



Reviewed by Jose Ruiz

BUG

The Coast Playhouse

The United States government is experimenting with a new type of "germ warfare" in the hopes of finding some way to win in Iraq. Without their knowledge, some soldiers have had millions of microscopic larvae inserted into their bodies and then closely monitored in hopes that the government will learn how to control the larvae reaction. They failed. Now the consequences are about to create a danger to the U.S. population that could be much worse than any nuclear threat.

A seedy motel room in Oklahoma is the least likely place where this government experiment would play out, and two women who are solid members of the "grotesque populace" end up in the middle of the struggle of minds, hearts and bodies.

No one creates characters better than author Tracy Letts, whose not too-distant *Killer Joe* created a sensation and now, with *BUG*, we could be in the midst of a much welcome Letts infestation of talent again. The Lost Angels Theatre Company combines science fiction with political intrigue resulting in a spine tingling, heart thumping thriller worthy of the best of them.

The characters in *Bug* include Agnes, who is staying at the motel hoping to evade her imprisoned ex-husband, an abusing, big mouth – small brain type of a man who would rather settle things with a punch rather than a word. Agnes' friend, R. C. works as a bar maid and brings a young man to the motel to meet Agnes. Peter Evans is a strange guy. He's very secretive – very smart and naive in a charming way so that Agnes allows him to stay with her (sleeping

on the floor) until he gets organized. This soon escalates to a more physical and intimate situation – just as ex-husband Jerry Goss finds Agnes and barges in hoping to pick up where they left off. Agnes throws Jerry out, but he vows he'll return – no doubt to settle things with Peter.

Then it happens. As Peter and Agnes are making love, he feels a sharp sting on his body. Soon there are dozens of flea-like bites, and they discover a tiny insect embedded just under his skin. She also feels some stings, and as they search the bed, they discover thousands of the almost imperceptible insects.

They fill the room with roach repellent – Peter finds a microscope and tries to figure out what these things are and where they came from. They have no success. Little do they realize that events from long ago play into their current situation. Agnes' six year old son had disappeared a few years back and was never found. R. C. and her female lover were trying to adopt a child, and Jerry was released from jail earlier than expected.

Some explanations become clear when Dr. Sweet finds them. He's a government agent – the man who first "worked" on Peter and he promises that if Peter returns from being AWOL he will fix everything – including returning Agnes son! R. C. and her lover suddenly get permission to adopt – and how did Jerry find Agnes so soon?

The characterizations are brilliant as directed by Scott Cummings. Amy Landecker is great as the confused Agnes – hoping and wishing for a change in her life but desperately disappointed at having gone from one bad situation into a seemingly impossible one.

Andrew Elvis Miller is exceptionally good, bringing a deceptive naivety to the role. Sometimes you sympathize with him – at other times you think he's delusional and paranoid and you don't quite know if you should cheer or hiss at his actions.

Laura Niemi, who was so exceptional in Killer Joe, brings a similar persona to the character of R. C. but unfortunately does not have enough of a role here to fully enjoy the character. What little we see of her is quite good, as usual.

Rob Nagle's unbelievable fight sequences with Peter are among the most shocking and realistic ever seen, and while we know he's the antagonist, we almost side with him as Peter takes out his frustration and revenge on him in a bloody, gory, life ending fight.

What makes this story chilling is the possibility that this could have happened – or maybe is happening now. The government has indulged in so many illicit practices against its citizens under the guise of protection, that a story like this is entire plausible. As presented by the excellent company, Bug becomes a frightening look at a future that could be here without us knowing it. You won't ever feel safe after seeing this. How do you know that the termites in your house are not carrying micro sensors to record your moves and conversation? Do you really trust your cat when he/she jumps on your lap or rubs your leg?

Bug will play through Sunday June 3, 2007 at the Coast Playhouse, 8325 Santa Monica Blvd. West Hollywood, CA. Reservations at 866-811-4111.