# Presented by Rachel O’Regan

# REALLY REALLY (working title)

**Referee 1: May Sumbwanyambe, leading Scottish playwright**

**Referee 2: Kolbrún Björt Sigfúsdóttir, leading Scottish director**

**Rachel O’Regan is a multi-award-winning playwright based in Edinburgh, Scotland.**

Born in the Eora Nation of Australia, she has Aotearoa New Zealand, Sāmoan, Scottish and Irish heritage. Her entry into theatre was not conventional, as she did not originate from this background through family or schooling. She got her first break in her mid-twenties, through the Australian Theatre for Young People, where she was mentored by Tom Holloway, and her first live performance piece was staged in 2015 for the company's play "The Voices Project: All Good Things".

Since then, she has resiliently pursued a career as a playwright, honing her skills and carving a space for herself within the industry. Upon relocating to Scotland, she embarked on Edinburgh Napier University's MFA Playwriting programme. Under the mentorship of esteemed Scottish theatremakers, including May Sumbwanyambe, Mark Thomson, and Martin McCormick, she graduated with distinction and was honoured with the Class Medal. While studying, her first full-length play, "Hungerland," also won the prestigious Bread and Roses Playwriting Award in 2019.

Her next play, "Afterparty," found a home with the Scottish feminist theatre company F Bomb Theatre, where she also holds the position of company co-director. This comedy drama, centered around the lives of working-class teenage girls, achieved remarkable success for a then-student company, selling out its entire run at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2021.

Her most recent work, "The Beatles Were A Boyband," further exemplifies her commitment to exploring socially relevant themes. This bold and timely piece delves into critical issues of women's safety and male violence. Premiering at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2022 at Gilded Balloon, the play received acclaim, earning a Scotsman Fringe First Award and the Sit Up Award for social impact, and was longlisted for the Popcorn Writing Award. The play's return to the 2023 Fringe speaks to its enduring relevance and the resonance it continues to find with audiences.

In addition, she has been supported by BBC Writersroom Scottish Voices and reached the final round of the BBC Writersroom Drama Room nationwide open call, which received more than 4000 submissions. Presently, she is immersed in writing a new play for young audiences devised with Strange Town Youth Theatre. She is also attached to an immersive play about neurodiversity with Emma Ruse Productions, which was shortlisted for an Unlimited Award and is pending funding.

**PROJECT PROPOSAL**

**Virtual violence and real-world consequences crash into eachother in my proposed play, REALLY REALLY (working title).**

The narrative follows Connie, a prominent streamer in her mid-twenties, most known for playing first-person shooter games in the metaverse. She has built up a substantial following, all the while assuming a male persona by using voice-altering software and filters. This protects her from the harassment that “gamer girls” are bound to face.

But one day, this facade glitches and her real identity is revealed to the public. She is initially met with well-meaning surprise at her gaming abilities and solidarity from other female gamers, and it seems like the whole incident is behind her. But the play takes a turn when she becomes the target of a virtual assault in the metaverse orchestrated by a group of male gamers who she used to be on a team with.

This is inspired by a real-life case. UK police are currently investigating a gang-rape of a teenage girl in the metaverse. Additionally, several sex attacks are reported to have occurred on Horizon Worlds, the virtual reality game run by Facebook’s owner company Meta.

One metaverse researcher, Nina Jane Patel, was attacked within minutes of entering Horizon Worlds using a female-presenting avatar. “Within 60 seconds of joining — I was verbally and sexually harassed — 3–4 male avatars, with male voices, essentially, but virtually gang-raped my avatar and took photos. A horrible experience that happened so fast and before I could even think about putting the safety barrier in place. I froze.”

These experiences have prompted predictably cynical responses, which will be echoed in the play, as Connie’s very public attack becomes a lightning rod for discourse. Social media comments have included: “Couldn’t she have just turned it off?” “Can we focus on real-life crime please?” “Don’t choose a female avatar, it’s a simple fix.” “I was killed in Call of Duty, been waiting for my killer to be brought to justice.” “Send them to virtual prison.” “This is an insult to real victims.”But this play will ask: how far does virtual violence permeate into the real world? How well does the body know the difference between these virtual experiences and physical ones? And, with the emergence of VR - including immersive technology and haptic feedback - is the gap between the virtual and physical world closing? Did it ever really exist to begin with?

Thoroughly examining the long-term emotional and psychological impact that the attack has had on Connie. She suffers with self-blame, and she is shamed and held responsible by others… it was her fault for masking her true identity, it was her fault for playing with the big boys, it was her fault for not turning off the game sooner. People may say that the attack against her wasn’t real, but the culture surrounding it echoes what many assault survivors experience.

The games she happily used to play - casually violent and misogynistic in nature - now take on a different tone. The dynamics of power and “winning at any cost” are now too triggering to engage with. Are such games inherently problematic? There is an argument for games holding value as creative expression, educational tools and stress relief. But there is also something distasteful about engaging in virtual violence when it profoundly

impacts real people, from drowning a Sim in the swimming pool, all the way to the simulation of war in countless games.

Video games have been the subject of moral panic for decades, and this play will not seek to demonise them or those who play them. Nor will it aim to offer up facile resolutions - but to challenge and prompt its audience to consider the fast-merging worlds of physical and virtual. Indeed, audience members will be invited to engage with the play in real-time,
through the use of a smartphone or handheld device. Paralleling the “choose your own adventure” style of gameplay, audience reactions to the various ethical dilemmas will actively transform the play in realtime. This is an innovative theatrical device that has been accomplished by just a few UK productions, including QUIZ on the West End, and MANY GOOD MEN by Scottish company Civic Digits.

I propose that the BxNU Citizens’ Jury Commission be used foremost to finance the comprehensive research, development, and writing phases of the play. This initiative will encompass a 1-hour play commission, adhering to the minimum fee stipulated by the Scottish Society of Playwrights, affording ample time for the playwright to delve into the ever-evolving discourse surrounding virtual reality, video games and violence. A dramaturg with interest or experience in these themes will be hired to support one week of workshopping the first draft and another week to refine the script. Dramaturgical support will be crucial in balancing the script’s weighty and complex themes, and also realising the complexity of a “choose your own adventure” narrative.

I intend to reach out to Civic Digits (or a company with similar expertise) to seek guidance and consultancy. This collaboration will ensure the smooth integration and execution of the play's technological components. I will also hire a director experienced in technologically innovative theatre, a lighting and sound designer, and an experienced actor, to complete the creative team. Leading the production and marketing efforts will be F-Bomb Theatre, my own feminist theatre company with a track record of multiple awards in recent years. I would aim to rehearse at Northumbria University to minimise expenses if possible.

In terms of logistics, "Really Really" will be staged live, with provisions made for the potential mobility of the production to accommodate different venues. The flexibility of the production design will allow for seamless transitions between performance spaces, facilitating potential staging at Northumbria University or other local Newcastle theatres or performance venues. Documentation of the rehearsal process and live performances will be undertaken - photographs, script excerpts, and a curated map of "game choices," will be made available for exhibition.

The realization of such an ambitious production does necessitate additional funding beyond the commission. To this end, applications for funding will be submitted to esteemed institutions such as Creative Scotland, as well as tech-forward organizations like Creative Informatics and Codebase. Advantageously, I have existing professional relationships with both companies, as I have worked with them closely through my work at Creative Edinburgh.

I hope that with the support of BxNU, REALLY REALLY will develop as a compelling exploration of virtual violence and its implications on individual and societal levels. Through storytelling, innovative theatrical devices, and interdisciplinary collaboration, the play will invites audiences to confront complex ethical dilemmas in an engaging and entertaining way.

# BUDGET OUTLINE

**Playwright commission £5,587.00**

**Dramaturg fee £1,270.00**

**Tech theatre consultancy £500.00**

**Producer fee (including sourcing extra funding) £600.00**

**TOTAL SUPPORT FROM BxNU £7,957.00**

**Director fee £2,322.32**

**Sound Designer £500.00**

**Lighting Designer £500.00**

**Actor £1,650.00**

**Costumes and Props £200.00**

**Photography £300.00**

**Contigency £671.47**

**TOTAL FROM OUTSIDE FUNDING £6143.79**

**TOTAL £13,429.32**