Acting Edition

THE URMETAZOAN

by Alex Rugman

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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NOTE

This edition reflects a rehearsal draft of the script and may differ from the final production.

THE URMETAZOAN was first performed at Hampstead Theatre Downstairs, London, on Friday 18 September 2026. The cast and creative team were as follows:

WILL ..... Ben Allen
ALICE ..... Dorothea Myer-Bennett
ABIGAIL ..... Meghan Treadway

Writer ..... Alex Rugman
Director ..... Anna Ledwich
Designer ..... Tomás Palmer
Lighting Designer ..... Jonathan Chan
Sound Designer ..... Sarah Spencer
Movement & Intimacy Director ..... Rebecca Wield
Production Manager ..... Phil Bentley
Costume Supervisor ..... Arial Fiske
Props Supervisor ..... Charlotte Smith-Barker
Birkbeck Resident Assistant Director ..... Helen T. Mariam
Stage Manager ..... Em Cox



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CAST

BEN ALLEN | Will

Theatre work includes *Radiant Boy* (Southwark Playhouse); *Macbeth* (Wessex Grove); *Black Superhero* (Royal Court); *Folk* (Hampstead Theatre); *The Cherry Orchard* and *Hamlet* (Theatre Royal Windsor); *Gently Down the Stream* (Park Theatre); *Measure for Measure* (Donmar Warehouse); *Present Laughter* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Julius Caesar*; *Oppenheimer* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Royal Shakespeare Company); *The Seagull* (Manchester Library); *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry V* (Propeller); *...and Darkness Descended* (Punchdrunk); *Canary* (Liverpool Playhouse Theatre/Hampstead Theatre/English Touring Theatre); *All's Well That Ends Well* (National Theatre); *Noises Off* (Ambassador Theatre Group) and *The History Boys* (National Theatre).

Film work includes *Another End*.

Short film work includes *The Foreigner*, *The Haircut* and *Better than Joe*.

Television work includes *The Undeclared War*, *Beyond Paradise*, *The Sandman*, *Vigil*, *World on Fire*, *Breeders*, *Soulmates*, *Barbarians Rising*, *Doctors*, *Bonekickers* and *Casualty*.

DOROTHEA MYER-BENNETT | Alice

Theatre work includes *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Old Vic); *Holy Rosenbergs* (Menier Chocolate Factory); *Nachtland* (Young Vic); *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* (Marylebone); *Twelfth Night*, *While the Sun Shines*, *The Lottery of Love* and *The Philanderer* (Orange Tree Theatre); *Possession* (Arcola Theatre); *The Arc* (Soho Theatre); *Leopoldstadt* (Wyndham's Theatre); *Miss Julie* and *Creditors* (Jermyn Street Theatre); *The Winslow Boy* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Rosenbaum's Rescue* (Park Theatre); *Holy Shit* (Kiln Theatre); *Pericles* and *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Uncle Vanya* and *Richard III* (Leeds Playhouse); *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, *Arcadia*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *King Lear* (Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory); *The Misanthrope* (Bristol Old Vic); *She Stoops to Conquer* (Birmingham Rep); *Hay Fever* (Manchester Royal Exchange) and *Restoration* (Headlong).

Film work includes *Prima Facie*, *The Payback*, *The Orchard* and *The Honourable Rebel*.

Television work includes *Ellis*, *Juice*, *Chelsea Detective*, *Doc Martin*, *Before We Die*, *Dodger* and *Around the World in 80 Days*.

MEGHAN TREADWAY | Abigail

Theatre work includes *Witness for the Prosecution* (London County Hall); *Cinderella* (Lyric Hammersmith); *The Magic Flute* and *A Dog's Heart* (Operas for Complicité); *Tamed* (Norwich Theatre Royal); *Hansel and Gretel* (RABBLE); *The Edit* (Folio/Salisbury Playhouse); *Treasure Island* (Leicester Haymarket Theatre); *Little Mermaid* (The Egg – Theatre Royal Bath); *Alice's Adventures Underground* (Les Enfants Terribles); *Til We Meet in England* (Lost Text/Found Space); *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Little Angel); *Venus in Fur* and *The Collector* (English Theatre Frankfurt); *War Horse* (National Theatre/New London Theatre); *There Is No Drama Without Conflict* (Old Vic New Voices: 24 Hour Plays); and *The Forum* (Edinburgh Fringe).

Film work includes *Infinite*, *Anchor and Hope*, and *7 Deadly Idiots*.

Television work includes *The Marlow Murder Club* (series 4), *Murder Before Evensong* (series regular), *The Crown* (series 6), *One Day*, *The Outlaws* (series 2 & 3), *Ten Percent*, *Dreaming Whilst Black*, *Flack* and *Endeavour*.

CREATIVE

ALEX RUGMAN | Writer

Alex is a writer and theatre maker based in London. His background is in devised theatre.

In 2018 he co-created *How to Save a Rock* with Conky Kampfner and Pigfoot Theatre. It won the Samuel French New Play Award and Sunday Times Playwriting Award at the National Student Drama Festival.

He is the co-artistic director of Freight Theatre, with whom he created *Move Fast and Break Things*, which was shortlisted for the Untapped Award. It premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2022.

The Urmetazoan is his debut play.

ANNA LEDWICH | Director

Previous work at Hampstead Theatre includes *Bird Grove*; *The Billionaire Inside Your Head*; *Anthropology*; *Dry Powder* (Olivier Award nomination); *Labyrinth*; *Wilderness*; *Acceptance* (Olivier Award Best Comedy nomination); *Kiss Me* (also Trafalgar Studios); *The Argument*; *Four Minutes Twelve Seconds* (also Trafalgar Studios – Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre nomination); *Deluge*; *No One Will Tell Me How to Start a Revolution*; *The Empty Quarter* and *Donny's Brain*.

Other theatre work includes *Girls & Boys* (Nottingham Playhouse); *The Heartbreak Choir* and *Photograph 51* (Ensemble Theatre, Sydney); *Coram Boy* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Godzonia* (Q Theatre, Auckland); *Cookies* (Haymarket); *Roundelay* (Southwark Playhouse); *The Stick House* (Bristol Temple Meads Station); *How Does a Snake Shed its Skin* (Battersea Arts Centre/Summerhall, Edinburgh); *Blue Remembered Hills* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Dream Story* (Gate); *Lulu* (Headlong, Gate); *A Christmas Carol* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Lovely and Misfit* (Trafalgar Studios); *GBS* (Theatre503); *Roulette* (Finborough) and *Poet No. 7* (Theatre503/Dublin Fringe Festival).

Work as Writer/Adaptor includes *Pinocchio*, *The Butterfly Lion, Beauty and the Beast* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Crossing Lines* (Chichester Festival Youth Theatre).

TOMÁS PALMER | Designer

Tomás Palmer is an artist and designer. Tomás trained at the Glasgow School of Art and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Recent theatre work includes *The Waves* (Jermyn Street); *Petty Men* and *Run Sister Run* (Arcola); *Radiant Boy* (Southwark Playhouse); *Speed* and *Dreaming and Drowning* (Bush); *Gruesome Playground Injuries* (The Glitch); *Wish You Were Here* (Gate); *Look Back in Anger/ Roots* (Almeida); *Multiple Casualty Incident* (Yard); *London Liberation*

Squares (Nottingham Playhouse); *Blue Mist* (Royal Court); *The Bacchae* (Lyric Hammersmith); *My Uncle Is Not Pablo Escobar* (Brixton House); *Time Is Running Out* and *Night at the Church* (Gate, Cardiff); and *WINNING* (Glasgow School of Art).

Television work includes *The Presenter*, *Too Rough*, *The Children*, *Dove* and *The Fabric of You*.

As an artist, Tomás has created installations and performance pieces for the Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow), Transmission Gallery (Glasgow) and Embassy Gallery (Edinburgh).

JONATHAN CHAN | Lighting Designer

Jonathan trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Theatre work includes *YOU & It – The Musical* (King's Head); *Dark of the Moon* (Charing Cross); *Double Double* (Barn Theatre); *Loot* (Queen's, Hornchurch); *A Grain of Sand* (Arcola/UK tour); *The Firework Maker's Daughter* (Polka - Offies 2026 winner); *Even More Ghost Stories by Candlelight* (Hightide); *The Last Five Years* (Reading Rep/Barn/Theatre Royal Bath); *Get Happy* (Clapham Omnibus); *Three Hens in a Boat* (Reading Rep/Watermill, Newbury); *Too Many Books* (Gatehouse Upstairs); *An Interrogation* (Hampstead Theatre); *The Snowflake* (Birmingham Rep/Polka/Little Angel); *Pinocchio* (Watermill, Newbury); *Soft or Spiky* and *Romeo & Juliet* (Polka); *Diva: Live from Hell!* (King's Head/Underbelly); *Constellations* (Theatr Clwyd); *Foam* (Finborough); *Kim's Convenience* and *Candy* (Park); *Tiny Tim's Christmas Carol* and *She Stoops to Conquer* (Orange Tree); *Ignition* (Frantic Assembly) and *The Flea* (Yard Theatre).

SARAH SPENCER | Sound Designer

Theatre work as sound designer and composer includes *Fire Fire* (Arcola/UK tour); *In the Print* (King's Head); *AETHER* (Jermyn Street/Edinburgh Festival); *Dyke Systems Ltd.* (Southbank Centre/Shoreditch Townhall/UK tour); *Scatter* (Underbelly, Edinburgh/Underbelly Boulevard, Soho); *1:17am, or Until the Words Run Out* (Finborough); *Looking for Giants* (King's Head); *Tending* (Brixton House/Riverside Studios/UK tour); *Sisters Three* (Summerhall, Edinburgh); *Her Green Hell* (Summerhall, Edinburgh/Theatre Royal, Plymouth/Theatre Royal, Bath); *Grounded* (Bridge/Brussels) and *Move Fast and Break Things* (Summerhall, Edinburgh).

Work as sound designer includes *Pear Phobia* (Soho/Underbelly Edinburgh/Underbelly Boulevard Soho); *Late with Pear* (Underbelly Edinburgh) and *The Great Gatsby* (Europe tour).

Work as composer, musical director and pianist includes *How to Kill a Chicken* (The Actors, Brighton).

Work as pianist and composer includes *Project Dictator* (New Diorama/HOME Manchester/Bristol Old Vic/Norwich Playhouse/Northern Stage/Mercury/Oslo/Teatru Manoel, Malta/Norway tour).

REBECCA WIELD | Movement & Intimacy Director

Rebecca trained at the Royal Ballet School and danced with English National Ballet, before training as an actor in 2015. She gained an MA in Movement Directing and Teaching from the RCSSD in 2023.

Work as movement director includes *Fatherland*, *Biscuits for Breakfast* and *Ravenscourt* (Hampstead Theatre); *Ruth* and *Musik* (Wilton's Music Hall); *Guys and Dolls* and *Duet for One* (Frinton Summer Season); *Persona* (Saatchi Gallery - Lumen Prize nomination 2024) and *Painting* (White Bear).

Work as choreographer includes *Pickled* (National Film & Television School) and *I'm King* and *Drag Performance* (RVT, Ivan – If – A – Boy).

Work as choreographer, director, writer, performer includes *Lockdown Palladium* (livestreamed).

Work as intimacy coordinator/director includes *Ruth* (Wilton's Music Hall) and *Me to You* (National Film & Television School).

Work as director includes *Playing the Feeld* (Riverside Studios) and *Fuck Me, I'm Grieving* (Hope Theatre, Islington).

CHARACTERS

ABIGAIL is 37. She eats pizza crusts.

ALICE is 40. She leaves pizza crusts.

WILL is 35. He eats pizza crusts.

Also: Call Center Bot; Christy, the producer of a popular late-night talk show; and CAPCOM.

SETTING

The play mainly takes place in the living room of a bungalow in suburban Florida. Later, a quarantine room at a space center.

TIME

Two weeks pass over the course of events;
time is the present, but sort of different.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

/ indicates the start of the next line.
(words in brackets) are not spoken.
Punctuation, or lack thereof, is intended as a guide for actors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been lucky enough to live with the love and support of a very great number of people as I've written and re-written *The Urmetazoan* over the last few years.

We have the best and most beautiful team bringing the show to life. To Anna, Dorothea, Meghan, Ben, Sarah, Tomás, Em and Jonathan, thank you for lending your talent and intelligence to the play, and making me look so good.

I will be eternally grateful to Marcus, Neil and Amanda Harman and Philippa Lawford for giving me space and time at the Clonter Theatre to finish the first draft and hear it out loud. Thank you to the numerous – too numerous to mention – people who have read the play and given me invaluable feedback.

Thank you also to my agent, Florence Hyde, and my manager, Alice Stites, for believing in me and in the play. To Alice Hamilton and Greg Ripley-Duggan and the whole Hampstead team for their faith and support. To Jack Serio for being the play's biggest supporter and most rigorous, exceptional dramaturg. To Lucy Kirkwood for being generous and kind, and giving up her time to help show me the way forward.

I was lucky enough to be taught by the amazing John Burgess, whose playwriting writing course changed my life. I sent him the play a few weeks before he died. I have no idea if he read it, but I hope he would have been proud. Or at the very least, not too piercing in his criticism. The world is a much less interesting place without him in it. To Ella, Shona, Sheila, Lucia, Emily, Marcus, Sam and Thea, my fellow classmates, thank you for everything.

The play owes a very great debt to Sayidd Aki, who sat me down in Wetherspoons and told me what to do. To India Harrison Peppe, who was a brutal and brilliant heart surgeon when I needed it most. To Stella Green, who held my hand throughout and whose love and intelligence transformed me and the play. And to Luke Wintour, who has made me a better person and a much better artist. Luke, I want to make things with you forever.

Finally, to my family, and to Flo – thank you for making life on earth so beautiful. I never want to leave.

For my mum
And her sisters

I had a junkie heart
and a proclivity for banned substances in strange houses
on streets where nobody lived and everybody died
you met me like you were passing through the wall
and into the attic to sleep
just for a few hours
light streaming in through that window, my eyes
you can't change anything but your shoes
the pale blue dog of the universe is asleep in your lap

– Flora Rugman, "Pale Blue Dog,"

PROLOGUE

(Two girls lie on the ground and look up at the stars. **ALICE** *is twelve.* **ABIGAIL** *is nine.)*

(They make up a story.)

(This dialogue should be improvised by the actors.)

ALICE. In

ABIGAIL. A

ALICE. In

ABIGAIL. My

ALICE. In...

ABIGAIL. The

ALICE. Beginning

ABIGAIL. There

ALICE. There

ABIGAIL. Was

ALICE. There

ABIGAIL. Were

ALICE. Two

ABIGAIL. girls.

ALICE. In

ABIGAIL. The

ALICE. Dark!!

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. empty!!!

ABIGAIL. Universe

ALICE. Yesssss.

ABIGAIL. The

ALICE. Girls

ABIGAIL. Were

ALICE. Big!

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Violent!!!

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Kind

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Rich

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Every

ABIGAIL. Day

ALICE. They

ABIGAIL. Walked

ALICE. Around

ABIGAIL. Stars

ALICE. And

ABIGAIL. Made

ALICE. money

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. forests

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Cheese

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Mum

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Dad.

ABIGAIL. They

ALICE. Made

ABIGAIL. Everything

ALICE. Because

ABIGAIL. They

ALICE. Were

ABIGAIL. Everything

ALICE. And

ABIGAIL. When

ALICE. They

ABIGAIL. Had

ALICE. Made

ABIGAIL. Everything

ALICE. They

ABIGAIL. Sat

ALICE. On

ABIGAIL. the

ALICE. Grass

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Ate

ABIGAIL. A

ALICE. Lolly

ABIGAIL. And

ALICE. Stayed

ABIGAIL. There

ALICE. Doing

ABIGAIL. That

ALICE. Forever.

(They laugh.)

(Black.)

One

(A living room in a bungalow: a sofa facing a TV, a desk with a laptop, a door that leads to bedrooms and a door to a front drive and a street we cannot see. A kitchenette and a microwave is visible through a pane of glass. There are clothes, books, and cardboard boxes strewn everywhere.)

(Over the course of the play, the room is stripped of its personality as the boxes are filled. A jigsaw on the coffee table is completed over the course of the play.)

(The sounds of voices swimming in white noise. We can't make out any words; it's just the crackle of communication. It rises.)

(The streetlamps outside the house snap on, casting the room into shadows, revealing…)

*(***ALICE** *[40] and* **ABIGAIL** *[37] facing each other, surrounded by suitcases.)*

(They stare.)

ABIGAIL. What?

ALICE. Your hair.

ABIGAIL. Yeah, I know.

ALICE. It's / different

ABIGAIL. I know.

(Beat.)

Love the shoes.

ALICE. Please, let's, can we not?

ABIGAIL. What?

ALICE. You / being

ABIGAIL. I mean it

ALICE. Do you?

ABIGAIL. I mean it.

ALICE. Because we've only got / two weeks

ABIGAIL. I mean it

ALICE. Two weeks, so let's just. Let's just not.

ABIGAIL. I really do love the shoes.

ALICE. Right. Well. Thanks.

ABIGAIL. They're super cool, / very snazzy

ALICE. Oh just stop it, for once could you just stop it.

(Pause.)

ABIGAIL. So how do you feel?

ALICE. Fine. I feel fine. Ready.

ABIGAIL. No change of heart?

ALICE. No.

ABIGAIL. No.

ALICE. There was a deadline. A cutoff point, for backing out.

ABIGAIL. Right

So this is it then.

ALICE. Yes. This is it.

(Pause.)

ABIGAIL. This is much nicer than you made out in the email.

ALICE. Sorry. I did say. I'm just in the middle of packing.

*(**ABIGAIL** surveys the space. Notices a camera screwed to the wall.)*

ABIGAIL. Is that a camera?

ALICE. Ah. Yes, yeah. It is.

ABIGAIL. Worried I'm gonna nick something?

ALICE. It's a heat camera. I'm wearing a thing as well, look.

*(**ALICE** pulls up her T-shirt and reveals a bit of wearable tech strapped to her torso.)*

ABIGAIL. Weird.

ALICE. Not really. Camera takes my temperature, sends it to the lab. If I get sick, they'll know about it before I do. Look –

*(**ALICE** retrieves a tablet from the coffee table. Unlocks it and gives it to **ABIGAIL**, who looks from the tablet to the camera to the tablet as –)*

ABIGAIL. There's me, hi!!! Cool! Why's my crotch so hot?

ALICE. It's not –

*(**ALICE** takes the tablet back –)*

oh that is – that is very hot. Are you okay?

ABIGAIL. And you don't find it like a bit weird that they're doing that?

ALICE. Observation. It's necessary.

*(**ABIGAIL** gestures for the tablet again and **ALICE** hands it to her.)*

ABIGAIL. So what have you been up to?

(She scrolls through.)

Watching telly. Nice.

*(**ALICE** gestures for the tablet back. As she hands it over, there's a moment of contact.)*

ABIGAIL. It's good to see you. moon face.

ALICE. Yes, well. Why don't you unpack? I'll show you through.

(Black.)

Two

(The living room. It's hot. **ALICE** *holds up items of clothing from a huge pile in the centre of the room. Asks the question – Yes? No?* **ABIGAIL** *watches, holding a handheld fan to cool herself down.)*

(It's a bit of a game. But one they're reluctantly enjoying. Yeses go in one smaller pile; Nos in another.)

*(***ALICE** *holds up a pair of jeans.)*

(They speak in unison.)

ABIGAIL & ALICE. Yes.

(A T-shirt.)

Yes.

(A knitted jumper.)

No.

(A leather jacket.)

Yes.

(Some corduroy trousers.)

No.

(A skirt.)

No.

(Another T-shirt.)

No.

(Some Doc Martens.)

ABIGAIL & ALICE. Yes.

(A summer dress.)

No.

(A [horrible] turtleneck sweater.)

ABIGAIL.
No definitely not, no way.

ALICE.
I mean obviously I'm taking it.

ALICE. ???

ABIGAIL. What?

ALICE. This is like my favourite thing.

ABIGAIL. Oh, right –

ALICE. I wear it all the time, Abigail.

ABIGAIL. God, sorry I wasn't looking / properly, no, I mean, no, it doesn't, of course it doesn't it yes it looks lovely

ALICE. I thought it was quite nice.

It's nice, right?

ABIGAIL. Yes.

(Beat.)

So you're –

ALICE. Yes, I'm taking it. Unless / you're

ABIGAIL. *(Stands to take a closer look at the sweater.)* No, it's lovely, it's very yeah, its yeah.

ALICE. Really?

ABIGAIL. Yes. Yeah.

ALICE. Okay. You know. World watching.

*(***ALICE** *holds up a pair of sunglasses.)*

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