

MATHIAS SVALINA

War Games: Instructions

HOLY WAR

(for 7 or more players)

One child begins in the center of the circle. The other children carry sticks & point the sticks at the sky. *Oh elephant* one moans. *Oh ferret* moans another. Soon each child is moaning the name of an animal, except for the child in the middle, who is starving to death.

When the child in the middle is dead the children point their sticks toward the earth. The sticks grow roots & enroot a circle below the dead child. As the sticks grow into enormous trees they lift the body of the child up into the sky so that no one can ever see her again.

One child says *I can see her*. But that child is lying. The other children circle around the lying child & begin to stroke his skin & rub his feet with expensive oils. Another child says *I can see her as well*. This child is also lying. Other children circle around this child & give her candies & juice boxes.

At night the first lying child sends his people to kill the people of the second lying child, but they are under strict instructions not to kill the second lying child.

CIVIL WAR

(for 2 players)

One child glues herself to another child with super glue. She glues her palms to the other child's palms. She glues her lips to the other child's lips. She glues her knees to the other child's knees. She glues her eyelids to the other child's eyelids.

At the end of the school day the two children exit the school & approach the buses. The one child wants to go to her bus. The other child wants to go to his own bus. They each attempt to reach for the wads of cash in the back pockets of their jeans in order to pay

the other child off, but as they do the skin rips off of their forearms where they have been glued together. This hurts so much that each child jerks away from the other, ripping all the skin off the front of their bodies.

Instructions for the Teacher

Schooltime contains the education. The playground extends into the history books. Remember to wash everything down the day before classes begin. Remember & hold a brittle metal between your teeth.

This book contains games for the education of the children. Allow the children to invent their own rules. Require the children to follow the rules. One game teaches the lesson of every game.

Children must be led to the playground by means of a long rope. They must hold the rope with one hand. They must close their eyes to feel the midmorning sun on their eyelids. You must know the name of every child you know.

Inside the schoolhouse paper contains. Inside the schoolbooks the children learn how to history. History only means by extension. Paper only means its ink. With these games the children will begin.

Every game consists of a set of restraints. Every child must be taught the restraints. Each child must open her eyes into the shattering sun. The playground spreads infinitely in every direction & it has an infinite duration.

Instructions for the Parents

Children need to learn their methods from their means. Children hold hands until the river bursts. At home your child needs a circle in which to stand. Your child's childhood is a place for sleep.

School remains open to the system of childhood. One mouth gaps & the other retains. One bone breaks another. You must know how your child's face recognizes itself in the shadowy space below the balance beam.

You must make a child by means of the following instructions: One child per instruction.

DRUG WAR

(for 5 or more players)

One child is the criminal & one child is the law & one child is the government. Each of these three children cover the playground in money. They wrap the other children up in dollar bills until they are completely cocooned in the money.

After fourteen days the cocoons shake & rattle & split open. The opened cocoons spill out thousands of small red bricks.

The criminal-child, the law-child & the government-child collect the bricks & build fabulous palaces with them. In the back of each palace they build swimming pools & fill them with the clearest, coldest water.

GUERILLA WAR

(for 4 or more players)

One child is a soldier. One child hides in the woods. One child is the government. One child stays in the village & continues to plough the fields. This last child is known as The People & she or he remains completely silent throughout the entire game, pantomiming ploughing actions & goat-milking actions & sleeping actions & waking actions.

The child in the woods sets the soldier-child's house on fire. The soldier child sets the child in the wood's house on fire. Someone finds a white handkerchief along a dusty road & places it over the open wound.

The government child stands before The People & tells her or him *You are better now*. The government child holds out a plate of food to The People & says *Here is some food for you*. The People returns to his or her town, which is also his or her hometown. He or she returns to his or her bed, the bed in which he or she was conceived.

It should be recognized that on both sides great courage is shown. There are beatings & there are soccer games. Someone is found in the village square with her hands cut off, attempting to grip a wooden bucket.

The soldier child & the child in the woods both stare into the canopy, awaiting the luminous moment of battle.

ILLEGAL WAR

(for 10 or more players)

In the morning the teacher gives one child a box of freshly sharpened pencils. Their tips are so pointy. They smell like raw wood & engine. Throughout the day this child sneaks the pencils into the bookbags of his classmates. He must be very careful so that no child discovers him unzipping the plastic zippers of their bookbags. So that no child sees him with his small hand inside her blue bookbag, or possibly yellow.

Throughout the day the children discover the freshly sharpened pencils in their bookbags & begin to draw & write with them. They chew the erasers. They break the tips. At the end of the day the teacher asks for the pencils back from the child. This game is especially good for boys who are afraid of the dark.

SECRET WAR

(for 5 or more players)

The children must sit in a circle in the sun. One child whispers a secret into another child's ear & that child whispers a secret into the next child's ear & so on & so on until every child knows every other child's secrets.

The first child hands the second child a small green frog & says "Here is your secret." The second child must hand the frog to every other child without having it crushed. The first child then hands the second child a newly hatched chick & says "Here is your secret." Again the second child must hand the newly hatched chick to every other child, being careful not to allow the chick to be crushed.

Eventually one of the children falls or sneezes or sees their advantage over the others & the frog & the chicken are crushed. There is a moment when one of the children whispers "I could hear its bones break," & then the children return to the circle.

The first child hands the second child a piece of dry ice. As he hands it over, bits of skin stick to the dry ice. "Here is your secret," he says. The second child must pass the dry ice to each subsequent child. Eventually the dry ice is covered with bits of skin from all the children's hands & it is safe to touch. But by then the ice has sublimated & there is nothing inside the frozen structure of skin.

DIRTY WAR

(for 4 or more players)

One child must kill another child & hide his body in woods beyond the playground. Another child must know that the first child killed the second; this child is known as The Media. Every morning The Media must place photographs of the Dead-Child on the walls & doors of the schoolhouse. The Killer-Child must every day stand beside the photographs of the Dead-Child & tell the other children that no one has died.

The other children will pass the photographs & the Killer-Child every day without noticing them. They will not hear the Killer-Child's voice. They will not see The Media's photographs. They will brush up against each other in the hallways & either fight or kiss & the buses will be running on the winter days to keep the interiors heated.

The Dead-Child builds a small home in the woods beyond the playground. He keeps a cot there & a small stove on which he heats his water for instant oatmeal. By day the Dead-Child stays inside his little home & keeps the curtains closed against the light. By night he walks through the schoolhouse & takes down all the photographs.

GOOD WAR

(for 3 or more players)

One child is The Civilian, one child is The Evil Enemy & one child must clothe himself in all white & stand with his posture perfected. The Evil Enemy should have a noticeable hunch to his shoulders, or perhaps carry a cane.

The Evil Enemy must tie The Civilian to the jungle gym. He should threaten The Civilian until The Civilian gives him everything of value.

Then the child in all white must walk with a stately gait across the playground & chase The Evil Enemy away. The Civilian takes all of the things of value & gives them to the child in white & says "Take it. Take it all. This is a gift for you."

OUR WAR

(for 1 or more children)

One child must be the tallest child & one must be the smartest & one must be the fastest & one must be the richest & one must be the strongest & one must be the cruelest & one must be the prettiest & one must be the strongest & one must be the tallest & one must be the oldest & one must be the wildest & one must be the most graceful & one must be the smartest & one must be the smallest & one must be the coldest & one must be the richest & one must be the richest & one must be the strongest & one must have the prettiest dog & one must have the largest room & one must be the most well-dressed & one must be the tallest & one must be the loudest & one must be the best at kickball & one must be the best drawer & one must know the most multiplication tables & one must have been born the farthest away & one must be the weakest & one must be the stupidest & one must be the youngest & one must be the slowest & one must be the poorest & one must be the strongest & one must be the cruelest & one must be the shyest & one must be the best guitarist & one must be the best leader & one must be the easiest & one must hold his pencil the best & one must cower in the bushes the most & one's mother must bake the best cookies & one must be the strongest & one must be the cruelest &

one must be the rudest & one must be the smartest & one must be the bravest & one must be the tallest.

THEIR WAR

(For 3 or more players)

One child must draw a silhouette of himself on the red brick wall of the schoolhouse in chalk. This child & another child must stand inside the jungle gym & stare at the silhouette. The third child must then enter the jungle gym & ask the first two children when school will end.

It becomes night when the Wall-Child dies, says the first two children to the third. If the Wall-Child succeeds we'll never wake up.

The third child watches the Wall-Child then, waiting for it to cry. The second child watches the Wall-Child then, waiting for it to fall down. The first child watches the Wall-Child then, waiting for it to die.

When the Wall-Child begins to shudder & shake, the other children run to tell the teacher. *It's all his fault. It's all his fault*, the children tell the teacher. When the teacher walks outside, the Wall-Child is gone & the walls have all crumbled.

The children look to the teacher, but they see bright blue feathers beginning to show at the teacher's collar.

WORLD WAR

(for 6,600,000,000 players or more)

Every child is at war with every other child. Every child braids a tight-rope out of rawhide & strings it between his or her home & school. The tight-ropes cobweb the blind face of the earth. Beneath them the vegetation dies for want of sunlight & above the web of tight-ropes the dust settles like the shrill choking noises a baby makes.

Every child does something to make him or herself unique. One child bathes in a tub of saliva. One child soaps herself with soap shaped like her face. One child buries every hair from her head

separately out in the grotto. One child lies in bed & laughs at the mistakes all his friends have ever made. One child believes that he is unique.

When a child dies in one schoolhouse another child cries in a schoolhouse in another county. When one child accidentally says *fuck* in front of the history teacher a child in another continent is slapped across the face. When one child bites her fingers until they are bloody & ragged another child who looks just like her jams her hands in the pockets of her jeans.

Instructions for Nurses

Do not see the blood, the ripped out hair, the dislocated arms hanging limp & pink. Do not see the folded children in their imaginary wounds. These are only playthings of the intimate. These are the colors of the healing bruise. These are the colors the janitors hide in the closets with the bleaches & other poisonous liquids.

Instructions for the Bomb

That which one becomes one always had a shadow for. The curl in the rainwater as it runs into the gutter is neither more nor less beautiful than the wave's perfect arc or the shard of bone embedded in the brick. Children gravitate toward images of their own round faces. Adults attend their funerals wearing darkly-hued clothes. When we run out of road we continue with our intentions. When we need something whole we build a bomb & plant it outside of the simplicity zone.

You must complicate. You must be the thing no rule can bind. You must be the binge at the bottom of the dry well. After the newspapers & the reporters have all forgotten you your trigger to remain inside of you. Your friend will ask you *What?* And you'll respond *What what?*

But mostly you will wait, which is the secret of weaponry. Like the tip of a branch that knows one day it will dip into the creek, you will hold yourself whole & watch the surrounding world proceed in its glassy surfaces. To each child that walks by holding a ball you'll

say *boom* & imagine the leathery musk of the mist. To each wall the people build you'll say *boom* & picture the lack, the hole inside it.

It is for you to define that which will soon not. One wonders, really, what becomes a hole.

FORGOTTEN WAR

(for 1 or more players)

One child hides a war beneath his bed & at night he hears the bombs & the wailing of the wounded. Every morning before heading to school he shoves a bowl of sugar cereal beneath the bed & each day when he gets home the bowl is empty.

Sometimes in school while the teacher sounds like white paint he can hear the tiny pings of their weapons. He can see their little arms & legs blown off by the explosions, nestled like eyelashes in the cream-colored carpet. Sometimes when the multiplication tables cover his desk he can see the tiny soldier jumping on the tiny hand grenade, the thump of the explosion, the jerk of the body & the pink mist.

At night he goes to sleep to the tinny chorus of the war. In the morning when his mother wakes him he can hear the silence of their waiting.

Some days he comes in from soccer practice & there is a smell in his bedroom. Sometimes he carefully pulls the legs & arms from the carpet & stores them in a matchbox.

At night he says his prayers with his hands folded over his chest. Now I lay me down to sleep to pray the lord my soul to keep. The explosions like toothpicks cracking. The guns like soda-bubbles popping against a clear plastic cup.

VICTORY

(for 12 or more players)

One child stands on another child's shoulders & one child stands atop of him & another & another. When the clock is broken every child must stand still. When the air bag goes off the children look at each other & say *What happened? What happened?*

One child discovers a ladder that rises up to the top of the schoolhouse. All the children climb up the ladder at once. It is a mess of muddy footprints on all the children's shoulders & dirt on the little boys' faces.

On the roof the children line up in straight rows. They produce shiny cameras from their knapsacks & take pictures of the backs of the boys in front of them. The boys in front pretend to take pictures but imitate the shutter sounds with their mouths.

The dogs in the distance run across the fields, chasing the squirrels into the trees. It is a desperate situation, reaching the top. The buses are waiting, white smoke slugging from the exhaust pipes.

DEFEAT

(for 12 or more players)

In the basement of the schoolhouse the boiler room is locked. The broken statues of shiny marble are hidden behind the locks. The children know how to play kickball. They know how to cut paper dolls out of the yellowing newspapers.

The child with the most closed eyes must braid her hair with the strands of the spider plants. She must gather the other children around her & close their eyes & tape them shut with Xs of black electrical tape. She strings an invisible fishing wire from the spider plants to the jungle gym & the other children step carefully from the bushes to home base.

In the locked boiler room, among the marble statues, there are hundreds of empty children's shoes, waiting with their mouths wide open.

CEASE-FIRE

(for 3 or more players)

One child puts a knapsack over his head & another child pulls his T-shirt over his head & a third child wears a pillowcase as a mask. *You don't love me enough*, says the first child to the second. *My skin is burning* says the second to the third. The third child holds his hands together as if in prayer & they fuse together like wedding rings.

The three children stand still as the sun sets behind the jungle gym. None of the three can see one of the others. When one shuffles his feet the other two shuffle their feet. When one sneezes the other two sneeze in return. The trains in the distance weep for the night.

The cease-fire occurs in the silence of listening. The motifs of passing headlights claw through the branches. The three children stand erect all night. When the sun rises over the schoolhouse the children remove their masks & blink into the sun like shiny dimes.

One child is holding a Molotov cocktail that has been burning all night long. One child has been in the process of pulling a trigger for hours. The third child holds a mirror up to his own face & sticks his tongue out at his own arrival.

MASSACRE

(for 3 or more players)

This is a story that has not been effectively told before. How the body becomes the equivalent of a chair or a wire hanger. How the It-Child sees everyone else as Not-It. Sometimes it is told with a chainsaw. Sometimes with a tank.

But it begins in the blindfold. Each child holds a blindfold up to her own eyes & spins around three times. Spins around three times more. Spins around again. The instructions do not say how the child ties the blindfold to her own head. The kind of knot she uses. The way the blindfold comforts like a mother's hand wrapped around the face.