

## Who Watches the Watchmen?

by Mitch Montgomery

Save the World reviewed January 26, 2008

It takes someone with an intermediate knowledge of the past twenty years of comics to fully appreciate Roundtable Ensemble's production of Chris Kipiniak's superhero drama *Save the World*. In the interest of full disclosure, my day job is in the licensing department of one of the "Big Two" comic book publishers; so I was more than up to the task.

A psycho-political thriller, *Save the World* follows a U.N. sanctioned superhero team, the Protectorate. When half a dozen natural disasters bombard the Earth simultaneously, the Protectorate suspects that they might be connected. Just days away from installing a U.N. authorized third party government in Jerusalem; the team's members find their heroic principles fraying under the pressure. The play's seemingly innocent title actually reveals its bleak ideology: "How far are you willing to go to save the world?"

Superhero antics are not naturally suited for live theatre, so director and developer Michael Barakiva scores points for his success. Wisely, the super powers on display all function based on other characters' reactions to them, like Stagger's ability to slow down time or Quake's invisible seismic blasts. The play's few action scenes are impeccably staged, and there is a pervading sense of dynamism in the way Barakiva got the script on its feet.

The scenic, lighting and sound designs support Barakiva's zippy staging. Shoko Kambara's set design aptly recalls the "Hall



of Justice" from the Challenge of the Super Friends cartoon. Scaffoldings upstage and on both sides allow the cast to depict different locations with ease. Shane Rettig and Nick Francone, as the sound designer and lighting designer respectively, work hard to make up for the lack of visible super powers. Umbra's shadow powers, for instance, get their own mysterious look and sound. It's all very convincing.

Thanks to Oana Botez-Ban's sharp, but restrained costume design, each character's super-duds ably classify their powers and personality; an obvious stand out being Stagger's spectacular red/orange business suit. The black sash that Legend adds to his costume to honor a fallen comrade is a particularly endearing touch.

Outer trappings aside, all the cast members render their characters with great humanity. There aren't really "good guys" and "bad guys." These are morally conflicted people trying to do good or trying to live up to their potential, but failing in a big way. Christine Corpuz, who plays the uncertain Quake, brings this struggle to life very well. Again, the dapper Stephen Bel Davies as Stagger, the team's English strategist, added just the right kind of zing to the proceedings; Davies hides his character's comprised moral compass splendidly.

Kipiniak has certainly crafted a mature story, opting for cerebral "Biffs!" "Bams!" and "Zowies!" over the traditional kind. This production isn't really appropriate for kids, which both helps and hinders. My only fear is that people who don't share my enthusiasm about superheroes are going to feel put off by all the intensely serious melodrama. Not me— what interested me in seeing this super heroic tragedy on stage was its unexpected resonance with Greek and Shakespearean tragedies. Like those plays from antiquity, *Save the World* persuasively examines the quest for power and its dire consequences.