

CHECKLIST
FOR AN
ARMED ROBBER

VANESSA BATES



Currency Press, Sydney

CHARACTERS

The play is written for four actors, with doubling as follows:

Actor 1: REBEL LEADER, ALEX, BOOKSHOP OWNER, REBEL, BOY,
DERRICK, REPORTER 1

Actor 2: YOUNG MAN, NIKOLAI, REBEL, NIGEL, REPORTER 2

Actor 3: JOURNALIST, RAISA, STAGE MANAGER, DRUNKEN
WOMAN, REPORTER 3

Actor 4: BOOKSELLER, LARISA, PRESENTER, REBEL, REPORTER 4,
MOTHER

PRODUCTION NOTE

There are a number of levels of reality and present time. Actors can become a character in the moment as well as a narrator or descriptor of the moment. At times this is also done in character.

At times, actors also play themselves, i.e. as actors discussing the situation, as in the opening lines.

At times there is an acknowledgement of an audience, for example the four hostages keep up a running commentary to an unseen listener throughout their ordeal, but at other times it is more conventional fourth wall stuff. Overlapping lines are used throughout the script. When a / occurs, the next line of dialogue overlaps.

Hostage characters (Raisa, Alex, Nikolai, Larisa) were not written with Russian accents in mind but rather the actors' own accent with the intention of making them almost part of the watching audience. (Having said that I have seen two productions where those characters were played with subtle Russian accents and it worked beautifully.)

The script is inspired by reported versions of two events that occurred within a couple of days of each other in Moscow and in Newcastle (Australia) in October 2002.

A small bell rings, the kind you hear tied to the door of a shop.

ACTOR 1: Saturday. October 26, 2002. Newcastle. Australia. Six-fifty p.m.

ACTOR 3: She would have been—well it's almost closing time, so she would have been thinking about... getting home, making dinner, whatever was on TV that night...

ACTOR 2: Bookshop. Mostly second-hand. A lot of New Age, heal-your-life stuff.

ACTOR 3: Anyway, it would have been sort of quiet. And if you've been doing that for so long it becomes second nature. / Packing up.

BOOKSELLER: [*listing*] Process and shelve any books that have come in that day, flag books that have been ordered, make sure they're on the shelf above the till...

ACTOR 1: Just a list of duties in your head that you tick off one by one.

BOOKSELLER: Go through the list of every book sold and ordered that day. Every book!

ACTOR 3: She's alone, don't forget. I mean she's used to it, yeah. But she's alone.

BOOKSELLER: Total and reconcile the eftpos machine. Turn the computer off. Set the answering machine. Set the alarm. Lock the door, closed sign, lights off!

People say to me: 'Ooh, must be lovely working in a bookshop. Get to read all day.'

She laughs to herself. A sound from somewhere in the shop. She looks up.

ACTOR 2: But let's go back a day.

ACTOR 1: Friday. October 25. Moscow. Russia. Two p.m.

ACTOR 4: The Palace of Culture! A gay nightclub, a cinema and the Dubrovka Theatre. Currently showing *Nord-Ost*, the first Russian musical based on the popular novel *The Two Captains*. They say it's a hit.

ACTOR 1: Fifty crew and front of house staff, thirty-five musicians, forty actors, seven hundred and fifty audience.

ACTOR 4: She enters the foyer. Lights out. Power cut—not sure if it was them or the police. She steps forward...

The JOURNALIST steps forward, she is in the foyer of the Dubrovka Theatre.

JOURNALIST: And I feel, crunching underfoot, broken glass. A small noise. But in that enormous dark space, the sound reverberates. I look down. Amongst the glass... I begin to see small dropped items. A bag. A glove. A box of chocolates spilled amongst the spent cartridges. I walk slowly into the dark, calling as I go: 'Hello. Is anybody here? Anybody?'... And the light behind me fading and fading...

ACTOR 2: And we go back a day.

ACTOR 1: Thursday. October 24. Newcastle. Six-forty-five p.m.

ACTOR 3: He's got a gun. Sawn-off. Double-barrelled shotgun.

ACTOR 4: He likes this gun because it makes him feel bigger.

ACTOR 3: Bigger. And stronger. Like he knows what he's doing.

A YOUNG MAN steps forward.

YOUNG MAN: I *do* know what I'm doing. [*Slight pause.*] Well you uncock it... it just cracks in half type of thing and there's a lever to do it. And you just put the shells in, crack it back up. There's two hammers on the back and you can pull them back and there's the double triggers too. / So you pull one of 'em, and one of 'em goes, and keep pulling—the other'll hammer as well.

ACTOR 1: He's got his gun, and he's got his place to hide and he's got some clothes to change into which he took off someone's clothes line.

YOUNG MAN: Or you do it straight at the same time, they both go down at once. Two shots.

ACTOR 3: He's already scouted the area and he's picked the place, he knows the routine and he's seen the lady who works there.

ACTOR 1: He knows he can do it.

YOUNG MAN: Bookshop.

BOOKSELLER: [*listing*] *Awaken the Giant Within, Empowerment Just*

Takes a Moment, How to Make Friends and Influence People, / The Blue Day Book...

ACTOR 3: Little place, edge of a shopping mall—there's a toilet there he can use.

ACTOR 1: And it's the last shop, almost, before the corner. He can duck down.

ACTOR 3: Snake his way home.

YOUNG MAN: Start the week before. Strap him in, under my jacket, make myself go for a little walk. Slowly make my way down the street till I'm there.

ACTOR 1: Heart races the whole way.

YOUNG MAN: Then run home. Then do it again.

ACTOR 3: Till he feels comfortable.

YOUNG MAN: Holding him. Walking with him under my clothes. Some I know—he's like their mate, their little dog.

ACTOR 3: The gun looks after them.

ACTOR 1: Speaks for them.

ACTOR 4: Does their dirty work.

YOUNG MAN: I go in the shop, suss the place. Feel what it's like to be standing there. Check it out—doors, till, window looking out on the street.

ACTOR 1: The owner sees him, becomes suspicious. [*As BOOKSHOP OWNER*] Are you right, mate?

YOUNG MAN: Yeah, thanks.

OWNER: Something I can help you with?

YOUNG MAN: No I'm just... looking.

OWNER: Looking for something special?

YOUNG MAN: No...

OWNER: You've been here a while. It's not a library, you know.

YOUNG MAN: I'm just looking!

OWNER: Well it's not a library. If you're not buying anything, you can go.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah. Alright.

He goes.

ACTOR 3: Think about it a bit.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah.

ACTOR 4: Think about doing another B and E instead. Easy.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah, I know.

ACTOR 3: Jewellery maybe. Wallet. Phone someone's left lying on the kitchen table.

YOUNG MAN: Think about giving it up or finding another place or waiting a bit so he forgets my face. But the thing is I can't wait. Saturday. Want to do it. Have to.

ACTOR 1: Walk home. Gun's heavy.

ACTOR 4: Need practice. Psych up.

ACTOR 1: This will be his first armed robbery.

YOUNG MAN: Walk home. Look out for things that can help me...
[*Pointing them out*] Rubbish tins to chuck me clothes... back lane there to duck through... mate's fence to jump over if I have to. It's all planned out. I know what I'm doing.

ACTOR 1: This will be his *first* armed robbery.

ACTOR 3: But we go back a day.

Pause.

ACTOR 4: Wednesday. October 23. Moscow. Ten p.m.

ACTOR 2: *Nord-Ost*. They say it's a hit. Tonight for instance. Seven hundred and fifty in the audience.

ACTOR 1: And more not yet counted. He is among them. Still. In the shadows. Quiet as a mouse.

ACTOR 2: *Nôtre Dame de Paris* and *Les Mis* have also been playing in Moscow.

REBEL LEADER: But *Nord-Ost* is a home-grown hit. A Russian hit. And that's why we are here.

STAGE MANAGER: [*Possibly British accent, calm, precise*] As stage manager I do the calls for the actors. I let them know how long they've got, from the half-hour call all the way to beginners... which is five minutes till curtain. It's up to me to make sure they're on time and in place.