



Deathtrap

by Ira Levin



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Approx. running time:
2 hours and 30 minutes, including one fifteen-minute intermission.

Student Talk-Back:
There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



Thom Sesma as Sidney Bruhl and Devin Norik as Clifford Anderson in Deathtrap. Photo by Alex Weisman.

Written by Ira Levin | Directed by May Adrales

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What would you do for success?

One of the greatest mystery thrillers in our American canon, *Deathtrap* is superbly constructed, with impeccable, smart, cunning dialogue and an exhilarating action plot. It holds the record for Broadway's longest running comedy-thriller. But its meditation on the dark Machiavellian underbelly of the theater makes it a personal thrill for me to direct.

A taste of commercial and critical success in the theater is like a drug – euphoric, short-lived and always leaving you hungry for more. Every theater artist knows the thrill of success, and every theater artist knows the abysmal public humiliation of failure or “the flop.” Just because you write or direct one hit doesn't mean that it will ever (ever) happen (ever) again. And when critics at national publications deride your talent and nonchalantly discount your work (which takes usually three to five years to create), it can lead to sniveling despair, a tattered self-worth and ruthless Machiavellian ambition.

Ira Levin pokes fun at this all too real anxiety that theater artists feel with every artistic endeavor. Does the show even work? Will they like it? Will critics pee on it? Will it lead to more opportunity? Or will this be my last show, my last paycheck ever? And in this devilishly clever play, Levin makes you laugh pitilessly at this despair.

So go ahead – guffaw at how low we grovel to have another hit play! Marvel at how smart, talented adults resort to childish, impudent impossible behaviors! Laugh at our expense!

~ May Adrales, Director

Fasten Your Seatbelts: It's Going to Be a Bumpy Night

by Elizabeth Ferguson, Associate Dramaturg

What makes a good thriller? Is it the unexpected reversals? The high stakes? The conniving villain or the clever hero? The thriller is a genre that relies on a balance of pacing and suspense designed to keep us on the edge of our seats. Often mistaken for mystery, which typically involves solving a crime that has already occurred, the thriller discovers the mystery as it unfolds, sometimes even two steps ahead. The tension is derived from the story's dangerous possibilities. In a psychological thriller, the focus is on the inner psyche of the characters who play intricate mind-games and weave complex manipulations.

Ira Levin is one of the acknowledged masters of the thriller, writing his award-winning first novel, *A Kiss Before Dying*, in 1953 at the age of only twenty-two. The book was quickly made into a film starring Robert Wagner, Jeffrey Hunter, and Virginia Leith. In his fifty-year career as a playwright and novelist Levin wrote several hits, many of which were later turned into films, including the chilling *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Boys from Brazil*, and *The Stepford Wives*. Levin's biggest Broadway smash, *Deathtrap*, which won the Edgar Allen Poe Award for Best Play in 1980, ran for four years and was made into a film in 1982, starring Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve.

According to James N. Frey, author of *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller*, "a thriller is a story of a hero who has a mission to foil evil. Not just a hero—a clever hero. Not just a mission—an 'impossible' mission. An 'impossible' mission that will put our hero in terrible trouble." In *Deathtrap*, Levin gleefully toys with this notion—our clever hero is certainly in terrible trouble and has an impossible mission. But "evil" is in the eye of the beholder.

Metatheatre

by Heather Nowlin, Asst. Marketing Director

The word "meta" can mean many things: Marked by change or transformation; later in time or development; behind, beyond; transcending, above, upon, or about. From its Greek root, the prefix meta- means beside or after.

In storytelling, however, the definition is more narrow.

Take a look at a painting by American "pop" artist Roy Lichtenstein:



And now, a joke:

A rabbi, a priest, and an imam go into a bar and order a drink. "What is this," asks the bartender, "a joke?"

Consider: What does the word "this" refer to in each of these two examples? The answer to that question is, essentially, the definition of the "meta" in "metatheatre."

Bogged down by writer's block, playwright Sidney Bruhl looks for his next big idea. A student sends him a script that's titled *Deathtrap* and has the potential to be the next biggest hit in town. With that, Sidney begins to scheme, and work his way through the play we are watching—which is also, we are reminded, called *Deathtrap*. The plot points in the play become the plot points in the play... And we are soon watching metatheatre at its finest.

"Metatheatre is an attempt by certain plays to challenge theatre's claim that it is a mirror for reality. By calling attention to the strangeness, artificiality, illusoriness, or arbitrariness – in short, the theatricality – of the life we live, it marks those frames and boundaries that conventional dramatic realism would hide."

Source: <https://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl3270/327.meta.html>

Mortal Combat

by Heather Nowlin

Conflict in the theatre comes in many forms: character-to-character, inner, conflict with setting or with the universe in its vast scope. And sometimes that conflict culminates in physical turmoil – fighting between characters, hand-to-hand or sword-to-sword. When that happens, the fights that are repeated in each performance must be safe and controlled, and at the same time believable and grounded in the actor's craft.

And that's where the Fight Choreographer comes in.

Stage combat keeps actors safe and audiences entertained using the illusion of violence onstage. Stage fighting must look effective to an audience member, and be safely repeatable in rehearsals and in every performance. In fact, *Deathtrap* fight choreographer Christopher DuVal recently told us, "Prior to each performance, the actors gather to review every fight in the play. This is called 'fight



Fight choreographer Christopher DuVal helps Devin Norik (Clifford in *Deathtrap*) fall down some stairs, as Bryan Sommer stage manages.

call.' They proceed through each fight twice, once at half speed and once at full speed. In totaling all fight calls and performances, by the time the production closes, the actors will have safely strangled, shot, stabbed, fallen, or bludgeoned each other well over 200 times!"

DuVal returns to PTC on the heels of playing Don John in, and serving as fight choreographer for, *Much Ado About Nothing* – a very different show from *Deathtrap*. "Each production that I work on requires a different style and a different story that needs to be told," he said. "Collaborating with a director and actors to help them find a physical vocabulary within the violence that is safe for the actors, thrilling for the audience, and helps to further the story of the play is greatly satisfying." He describes fight choreography as a natural extension of acting. "Stage combat without a deeply specific acting investment becomes a series of empty tricks and illusions that bears little resemblance to the complicated nature of human conflict."

Deathtrap is classified as a thriller, even though there is also a lot of comedy woven into the story, and DuVal said that a psychologically thrilling experience for the audience is a priority with this project. "Without giving too much away, the violence in this production needs to have a very real feel. The nature of the illusion of violence that the characters are trying to simulate, coupled with the nature of the real violence that is perpetrated



Part of stage combat involves weaponry of all types. Pictured here are Thom Sesma with a crossbow, Gayton Scott with a broad axe, and Devin Norik in *Houdini's* handcuffs.

by the characters, has been a large part of our work."

The violence also has to do with the comedy in the piece, as strange as that may sound. "The combat helps to create a world of the play that is both disturbing and somehow shockingly amusing. The murder mystery potential of the serio-comic darkness of human nature is highlighted within the violence."

As an actor and fight director, DuVal's work has been seen for over 20 years at such theatres as South Coast Repertory, Shakespeare Orange County, Sacramento Theatre Company, Idaho Repertory Theatre, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Dallas Theatre Center, Syracuse Stage and thirteen seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where he worked on over 30 productions including *Othello*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Henry V*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry VI*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and many others. He is a Certified Teacher with the Society of American Fight Directors, a Senior Instructor with Dueling Arts International, and holds a 2nd degree black belt in Aikido, and an MFA in Acting.

LGBTQ in 1978

by Elizabeth Ferguson,
Associate Dramaturg

The Stonewall Riots, an important turning point for what we now refer to as the LGBTQ movement, occurred in the early morning hours on June 28, 1969. Outside of a gay club in Greenwich Village, NYC, called the Stonewall Inn, a riot broke out between patrons and police. While the police raided the club on grounds of liquor license violations, patrons took a stand against these city-sanctioned raids and the oppressive targeting of the gay community. At the time, homosexuality was considered a mental illness and it was illegal for a gay person to be served alcohol or to dance with another person of the same sex. During these raids, a man dressed in drag, or a woman who was not wearing at least three feminine articles of clothing, would be arrested. The raid that night did not go exactly as planned, however, and patrons began to rebel, throwing things, trying to turn over police wagons, and shouting, "Gay Power!" Joined by local sympathizers the crowd of demonstrators grew to about 600, leaving destruction in its wake. Thirteen people were arrested and many were injured among both demonstrators and the police force. News of the riot quickly spread. The next night the crowd returned with reinforcements in the thousands, and various demonstrations took place throughout the city and the nation for days afterwards (*Historic Stonewall Inn*).

The Stonewall aftermath had opened the proverbial "closet door" allowing for the "coming out" of many across the nation, including influential individuals such as San Francisco Supervisor and gay rights activist, Harvey Milk who, in 1977, became one of the first openly gay officials (*Harvey Milk Biography*). In June of 1978, Milk rode in San Francisco's Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade, where the symbolic Rainbow Flag made its first appearance (*History of the Rainbow Flag*). In November of the same year, disgruntled former City-County Board member Dan White murdered both Harvey Milk and San Francisco Mayor and Gay Rights supporter George Mascone, in their offices (*Harvey Milk Biography*). The Pride Parades we still see today are in commemoration of this tumultuous time in civil rights history (*Come Out with Joy, Speak Out for Justice*).



Harvey Milk at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. Photo by Terry Schmidt.



The Stonewall uprising in 1978. Photo courtesy thestonewallinnnyc.com



The Stonewall Inn today. Photo courtesy of nyclovesnyc.blogspot.com

Sources

Come Out with Joy, Speak Out for Justice. SF Pride. San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration Committee, n.d.

Schmitt, Terry. *Harvey Milk at SF Gay Freedom Day Parade*. 1978. Photograph. SF-Gate, San Francisco.

Harvey Milk Biography. Biography. A&E Television Networks.

History. The Historic Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall Inn, NYC.

History of the Rainbow Flag. Gay Pride New Orleans. Gay Pride New Orleans, 11 Jan 2013.

Glossary

by Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell



The Amazing Kreskin with Johnny Carson on The Tonight Show.

The Amazing Kreskin (b. 1935) is a “mentalist” who had television shows during the 1970s called *The Amazing World of Kreskin* and *The New Kreskin Show*. During his act, he finds objects that are hidden in the theatre (like his paycheck) and makes predictions.

Angel Street A 1938 play by British playwright Patrick Hamilton. It’s the story of the Manninghams who live on Angel Street in 19th-century London. As the curtain rises, all appears the essence of Victorian tranquility. It is soon apparent however, that Mr. Manningham is slowly driving his gentle, devoted wife Bella to the brink of insanity. A Scotland Yard visitor convinces Bella that her husband is a homicidal maniac wanted for a murder committed fifteen years earlier in their house. The victim of the earlier murder, Alice Barlow, is believed to have been hiding jewels in her apartment.

David Merrick (1911-2000) was one of the American theater’s most prolific and successful producers. Credits include *A Taste of Honey* (1960), *Becket* (1960), *Hello, Dolly!* (1964), *Oh What a Lovely War!* (1964), *Cactus Flower* (1965), *Marat/Sade* (1965), and *Play It Again, Sam* (1969). In his obituary, *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich wrote, “Merrick didn’t mind if people hated him as he battled his way to the top.”

George S. Kaufman (1889 – 1961) was a successful American playwright who typically collaborated with other writers, including Moss Hart, Edna Ferber, and Marc Connelly (he only wrote one play alone). Among his many successes were *Of Thee I Sing*, *Dinner at Eight*, *Once in a Lifetime*, *You Can’t Take It With You*, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

Harold “Hal” Prince (b. 1928) is an American theatrical producer and director who has been seen as one of the most creative and innovative figures working on Broadway. He has won the Tony Award for directing seven times (*Cabaret*, *Company*, *Follies*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Evita*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and for the Broadway revival of *Show Boat*).



The Merv Griffin Show was a talkshow hosted by Merv Griffin (1925-2007) that ran in syndication for about 25 years from 1962 to 1963 and then 1965 to 1986. He preferred to interview guests for about 30 minutes, rather than the 5 to 6 minutes that is and was typical of most talkshows. Over the years, Griffin interviewed about 25,000 guests from diverse backgrounds—from entertainment to science.

Rodgers and Heartless This is a pun on the names of the American musical comedy writing duo “Rodgers and Hart.” Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) and Lorenz Hart (1895-1960) penned many shows for Broadway and the West End between 1920 and 1943, when Hart died of pneumonia. Richard Rodgers went on to collaborate with Oscar Hammerstein II on many successful musicals including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *South Pacific*, until Hammerstein’s death in 1960. Rodgers kept working right up until his death in 1979, eight months after his 40th musical, *I Remember Mama*, opened on Broadway.

Theater vérité This is a play on the 1960s French film movement called “cinéma vérité” (literally “truth cinema”). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, it “showed people in everyday situations with authentic dialogue and naturalness of action. ”

Peripeteia n. a sudden or unexpected reversal of circumstances or situation especially in a literary work.



OUR EQUITY CAST

MAY ADRALES (Director) NYC-based guest director May has helmed several world premieres including JC Lee's *Luce* (LCT3); Katori Hall's *Whaddabloodclot!!!* (Williamstown Theater Festival); the musical *In This House* (Two River Theater Company); A. Rey Pamatmat's *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them* (Actors Theatre of Louisville); Thomas Bradshaw's *Mary* (The Goodman Theatre); Tommy Smith's *The Wife* (Access Theater) and *The Bereaved* (Partial Comfort Productions). She has directed and taught at Juilliard, ART, ACT, Fordham University, NYU and Bard College, and is currently on faculty at the Yale School of Drama.

CRAIG BOCKHORN (Porter Milgrim) Broadway: *On Golden Pond* (also the Kennedy Center and National Tour), *The Lonesome West* and *Prelude to a Kiss*. Also in New York Mr. Bockhorn has appeared in: *King Lear*, *The Seagull*, *Kit Marlowe* (Public Theatre), *The Hope Zone*, *The Truth-Teller*, (Circle Rep.) Film and television credits include: *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Michael J. Fox Show*, all the *Law & Orders*, *Ed*, *The Big Year*, *TransAmerica* and *As the World Turns*. PTC: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Julius Caesar*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Our Town*, both productions of *Laughing Stock*, and many others.



Craig Bockhorn

KYMBERLY MELLEN (Helga Ten Dorp) Local performance credits include Utah Shakespeare Festival (*Les Misérables*, *Hamlet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Macbeth*). Regional: Writers' Theatre, Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre, Court Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Northlight Theatre and Milwaukee Rep. Film: *The Unborn*, *Pretty Darn Funny*, *Colorless Green* and *Joseph: Prophet of the Restoration*. PTC: *Emma* and *Laughing Stock*.

DEVIN NORIK (Clifford Anderson) Off-Broadway: *Unnatural Acts* (Classic Stage Company; Rosemarie Tichler Award) and *Unplugged In* (Theatre Row). Regional: *Loot* (Westport Country Playhouse), *A Most Dangerous Woman*, *Lion in Winter* (Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey); *Two Gentleman of Verona*, and *A Christmas Carol* (Geva Theatre). Film: *The Professor* starring Betsy Brandt, *The Trouble with Cali* directed by Paul Sorvino, *The Lipstick Stain*, *Surviving Family* and *Roger, the Chicken*. Television: *I Just Want My Pants Back* (MTV). MFA: New York University Graduate Acting Program.



KyMBERly Mellen

GAYTON SCOTT (Myra Bruhl) Broadway: *Gypsy* w/Bernadette Peters, dir. Sam Mendes; *The Women* w/Cynthia Nixon, *Present Laughter* w/Frank Langella. Off-Broadway: *Bunty Berman Presents . . .* and *Abigail's Party* by Mike Leigh; *Indiscretions* at the Phoenix Theatre; *White Chocolate* at The Culture Project. Other New York: Theatre Lab, WET, Packawallop (at the Fringe), Here, Lincoln Center Directors Lab, Prospect Theater among others. Many regional theatres. Film/TV: *P.S. I Love You*, *Forbidden Love*, *Law & Order: CI*, *Guiding Light*, *As the World Turns* and *Great Performances* on PBS. PTC debut.



Gayton Scott

THOM SESMA (Sidney Bruhl) Broadway and on tour: *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, *The Lion King*, *Search and Destroy*, *Titanic*, *Chu Chem*. Off-Broadway: NSYF/Public Theatre, the Roundabout, Second Stage, The Drama Department, The Mint, NAATCO, Epic Theatre and Playwrights Horizon. Some TV/film: *The Good Wife*, *Single Ladies*, *Third Watch*, *Law & Order*, *Canterbury's Law*, *Over/Under*, *Lay the Favorite*, *Building Girl*, and getting shot point-blank in the head in *Person of Interest*. He is currently nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for the role of The Engineer in *Miss Saigon* at the Signature Theatre in DC.



Devin Norik



Thom Sesma