole thing as a joke.

**The Junior Officer**

That's wise.

**The Man**

The arrangements that have been made seem too extensive for that. All the people here would have to be involved, and all of you too. That would take it beyond the limits of a joke. So I'm not going to say it's a joke.

**The Junior Officer**

That's very wise.

**The Man**

However, the matter can't be very important either.

**The Senior Officer**

And you were doing so well.

**The Senior Officer** rises from his Station. He observes **The Man** then regards the confiscated book, reading the pages to himself.

**The Junior Officer**

You're making a great mistake.

**The Man**

I deduce this from the fact that I am accused of something but can't find the slightest guilt to justify an accusation. But that's a minor point. The main question is: Who is accusing me? What authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officials? Nobody is wearing a uniform unless we can call what you are wearing a uniform but it's more like a travelling outfit. I would like to have these

points cleared up, and I'm sure that after this clarification we will be able to take leave of each other most amicably.

**The Senior Officer**

*(amused, reads from the book)* We could be wearing the most correct uniforms and your business would be none the worse. We are minor officials. But we are capable of seeing that the high authority we serve would not authorise a detention without gathering exact information about the reasons...

**The Man**

That is the reason for this interview. We need to gather information to provide us reasons for your detention. Our authorities do not go in search of guilt in the population but are drawn to guilt. Our task is to discover reasons for that guilt. That is the law. This law is unknown to me.

**The Junior Officer**

All the worse for you.

**The Man**

It probably exists only in your heads.

**Head of Security** flinches. **The Man** doubles up as if he has been struck in the abdomen.

**The Senior Officer**

End of quote.

**The Man**

What happened?

**The Senior Officer**

You know the whole book?

**The Man**

I have memorised it, yes.

**The Senior Officer**

A novel mechanism. How interesting.

**The Man**

Almost.

**The Senior Officer**

Almost?

**The Man**

The last chapter. I haven't recorded the last chapter.

**The Senior Officer**

Which is why you still have the book in your possession?

**The Man**

Yes.

**The Senior Officer**

And what is your opinion of this book?

**The Man**

It's a masterpiece.

**The Senior Officer**

Really?

**The Man**

Am I under arrest?

**The Senior Officer**

No.

**The Man**

Have I been detained?

**The Senior Officer**

You have.

**The Man**

Can I phone my lawyer?

**The Senior Officer** waits, observes **The Man**.

**The Man**

Can I phone my lawyer?

**The Senior Officer**

*(pauses, returns to the book, reads)* Of course. But I don't know what sense there would be in that unless you have some private matter to discuss with him.

**The Man**

What sense? *(beat)* What sense?

**The Senior Officer**

*(reading)* Please telephone ?

**The Man**

Thankyou.

**The Senior Officer** signals to **The Junior Officer**.

**The Junior Officer**

What's the number?

**The Man**

101001.

**The Junior Officer** goes to the Security Station, dials the number. A message menu is activated.

**Sound 3:**

Call Tone.

**Telephone Menu**

You have reached the offices of Hasterer, Huld and Burstner. If you wish to speak to Mr Hasterer, press 1; if you wish to speak to Mr Huld, press 2; if you wish to speak to Mr Burstner, press 3.

**The Man**

Press 2.

**Sound 3A:**

Call Tone.

**Telephone Menu**

Congratulations! You have selected Mr Huld. If you wish to speak to Mr Huld or his staff on a civil matter, press 1; a criminal matter, press 2; if you are unsure of the status of your inquiry, please press 3.

**The Man**

Press 3?

**Sound 3B:**

Call Tone.

**Telephone Menu**

If the matter pertains to property, press 1: insurance, press 2: taxation, press 3: civil liberties, random detentions and other matters, press 4.