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Culture Monster

Review: 'Land of the Tigers' at Sacred Fools Theatre

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What if tigers suddenly began walking on their hind legs, started speaking English and formed a democratic society? Small-minded realists might demand an explanation for such a premise, but the contrarian Burglars of Hamm blithely take it as a given from the outset in "Land of the Tigers" at [Sacred Fools Theatre](#).

Subversively inventive and consistently entertaining, the troupe's latest collaborative creation is really two anti-plays in one, each balancing camp and artistry in Matt Almos' deft staging. The first, a hilariously ridiculous and pretentious allegorical drama built on the aforementioned conceit, presents a skillful parody of the kind of theatrical productions that result from the over-earnest pursuit of a conceptual misstep.

In this narrative love child of "Planet of the Apes" and "The Crucible," the heroic Sabertooth (Hugo Armstrong) finds himself torn between duty to his strictly regulated tiger society and his forbidden love for fertile feline Sheba (Devin Sidell). Forced to choose between "a civilized lie and a savage truth," Sabertooth's journey encompasses a full range of topical platitudes, including heavy-handed warnings about the perils of ignoring climate change and invoking terrorist hysteria.

Sporting "Cats"-like makeup and parading in tricornered hats, powdered wigs and frock coats, the performers wittily evoke this alternate universe with single-minded determination. Even when the material occasionally grows thin and repetitive, they deliver the most inane lines with Shakespearean gravitas. (Tim

Los Angeles Times

Sheridan's dastardly villain and Shelly Kurtz's bumbling professor are supporting standouts in this regard.)

The second act, an equally skillful parody of the creative process, travels back in time to trace the origins of the play we've just witnessed. The hilariously ridiculous and pretentious actors who portray the tigers discover their characters -- and some unwelcome truths about themselves -- under the tyranny of an egomaniacal director (pitch-perfect Dean Gregory). As their endless confessional workshop exercises increasingly exasperate the play's would-be author (Cody Henderson), the Burglars weave some unexpectedly poignant insights into the backstage dramas that drive even the most misguided efforts.

-- Philip Brandes