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# THE UNDERGROUND ARK

by Bruce Hoogendoorn

# EXTRACT

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**Note on the script:** This is an unedited manuscript as provided to us by the playwright. We distribute it in good faith; however it may contain layout inconsistencies or typographic errors which are beyond our control.

**CAST**

BEN: Mid-fifties, Obstetrician

LYNN: Late-twenties, psychiatrist

STAN : Forties, Security guard

JOHN: Twenty, medical student

JAIME: Eighteen, menial worker

**SCENE LOCATIONS**

Scene 1 & 2: Ben's bedroom

Scene 3: Lecture room. No set required

Scene 4 & 5: Ben's bedroom

Scene 6: Lynn's bedroom

Scene 7: Corridor. No set required

Scene 8: Ben's bedroom

Scene 9: Lynn's bedroom

Scene 10: John's bedroom

Scene 11: Court. No set required.

Scene 12: Ben's bedroom

**SCENE 1**

*A bedroom. A bed, bedside drawers with a phone on it, a table and chairs. Two men sit at the table opposite each other playing chess. There is a light box in the room. It is about half a metre wide and high, and emits a cold, hard light. It hangs from stand similar in size to a normal fan stand and is aimed at BEN's face. It is not currently on.*

*BEN is fifty-five; a handsome, fit man. JOHN is eighteen, intelligent-looking.*

*After a few moments of silence, JOHN makes a move.*

JOHN: Check.

*BEN studies the move, then after a few moments knocks all the pieces off the board. He leaps up and walks away.*

JOHN: Why'd you do that?

BEN: I've had enough!

JOHN: But it wasn't much of a check. You could have easily got out of it.

BEN: Not of the game. This life! Living underground. Sitting in front of a light box like I'm a growing vegetable.

JOHN: Yeah, it's not much fun, I know, but if we're going to save the human race –

BEN: And that's what I'm sick of the most! Hearing that constant mantra that we have to save the human race.

JOHN: But that's why we're here.

BEN: Our survival won't have any impact on the human race. I'm sure the Americans and Chinese have ten times more people living underground than us, ready to leap out and start rebuilding when the day comes.

JOHN: And that day may not be far off. The meteorologist said –

BEN: The meteorologist! Don't listen to anything that idiot says. They predicted there'd be a temperature rise of two degrees over the next fifty years. Instead it was twenty degrees in two years! The purpose of his predictions are to give us hope. I'll bet you any money that his next prediction will be that, yes, the temperature will drop quickly, but not for another year now. Keeping us going like a greyhound chasing a fake rabbit it will never catch.

JOHN: *(pause)* Maybe you should see Lynn.

BEN: I don't need a psychiatrist! All she'd do would be put me on anti-depressants.

JOHN: They might help you.

BEN: The only thing that would help me would be to run on the beach, with the wind in my hair and the sun on my face.

JOHN: You could always set up a fan and a heater in front of a treadmill.

BEN: *(pause)* John, you're young, you're optimistic. I understand. But I can't go on living underground like a mole anymore.

JOHN: You're not...you're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?

*Silence.*

JOHN: But we need you here! The babies are coming. No-one else can deliver them.

BEN: David can do it.

JOHN: David! He's just a GP, and he's never delivered a baby! And all these women have Hypertension. And what if – as you said is very possible – they all progress to Eclampsia? We could lose the babies. *(pause)* And what about me and the rest of the students? We need your knowledge!

BEN: Everything you need to know is in the textbooks.

JOHN: But that doesn't give us hands-on experience.

BEN: You'll get it by doing.

JOHN: But we can't afford to make mistakes. The death of one baby could be the difference between humanity surviving or dying out.

BEN: John, you're an excellent student. I have no doubt you will rise to the occasion. Now, I'd really appreciate it if you could leave me alone, please.

JOHN: Why? What are you going to do?

BEN: Will you just go!

JOHN: But...but you haven't passed on your genes yet?

BEN: What?

JOHN: You haven't fathered a child.

BEN: Thank God for that. This is no world for a baby.

JOHN: But if human beings are to go on and create a new and better world, we need the best genes available. And yours are the best.

BEN: John –



JOHN: You should at least do that before you go.

BEN: Believe me, I have done my duty in that area. I tried dozens of times with the humourless Amanda. She was less enthusiastic than a blow-up doll. And appropriately enough no child came of it.

JOHN: But you know these things can take time, so –

BEN: And that's another complaint I have! Why are there no sexy women? Why were they chosen only for their intelligence, but not on their looks? Along with the elite minds couldn't we have had the odd elite supermodel?

JOHN: I must admit that would've been nice.

BEN: Maybe if they'd matched me to someone like Elle Macpherson I'd be as chipper as a puppy dog.

JOHN: Well, intelligence is what we need now.

BEN: I don't see much intelligence being displayed. It's all group-think: "We have to save humanity. We have to save humanity".

JOHN: We have to try! *(beat)* I can't believe you've turned out to be this... weak.

BEN: Don't try reverse psychology on me.

JOHN: The great Doctor Morgan. Gynaecologist, obstetrician, paediatrician, and probably rock star in your spare time, turns out to be a selfish coward.

BEN: You watch yourself.

JOHN: I do watch myself. I put aside my feelings for the group. Like everyone else I lost all my family and friends. I could've given up. But compared to the future of humanity my feelings are pretty damn insignificant. But you, oh great one, only consider yourself, not caring that your death could also mean the death of everyone else!

BEN: If you don't get out of my room right now I'm going to punch you in the head!

*STAN enters. He's a big man of about forty.*

STAN: G'day fellas. What's going on?

JOHN: Oh, thank Christ.

BEN: Did you hit your panic button?

JOHN: You bet I did!

*He takes a wireless panic button out of his pocket and holds it up.*

JOHN: He's threatening to kill himself.

STAN: What?

BEN: He doesn't know what he's talking about.

JOHN: He said he can't go on living underground any longer.

STAN: Doc, Doc, this doesn't sound like you. What's the matter?

BEN: I'm not going to kill myself. I was just letting off steam. All I need is a bit of sleep. So if you can leave me to it I'd be most grateful.

JOHN: We can't leave him alone. He'll kill himself. I'm certain of it.

BEN: Oh, for Christ's sake! Just let me have my rest. I have a lot of pregnant women to attend to later and I need to have as much energy as possible.

JOHN: We can't leave him.

STAN: Why don't I get Lynn to have a chat to you?

BEN: Get out the pair of you!

STAN: Doc, just calm down.

*BEN starts trying to push them out.*

BEN: I will not calm down! Just get the Hell out of my room.

STAN: Doc, please.

BEN: Just get out!

*BEN throws a punch that misses. STAN takes out a stun gun and pushes it against BEN's neck. BEN collapses and STAN catches him.*

STAN: Help me get him into bed.

*They put him on the bed.*

STAN: I'd better tell Lynn.

*He exits. JOHN stands shocked for a moment, then starts to pick up the chess pieces. Fade to blackout.*

**SCENE 2**

*In the darkness we hear the soothing sounds of the beach: waves breaking gently, seagulls squawking, children playing.*

*Lights up revealing BEN in bed asleep, with STAN in a chair next to him reading a book.*

*After a few moments BEN starts to stir. STAN picks up the phone.*

STAN: Lynn, it's Stan. He's starting to wake up. *(pause)* Okay. See you soon.

BEN: Jesus, where am I?

STAN: Safe and sound in your bed, Doc.

BEN: My bed? But that sound...

STAN: It's the beach. On the wall, see?

*He points out to the audience.*

STAN: Nice, isn't it? Makes me feel like going for a swim.

*BEN looks out at it.*

BEN: Why's that on?

STAN: John said you missed the beach. He thought you might like it.

BEN: Turn it off.

STAN: But he loaded it for you especially.

BEN: Turn it off!

STAN: All right. Jesus. Don't have a cardiac arrest.

*STAN grabs a remote control, points it at the wall and turns it off.*

BEN: Water. I need some water.

STAN: Here.

*STAN gives him a glass. Ben drinks.*

BEN: Thanks.

*STAN takes it back.*

BEN: What happened?



STAN: You don't remember?

BEN *shakes his head.*

STAN: You were threatening to kill yourself so I had to zap you.

BEN: You zapped me?

STAN: Yep. You were losing it.

BEN: Thanks a-bloody lot.

STAN: Quite all right. Actually I enjoyed it. It's been a bit dull round here lately. All you educated professionals in full control of yourselves. I'm glad one of you finally lost it.

BEN: Glad to spice up your day.

STAN: So you really don't remember?

BEN: It's coming back to me.

STAN: You're the last one I'd have picked to crack. But there you were, sputtering away like a pork chop.

BEN: I'm surprised more haven't gone off.

STAN: Yeah. But if they do, I'll be ready for them. Zap!

BEN: How reassuring.

STAN: So what set you off? Not being able to do things like go to the beach?

BEN: Basically.

STAN: I know how that feels. I used to love watching rugby league, but the closest I get to it now is this book.

*He shows it to BEN.*

BEN: The history of the NRL. I'm surprised it's in the library. I thought anything with a hint of violence in it was sifted out.

STAN: Must have been an oversight.

BEN: Yeah. No place for violence in the new-improved human society. That's left back in the dark ages.

STAN: Although it has made a bit of a comeback with you.