



WORLD BUILDERS

BY
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*Special thanks to Karen Hartman for midwifing this play
into existence and Daniel John Kelley for being a
great detention partner.*

WORLD BUILDERS opened at the West End Theatre in April 2017, presented by the Flux Theatre Ensemble. It was directed by Kelly O'Donnell, the scenic design was by Will Lowry, the costume design was by Stephanie Levin, the lighting design was by Kia Rogers, the sound design was by Kelly O'Donnell, and the production stage manager was Ben Shipley. The cast was as follows:

WHITNEY Alisha Spielmann
MAX August Schulenburg

WORLD BUILDERS was originally produced at the Contemporary American Theater Festival (Ed Herendeen, Producing Director; Peggy McKowen, Associate Producing Director), Shepherdstown, West Virginia, in July 2015. It was directed by Nicole A. Watson, the set design was by Robert Klingelhofer, the costume design was by Stephanie Shaw, the lighting design was by Tony Galaska, the sound design and original music were by Arshan Gailus, and the production stage manager was Laura Smith. The cast was as follows:

WHITNEY Brenna Palughi
MAX Chris Thorn

CHARACTERS

WHITNEY, 30s, outgoing and awkward, has a schizoid personality disorder, but you might not suspect it.

MAX, 30s, withdrawn and depressed, also has a schizoid personality disorder. You probably *would* suspect it.

SETTINGS and TIMES

A clinical drug trial for a medication treating the symptoms of schizoid personality disorder.

Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, MD.

The psychiatric wing.

A lounge. A new modern decor with cushioned chairs, white end tables, sinuously curving benches. A few tables for eating and playing cards are along one wall. The walls are painted in bright, cheerful colors. Abstract art hangs in prominent positions.

There is a gleaming cleanness and pristine shine on the tiled floor.

This is a room someone has taken great pains to make look like something other than a lounge in a psychiatric ward.

It is still a lounge in a psychiatric ward.

The present.

NOTES

When a character tag is followed by an ellipsis as such:

MAX. ...

this indicates a non-verbal response to the previous line.

The ellipsis may be played in many ways: as a pause, a beat, a look, a movement, a silence, a smile, a sudden thought; or it can just be used to give the scene some air, some room, some tension, etc.

If the line is comprised of exclamation marks or hash marks:

MAX. !!!!

MAX. #####

emotions are heightened. While four exclamation marks indicate a moment of surprise, hash marks indicate a moment of internal pain or anguish.

A slash (/) in the middle of a character's line indicates an interruption, where the next speaking character should begin her line.

WORLD BUILDERS

Scene 1

Week one. Day two.

A hospital lounge.

Whitney and Max sit at separate tables.

They are dressed in hospital scrubs and sweatshirts and wear electronic monitors.

They stare off into the distance, watching events unfold in their private worlds.

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. ...

Suddenly something very interesting happens in both worlds—

WHITNEY. !!!!

MAX. !!!!

Then, accidentally, their eyes meet.

They are snapped out of their worlds.

Super embarrassing!

WHITNEY. Oh. Hi.

MAX. Yeah.

WHITNEY. Ha! Yeah.

I was just—...well, you know. Right? Because—we're both... you know. Both of us—

So...you know what I was doing—...Ha!

Right?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. Well, we're here. So...

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. We're clearly both—

MAX. Actually—

WHITNEY. Yes?

MAX. I'd rather not—...If you don't mind.

WHITNEY. Oh.

MAX. Not to be rude. But...

WHITNEY. Oh. Okay. Sure.

MAX. We have to talk to doctors and nurses. We don't have to talk to each other.

Max withdraws back into his world.

WHITNEY. ...

Whitney pretends to go back into her world, then moves to sit in a chair closer to Max and watches him.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

Something interesting happens in Max's world.

MAX. !!!!

It concerns him and he wishes he could intervene, but he can only watch.

WHITNEY. ????

MAX. ...

Max sighs, defeated.

WHITNEY. Hey. Can I ask you something?

Max starts, seeing she has been watching for some time.

MAX. I came in here for privacy.

WHITNEY. I know. It's the crappy lounge with the least comfortable chairs. No one else is ever in here.

MAX. And I think I was here first.

WHITNEY. You were. I followed you.

MAX. Oh.

WHITNEY. We're in the same group. Group A. It says so on your chart. At the nurse's station.

MAX. You looked at my chart?

WHITNEY. So, we're both getting the same dosage.

MAX. Charts are private. What else did it say?

WHITNEY. I volunteered. Did you?

MAX. I was here first—

WHITNEY. I didn't really volunteer freely. Did you?

MAX. And I came in here to be alone. And I would appreciate you leaving me alone. Thank you.

WHITNEY. My psychiatrist and my mother made an ultimatum. They said I would be hospitalized if I didn't come.

So, I'm here.

My family has a lot of money, unfortunately. So they can pay to just have someone hospitalized because they want to, without having to get insurance to approve it. I mean, they're cheap rich people, they would like insurance to approve it. But they don't need it.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. My stepdad is a college friend of my psychiatrist, so they can get me committed really easily. So they said either I participate or I get hospitalized. So I'm here.

You?

MAX. Me?

WHITNEY. Why are you here? Of your own free will? Or were you coerced?

MAX. Why?

WHITNEY. Just curious.

MAX. I'd like to be alone with my thoughts.

WHITNEY. Because, the only cool thing about this drug study is that everyone is like me. You know?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. All the other patients. You are all like me. You are like me.

MAX. I don't know what you're like.

WHITNEY. And so we get to spend six weeks together. Us and all the other people like us.

MAX. I don't know what you're talking about.

WHITNEY. Testing pills to cure our schizoid personality disorders. Antisocial tendencies. Brief reactive psychoses. Autoerotic fixations. Dissociative and narcissistic behavior.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...?

MAX. Is that from my chart?

WHITNEY. No, that's my chart. But it's virtually identical to yours.

MAX. Oh.

WHITNEY. So, are you here willingly or compelled?

MAX. Compelled willingly.

WHITNEY. By your doctor?

MAX. He's my uncle.

WHITNEY. Your doctor is your uncle?

MAX. Yes.

WHITNEY. That sucks. So it isn't just a job. He's super motivated for your well-being and your mom or dad, whichever one is his sibling, is pressuring him to provide good care and look after your welfare really carefully.

MAX. Yes.

WHITNEY. That sucks!

MAX. Yes.

WHITNEY. I hate doctors who care a lot. You're so lucky when they aren't super motivated to be helpful. They leave you alone.

MAX. Yes.

WHITNEY. So, according to our charts, we both have vivid fantasy lives. That we retreat to due to our schizoid personality disorders. That are more complex than simple social withdrawal fantasies. But are actual fantasy worlds.

MAX. Please don't say that so loudly.

WHITNEY. There's no one in here.

MAX. There are people in the hall.

WHITNEY. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. I'm not embarrassed by my world.

MAX. You clearly aren't embarrassed by much.

WHITNEY. And anyone out in the hall would have to be the same as us. That's what the drug is for. People like us. So you have to be like us. Or you wouldn't be here.

I'm Whitney.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. ...?

MAX. Oh. Max.

WHITNEY. Hi, Max. So have you been obsessively introspective, addicted to building an elaborate fantasy life and indifferent to social norms your whole life? Or is it recent?

MAX. ...

I am going to go to my room.

Max picks up his pills and water and starts to leave.

WHITNEY. Wait! Was it something I said? I didn't mean to.

MAX. I just need to go to my room.

WHITNEY. I just thought since we were alike and all. We could talk.

MAX. I don't talk to people.

WHITNEY. Not real people, sure.

But, I'm practically like talking to a not-real person, because I would prefer to be talking to not-real people, too. Or listening to them. And I don't really care about you because I'm narcissistic and antisocial, so I won't judge.

MAX. That's good. I'm going to go to my room.

WHITNEY. Please don't go. We'll go back into our worlds.

Max hesitates.

I'll shut up.

The other lounges are full of real people. Who talk sometimes.

MAX. I know.

WHITNEY. I have things to do in my world.

Whitney sits and goes back into her world.

Max watches a moment. When he is sure she has settled into her world, he sits and returns to his world.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

Whitney sighs and breaks dramatically out of her world.

Max doesn't notice.

Whitney sighs again, louder, and speaks, jolting him out of his world.

Mine's a little sad.

MAX. What?

WHITNEY. My world. It's a little sad. Because I'm here.

MAX. Sad how? Sad as in lacking? Or emotionally sad as in depressed?

WHITNEY. Depressed.

MAX. Oh.

WHITNEY. My world isn't *lacking*. I wasn't saying it's a sad world, like a lousy world—or *lacking* something.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. Just depressed because I'm here.

MAX. Your world gets depressed?

WHITNEY. Yeah. Only the depressing story lines want to happen.

MAX. Oh.

WHITNEY. Yeah.

MAX. Sorry.

WHITNEY. It's understandable.

MAX. Why?

WHITNEY. It knows it's dying.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. What do you mean?

WHITNEY. That the pills are going to kill it.

MAX. Are the pills killing it?

WHITNEY. Not yet. You?

MAX. Not yet.

WHITNEY. I think it's starting to affect the woman who talks to herself. The one who talks out loud. Ms. Reactive Psychosis.

I followed her around yesterday, eavesdropping. It was all one conversation over and over again. Telling someone named Frank not to tell someone named Susan about the apples. That was it. "Frank, no, don't tell her. She'll be mad. They were her apples." It never got better. That was it.

MAX. Not sure what there is to withdraw to in that.

WHITNEY. I know, right?

My schizoid delusions are just better. I mean, it's totally bad to label and worse to compare, but my world is just better. No one would have such a stupid conversation in my world. People are intelligent there.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. I mean, maybe there's more to hers. But judging by her dialogue, her world is sort of crappy. Right?

MAX. Maybe.

WHITNEY. My world isn't. It is the opposite of sad as in lacking.

MAX. Okay.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do whatever I did to you emotionally.

WHITNEY. I'm very emotional right now. I don't want to lose my world. I don't want the drugs to make me... you know.

MAX. Normal.

WHITNEY. Normal.

MAX. Yeah.

WHITNEY. Maybe it's just going to work on stupid people.

MAX. Why would that be the case?

WHITNEY. Maybe smart people can outthink the pills.

MAX. No. If it works, it will work.

WHITNEY. Do you want it to work? Is that the willing part of your compelled willingly?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. Maybe it won't work for everyone.

MAX. Maybe.

WHITNEY. God. That would be just my luck. To be in the most successful drug trial of all time where there was a hundred percent success rate. The one time doctors actually get things right and they cure my disorder completely!

MAX. Yeah.

WHITNEY. So...

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. Do you have any interest in...?

MAX. ...?

WHITNEY. I mean, we aren't going anywhere.

MAX. What?

WHITNEY. So how would you feel about...?

MAX. What?

WHITNEY. You know.

MAX. No, I don't.

WHITNEY. Well. I was thinking. Maybe... Aren't you thinking the same thing?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. Come on.

MAX. What?

WHITNEY. I'll show you mine, if you show me yours.

MAX. Oh!

No. Sorry. No. I'm asexual.

WHITNEY. What?

MAX. I'm asexual. So. It holds no interest.

WHITNEY. No! I'm autoerotic.

MAX. I'm completely asexual.

WHITNEY. I'm completely narcissistic and autoerotic. I didn't mean that.

God, no.

MAX. What did you mean?

WHITNEY. I'll tell you about my private world, if you tell me about yours.

Max leaps out of his chair and stares at her in shock!

MAX. !!!!

WHITNEY. If you want.

MAX. !!!!

WHITNEY. Just if you want!

MAX. I need to go to my room.

WHITNEY. Wait, no! Just wait.

MAX. No. I'm going to my room.

WHITNEY. It's okay. I don't care enough about other people—real people—to judge you.

MAX. It is not possible.

WHITNEY. I just thought it would be nice.

MAX. Some things are private!

WHITNEY. I know.

MAX. Intensely private!

WHITNEY. I know. But, we're the same. You probably won't judge me either because we're the same. I don't care if your world isn't as good as mine. Or if it's stupid.

MAX. ...

Okay. I'm leaving. I'm just leaving.

WHITNEY. Wait!

Max leaves.

Wait. Please?

Whitney is dejected a moment.

Then, just as she starts to drift back into her world—

...—

Max storms back in.

MAX. My world is not stupid!

WHITNEY. Okay.

MAX. It is private.

WHITNEY. Okay.

MAX. There's a difference.

WHITNEY. All right.

MAX. Do you go around telling people about your fantasy world?

WHITNEY. God, no! Of course not. I'd be committed.

MAX. You have been committed.

WHITNEY. Oh, well, sort of. It's a drug trial.

MAX. For people with disorders that are so severe they have been hospitalized at least once. Before this.

WHITNEY. Oh. Right.

MAX. Did you tell your psychiatrist details?

WHITNEY. Of course not.

MAX. I should hope not.

WHITNEY. I just say I retreat into a fantasy life and my doctor has not been rude enough to ask what it's about.

MAX. Then why on earth would you want to tell me?

WHITNEY. Because it's dying.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. It's going to die. I'm going to lose it. And no one will ever know about it. And it's not sad, it's complex and full of not-real people that are better than real people. And I'm never going to get to share it with anyone because it's private, and then soon I won't have it and I won't even want to have it, and there won't be anyone who ever even knew about it. How wonderful it is. To me.

MAX. You really think the pills will...kill the worlds?

WHITNEY. That's what my doctor said.

MAX. They'll just disappear?

WHITNEY. Yes. And we won't want them back or even remember them clearly. Gone, lost, dead, dead worlds.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. That doesn't seem possible.

WHITNEY. You don't have to tell me yours.

MAX. I won't.

WHITNEY. But, do you want to hear about mine?

MAX. Do you expect something from me? Afterward? Emotionally?

WHITNEY. No.

MAX. Pity? Praise?

WHITNEY. No. Nothing.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. Really?

MAX. If you don't expect anything in return.

WHITNEY. I don't expect anything.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. Okay! Wow! Okay! I've never done this before.

Oh my god! I'm telling someone about the world. This doesn't seem real. This is sort of liberating, huh?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. Well, you want to share it because you spend so much time there. Right?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. And it's so complex—your world—that you sort of want people to admire the effort you've put into it.

MAX. No. I don't.

WHITNEY. Well, maybe your world isn't as complex and rich as mine.

MAX. ...

WHITNEY. ...

MAX. Let's not go there.

WHITNEY. That's nothing to be ashamed / of—

MAX. Let's not go there.

WHITNEY. I don't want you to feel bad about your world when you hear about mine is all.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. Because mine is comprehensively realized. In my head.

MAX. Okay.

WHITNEY. My world is a futuristic dystopia. The Earth has been destroyed by a giant meteorite, thrown at the planet by an alien race that is our enemy.

There are seven colony worlds that Earth's survivors fled to.

Having crossbred with native species on several worlds, humanity now has a variety of forms and we live peaceably with several alien races.

So, racial subsets have now created seventy-two alien-human hybrid races. Do you want me to list them?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. There are forty-seven major characters and one hundred and thirty minor characters. Should I list those and provide brief biographies?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. This is so hard. How do you describe a world? It isn't a story with a beginning, middle and end. It's a world.

MAX. Okay. Failed experiment.

Max starts to leave again.

WHITNEY. No, I can do this. I'll start with the earliest world stories from when I was in junior high, and the world first coalesced into a coordinated whole.

The torture and execution of Marvina of Taurus Seven!

Marvina was a space pirate and a princess and a water-breathing amphibious archaeologist.

Okay, that's a little unrealistic, sure. But I was twelve when I first made her up.

She went on a quest to find the ruins of an underwater alien city to

retrieve an artifact that would save humanity from being enslaved by robots this one time. And she met and fell in love with the high priest of a dark cult of demon-worshipping opera singers. And they had three sons. Mikor, Sebastian and Dorrick.

Marvina found the artifact and saved humanity and settled down to raise the boys as a single mother. Only this other cult—a demon-worshipping rival cult of belly dancers—wanted to kill her sons. So she killed the belly-dancing cult leader and got arrested by the planetary governing council headed by Vernonian the Curse-giver. And it shouldn't have been a big deal because it was in self-defense.

But Vernonian used the arrest as an excuse to put Marvina into a trial of mortal combat with a special executioner-android trained to torture and kill amphibious races in a water arena—

Glibtrar Drathmek!

And so Marvina got thrown into this water arena to fight Glibtrar to the death. And it was televised and her sons watched as she was tortured and murdered. And there was nothing they could do.

So, from there, my fantasy world branched off into three different stories of personal vengeance. Because Mikor, Sebastian and Dorrick were sent in disguise to three different colony worlds out of fear that Vernonian, having killed their mother, would come after them next.

Do you want to hear about Mikor, Sebastian or Dorrick next?

MAX. No. That was enough. Thank you.

WHITNEY. I feel that by having to streamline it, I'm gutting everything. Is that what you're feeling? Things are too compressed?

MAX. No.

WHITNEY. What are you feeling then?

MAX. Embarrassed for you.

WHITNEY. It gets better.

We'll start with Mikor.

Mikor inherits the fleet of space pirates. And he's raised on the flag command ship and eventually becomes admiral. And he captures a Sensorian royal intergalactic space yacht. And Princess Selestina is on board, commanding the ship. And they meet. And she leads a

The play doesn't end here...

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