

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Spinning the Line

by Chris Thompson

EXTRACT

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SPINNING THE LINE by Chris Thompson is based on COME IN SPINNER, created by Chris Thompson, Richard Sallis, Annie Fiume, Clare Larman and Dave Houston, from an idea by Meaghan Leith. The original production of COME IN SPINNER was produced by FM LIVE THEATRE with funding from the Transport Accident Commission. It was directed by Chris Thompson, designed by Stephen Looker and performed by Richard Sallis, Annie Fiume, Clare Larman and Dave Houston. It premiered at St Martins Youth Arts Centre on October 5, 1988.

CHARACTER LIST:

Alec Reed (a teenage boy, friends with LX since childhood)
Alexa 'LX' DiStasio (a teenage girl, friends with Alec since childhood)

AI (Alec's observations of himself, part narrator)

Ron Reed (Alec's dad)
Sue Reed (Alec's mum)
Carla DiStasio (LX's mum)

Other Kids:

Rashi (Alec's friend)
Stacey (LX's friend)
Debbie Grosso (the unpopular girl)
Warren Glover (a nerdy boy)
Gibbo (a boisterous kid)
Knackers (Gibbo's not-so-bright mate)
Roxanne (a tough girl)

Toula (a girl in their class)
Minh (another student)

Gino Saleazo (an older kid)

Other students as required

Teachers:

Marinello (the Biology teacher)
Devries (the Arts coordinator)
Rankle (the Sports coordinator)
Cathcart (the school principal)
Booker (the librarian)

Other teachers as required

Other Characters:

Grandma (Alec's senile grandmother)

Davy Dee Jay (a radio announcer)
Tamara (a TV sports presenter)
Camilla (a waitress)
Ern (the bottleshop attendant)

Other restaurant patrons as required

SPINNING THE LINE

PROLOGUE: C,C,C... COME IN SPINNER

An old cyclone wire fence is stretched across the space.

At one side, a faded sign says: 'DANGER: NO UNAUTHORISED ENTRY'. Beside the sign, the fence has been breached... a hole big enough for kids to squeeze through.

Towards the front of the space, a big, fat, rusty, gunk-encrusted pipe extends out over an abandoned quarry filled with water. Nearby, an old gnarled and split tree protrudes from the ground.

One by one, characters push through the wire into the space. Each one is occupied with a different 'fad' or game: frisbees, hula hoops, nintendos, yo-yos, Rubick's cubes, elastics, gameboys, tamagotchis, swap cards, click-clacks ...

By the time the song begins, the whole cast is there.

In the centre of the space ALEC (aged six) and his dad RON are flying a kite. As the music begins, they all freeze.

Slowly they turn and stare at the audience, then explode into the song...

C,C,C... COME IN SPINNER

Everybody seems to be spinning a line
 I keep getting sucked in all of the time
 Who do you trust?
 Who to believe?
 How do you tell the wood from the trees?
 They swear on this and they promise you that
 You gotta sift through the bull and sort through the crap
 It goes on and on and on without end...
 Ngor...
 Come In Spinner, sucked in again!

I sucked you in and I tricked you bad,
 I spun another line
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Pulled your leg and I had you on
 You bought it every time
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Stirred you up and you fell for it
 You didn't see the signs
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Baited you and you swallowed it

Sinker, hook and line!

You 'come in like the tide' you're a 'Gullible Grace'
 If the wind should change, you'll be stuck with that face
 What to believe?
 What do you trust?
 Your hair'll go curly if you eat that crust
 Santa Claus'll bring you lots of nice toys
 If you're good little girls and good little boys
 Easter Bunny, Tooth Fairy, where does it end?
 Ngor...
 Come In Spinner, sucked in again!

I sucked you in and I tricked you bad,
 I spun another line
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Pulled your leg and I had you on
 You bought it every time
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Stirred you up and you fell for it
 You didn't see the signs
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Baited you and you swallowed it
 Sinker, hook and line!

When you get to school you are so uncool
 You're a dickhead, dipstick, April Fool!
 When do you trust?
 When to believe?
 Will you know who you are before it's time to leave?
 They can wind you up or they can put you down
 Are you a tough kid, nerd brain, classroom clown?
 Do they mean it when they say 'I'll be your best friend?'
 Ngor...
 Come In Spinner, sucked in again!

I sucked you in and I tricked you bad,
 I spun another line
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Pulled your leg and I had you on
 You bought it every time
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Stirred you up and you fell for it
 You didn't see the signs
 C, C, C, Come In Spinner
 Baited you and you swallowed it
 Sinker, hook and line!

SCENE 1: THE BIG FISH STORY

At the end of the song, THE CAST exits, leaving ALEC and RON outside the quarry, flying the kite. ALEC tries to grab the string from his dad.

ALEC
Can I have a go, dad?

RON
(struggling with the kite)
In a minute, Alec. It's pretty tricky stuff. You have to judge the updrafts and the crosswinds just right.

ALEC
(waits a moment)
Now?

RON
Just let me get it stabilised, son.

ALEC
But it was *my* birthday present.

RON
And you wouldn't want it to get snagged, would you. Trust me. I know what I'm doing. Watch this.

Ron tries to make the kite loop the loop, but he fails miserably and it crashes to the ground on the other side of the fence. Alec gasps and runs off after it.

RON
Wait for me, Alec.

RON chases his son off stage.

ALEC reappears at the cyclone wire fence. He squeezes through the gap.

ALEC
I see it, dad.

RON reappears. He has a bit of trouble getting through the gap. He snags his cardigan on a loose wire.

RON
Stay where you are, Alec. Don't go near the edge.

ALEC rushes to the front of the stage, and looks down into an old quarry.
RON rushes over to his son and grabs him by the arm.

RON
Don't ever do that again, Alec.

ALEC
What?

RON
Run off like that. You could get hurt.

ALEC
I was just getting the kite.

RON
I know, son. But this old quarry is a pretty dangerous place.

ALEC
(looks down)
It's a big hole, isn't it?

RON
Sure is. It's where they dug out all the clay for the bricks that make our house.

ALEC
Even the barbeque?

RON
Even the barbeque.

ALEC
How'd they get the clay out when it's full of water?

RON
The water wasn't always there, son. When they closed the quarry, it just filled up with water.

ALEC points to an old metal pipe that extends out over the water.

ALEC
What's that, dad?

RON
(he's got no idea)
That? That's a wigwam for a goose's bridle, son.

ALEC

A wigwhat?

RON

(making it up)

Wigwam. They used it to support the goose's bridle which was a big doohickey of a contraption they used to extendivate the hooziwhatsit far enough out there to lift the jammatappits off the thingamybobs to excavandalising the bricks. You find things like that in old quarries all over the country.

ALEC

(not quite convinced)

Oh, right. Was it a quarry when you were a kid?

RON

No, mate. It's been like this for donkey's ages. Hasn't been a quarry since your grandpa was a boy.

ALEC

So how'd you know about the wigamywam?

RON

'Cause me and your uncle Roy asked your grandpa the very same question you did when we were your age, and that's the answer he gave us. When your uncle Roy and I were lads, we'd come down here to swim. We used to go skinny-dipping.

ALEC

(shocked)

No way. In the nuddy?

RON

As the day we were born. Don't you tell your grandma.

ALEC

How'd you get down? Did you dive off the wigamywam?

RON

No, mate. It's much too high. There used to be a track around here somewhere. Looks like it's overgrown now.

ALEC

Can we look for it?

RON

Maybe another time.

ALEC

(still looking down)

Would I die if I jumped off here?

RON

You might. So keep away from the edge, eh, sport?

ALEC

Would you die, dad?

RON

I guess I might. Even dads die.

ALEC looks over the edge again with renewed awe.

ALEC

Fwoooooorrrrr

(pause)

Do you think there's any fish in there?

RON

Sure are. Big ones, with fins as big as plough shares.

ALEC

Wow. I don't see any.

RON

Just 'cause you can't see 'em, doesn't mean they're not there. One time, your uncle Roy and I camped down here. Your grandma used to warn us off, but Roy dared me, and old Rocket Ronnie Reed has never been one to knock back a dare.

ALEC

(impressed)

Rocket Ronnie Reed.

RON

That's right, son. So Roy and I set up our tent, just near that old split tree down there, only it wasn't split back then, it was straight as a die. So we got out our fishing rods and cast our lines and there we sat for most of the day with not even a nibble to show for it.

ALEC

Weren't you bored, dad? I would've been bored.

RON

You gotta be patient when you go fishing, son. Fishing is all about patience. Anyway, just as the sun was going down and we were thinking it might be baked beans for dinner, your uncle Roy pulled out his lucky gold spinner. Well, it had barely hit the water when a big storm blew up. The wind started howling and thunder cracked and lightning streaked the sky and out there, the water started bubbling and hissing.

ALEC

(wide eyed)

No way.

RON

(acting out the story)

You better believe it. And that's when his line snapped taut. Roy started to slide towards the edge of the water, but I grabbed hold of him and as hard as I pulled the fish pulled back, like we were in some great tug-of-war. And then we saw it. Out of the water came this one red fin.

ALEC

Like *Jaws* at Movie World?

RON

Bigger than that. It was the biggest fish we'd ever seen. Its head was this big and it looked at us with its cold clammy eyes, winked at us,

just once, and spat out Roy's spinner right into that old tree.

RON points over to the SPLIT TREE and there it is.

RON

Well, it just hung up there, snagged on a branch, when out of the sky came the biggest bolt of lightning you've ever seen and KAPOW! It hit Roy's lucky gold spinner and split the tree in two.

ALEC

Fworr. What happened to the fish, dad?

RON

Went back in the water. We never saw it again.

ALEC

You mean it's still in there?

RON

As far as I know.

ALEC

Fworr.

He looks over the edge and looks down into the water.

RON

(winks at the AUDIENCE)

Come in, spinner.

(to ALEC)

OK, mate. Come away from the edge. It's time to go.

ALEC

Can me and Alex go camping down there, dad?

RON

It's too dangerous. You could drown.

ALEC

But you and uncle Roy did.

RON

That was different. It wasn't as dangerous when I was a boy.

ALEC

Why not?

RON

It just wasn't, alright? Trust me. And don't tell your mum we came up here. Now, let's get that kite.

RON exits.

AL enters. He's a teenager, part Narrator, part ALEC's inner voice.

AL

You'd have to be a dickhead to believe that story.

ALEC

I'm only six.

RON

(calls from off stage)
Come on, Alec. It's getting late.

AL

You'd better go, kid.

ALEC leaves.

AL

(to the AUDIENCE)

I used to get sucked in like that heaps. Dad and I'd go up to the park near the old quarry all the time. Sometimes we'd kick the footy. Sometimes we'd throw the frisbee. Sometimes we'd just take Buster for a walk, back before mum and dad had to send him to the farm. I didn't care what we did, I just liked hanging out with him. He used to tell the best stories. And I believed every one of them. Sometimes, after school, me and Alex'd go up there to hang out.

SUE

(off stage)

Alex and I, darling.

AL

(shrugs her off)

Yeah, whatever.

SCENE 2: ALEC AND ALEX

SUE, ALEC's mum, is in the kitchen. ALEC, (aged 9), enters the kitchen, out of breath, but very excited.

ALEC

Aw, mum, you shoulda seen what happened! Alex and me were up...

SUE

Alex and I, darling.

ALEC

Yeah, and we were up at the park playing hidey, and we heard a sound from the old quarry, like a scream.

SUE

I hope you didn't go in there.

ALEC

No. Anyway, Alex reckons it was someone getting eaten by the crocodile.

SUE

There aren't any crocodiles in the old quarry, Alec.

ALEC

Alex reckons there are. She reckons that there was this old bloke who used to live around here, and he brought some crocodile eggs back from Queensland. But the cops found out, so he threw them in the old quarry and they hatched out so now there's heaps of them. It's true. She saw one.

SUE

Alex has been in there?

ALEC

Yeah. She's allowed. She's a good swimmer. You'd have to be, or the crocs'd get you.

SUE

That last bit I can believe. The quarry's a dangerous place, Alec. I want you to promise me you won't go in there.

ALEC

Cross my heart and hope to die.

SUE

Yes, well, let's just hope for something a little more cheerful shall we? What are you doing with that?

ALEC has unscrewed the broom handle and is crawling along the floor on his belly, using it as spear.

ALEC

Croc spear. Alex says we have to be prepared in case they get out.

SUE

You shouldn't go believing everything that girl tells you. Sometimes she lets her imagination run away with her. Now get up off the floor. There are germs down there. They'll make you sick.

ALEC

How?

SUE

They'll grow into tapeworms and live in your stomach and eat all your food. And the bigger they get the more you'll shrivel up until you're as skinny and brittle as stick.

ALEC

Alex's mum lets her play on the floor.

SUE

Well, I'm not Alex's mum, I'm your mum and I say get up off the floor.

(to the AUDIENCE)

I don't think her mother is coping very well with bringing up Alex by herself. She's a nice enough person, but she has to work all hours. It's not good for a girl Alex's age to be left on her own. Who

knows what she gets up to? The girl needs a father. No wonder she's running wild.

(back to ALEC)

Alec, get out of the cupboard.

ALEC

Her dad's coming home soon.

SUE

Is he, now?

ALEC

Yeah. He's been overseas, searching the world for Alex's real mother. She's an Egyptian princess.

SUE

Alex told you that, did she?

ALEC

Yeah. And it's true.

ALEX (aged ten) bursts into the kitchen.

ALEX

You comin', Alec? I think I saw one. Oh. Hello, Mrs Reed...

SUE

Hello, Alex. How's your mother? Is she working today?

ALEX

Yeah, 'til six. Can me and Alec go up the park?

ALEC

Alec and I.

SUE

As long as you promise that that's where you'll stay.

ALEX

Oh we promise.

ALEC

(a shared joke)

Proper promise.

ALEX
(giggles)
Cross my heart and hope to die.

ALEC
(giggles too)
Stick a finger in your eye.

SUE
Yes, well just try not to stick
anything into your eye or anywhere
else for that matter.

ALEC
Can I take my crocodile spear?

SUE
I suppose so. As long as you bring it
back in one piece.

ALEC
I will.

ALEX
Unless a crocodile bites it in half.

ALEC and ALEX run out giggling.

SUE
(calls after them)
You two be careful up there!!

SUE exits.

AL enters. He watches them go.

AL
(to the AUDIENCE)
Alex was worse than my dad for
making up stories about the quarry.
There was the one about the
crocodiles. Then later, when I was
about eleven, she convinced me
there was sunken treasure in there.
We found that old track that leads
down to the water, so we spent the
whole summer sneaking in there,
diving for it. We got away with it,
too, only we never found anything
down there except old tyres. It was
pretty dumb. I became a heaps
better swimmer, but. Last year she
convinced me she was gonna leave