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STEVEN STANLEY'S STAGESCENELA.COM: SPOTLIGHTING THE BEST IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA THEATER

THE KILL-OR-DIES

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WOW!

Ovation Award-winning playwright Meghan Brown is back with the intriguingly titled *The Kill-Or-Dies*, a darkly comedic edge-of-your-seat thriller that will keep you guessing from its first surprise twist all the way up to its gratifyingly unpredictable finish.



Bold and brassy Maggie (Megan Kathleen Duffy) and meek and mild Chelsea (Karina Wolfe) are 20somethings who've been each other's best friend and support system since their troubled teen years.

With Chelsea's grandmother recently deceased and only a week to go before the electricity gets turned off and relatives arrive to sell off the small-town Kansas house that grandma and granddaughter have called home, Megan's visit (and the promise of \$15,000 easy cash) could prove a lifesaver, that is if Chelsea weren't being asked to do something that could get her into a whole heap of trouble.

Still, what could be simpler for Chelsea than to take the black duffel bag Megan has brought along with her, head on down the road to the neighborhood bar, and quickly, unobtrusively exchange bags with a man who'll be there waiting, then head quickly back to Granny's with \$500,000 hidden inside duffel number two?

It takes all of the fifteen minutes they've got remaining before the scheduled exchange for Megan to persuade Chelsea that no, this won't backfire like the pranks they used to play on classmate Sheri (who ended up killing herself), and once it's revealed that Chelsea has a very good reason for needing at the very least the fifteen grand being promised her, she eventually agrees to go make the switch.



The discovery Megan and Chelsea make once the lookalike duffel is in their possession soon has Megan's drug-dealer boyfriend Billy (Daniel Dorr) and his thug companion Lawrence (Rob Nagle) barging in none too happy about what's transpired.

Without giving too much away, suffice it to say that the male duo are under orders to bring back a body, though as to whose corpse that will be, well for that you'll have to head on over to the McCadden Place Theater for *The Kill-Or-Die's* brief but welcome January extension.



I defy anybody to predict the plot twists playwright Brown has up her sleeve, and how often can you say that about a mystery thriller?

Add to that a script about which it can be said that the darker it turns, the funnier it gets, and you've got a suspenseful treat that could easily become a regional, college, and community theater favorite (and would make a terrific Sundance-style indie feature as well).

It helps enormously to have ace director Darin Anthony on board to ensure swift pacing, precise timing, and razor-sharp performances from an all-around terrific cast.

Red-headed stunner Duffy carries on the Lana Turner-Barbara Stanwyck film-noir femme-fatale tradition (but with a contemporary edge) opposite a particularly impressive Wolfe, who makes mousy electrifying in one of the most watchable performances you'll see any time soon.

The same can be said about the lean-and-hungry sex-appeal-blessed Dorr, who gives Billy the quicksilver volatility of a young Jack Nicholson, and is backed by the always impressive Nagle, adding professional hit man to his lengthy list of credits and investing the role with unexpected depths.



Scenic designer Jeanine A.

Ringer has taken the fortuitously staircase-equipped McCadden Place Theater and transformed it into an upstairs-downstairs "old lady" house filled with properties designer Susan K. Coulter's hummingbird-related tchotchkes galore. Christine Cover Ferro's character-perfect costumes, Luke Moyer's vivid lighting, and Dave Mickey's suspense-building sound design are top-grade as well, with special snaps to Kevin Moran's dynamic fight direction and John Burton's fight-related special effects.

The Kill-Or-Dies is presented by Electric Footlights in association with Moving Arts. Lisa Brenner is executive producer and Coulter is producer. Meg Elgaard is stage manager. Aaron Lyons is technical director.

With its return engagement conveniently timed to arrive just before most L.A. theaters begin their January-February offerings, Meghan Brown's *The Kill-Or-Dies* is a bona fide audience-pleaser guaranteed to start your 2016 off with a bang.

McCadden Place Theatre, 1157 N. McCadden Place, Hollywood. Through January 17.

Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 3:00.

<http://movingarts.org/the-kill-or-dies/>

—Steven Stanley

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