

## **Writtle CARDS - In For The Kill**

Writtle C.A.R.D.S. – In For The Kill, 21st February, 2009

Director – Michele Moody

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins

In For The Kill was a tense five handed thriller which was not just a “whodunit” but a “whoshouldhavebeendun” since we were guessing until the end whether the victim was a hapless bystander or the intended target. In fact most of the second act was devoted to the exploration of the motives that each of the protagonists may have had for killing the actual victim as well each other. Weaved into the main plot were a couple of subplots but it was not clear until towards the very end of the play which of the plots would win out. This made for gripping theatre right until the very end. The fixed set, used throughout the play, was good. White painted flats with hung pictures represented a living room. Doors stage left and at the back were entrances to the front of the house and the rest of the house but the french doors stage right represented the entrance to the garden, which was clearly visible since it included garden fence and climbing plants seen through the doors. Appropriate lighting made the garden effect very realistic. A sofa and armchairs, a sideboard and drinks trolley completed the effect of the living room. The tension began almost immediately when Frank, played by Nick Caton, entered the room uninvited. Paula, played by Sarah Wilson, was dressed only in a dressing gown and was preparing for a night out with someone who was not her husband. Frank, intense, quiet and purposeful, seemed to stalk Paula around the room. Should Paula have been more fearful of this man who claimed to be a friend of her husband? As the dialogue unfolded it became clear that Paula was not unused to men and was cheating on her husband; indeed was a serial adulteress. This was a curious turn of events since audience loyalties were shifting despite the obvious disdain for Frank. The appearance of Mark, the boyfriend, almost confirmed our view that a conventional whodunit was likely to unfold. Mark, played by Neil Smith, was a transparent fellow, in love with Paula despite being a friend and employee of Paula’s husband, James. James, played by Lee Barnes, came across as extremely likeable, warm and trusting. This characteristic worked well for this play since it kept the audience off guard throughout. The final character was James’ daughter Susan, played by Laura Bennett. When her first appearance revealed that she had overheard Mark’s protestations of love for Paula we assume that Susan’s own plotting on behalf of her father begins. And so the characters are introduced and the real machinations begin when Mark dies when driving James’ car, the brake pipes of which had been deliberately cut. Who was the murderer and was Mark the intended victim? This is when the subplots kick in, especially the revelation that Frank’s daughter had been killed in a car accident involving James. Did Frank want to get even by killing James but got the wrong man? Did Paula want to rid herself of a tiresome lover or did she want to kill her husband to make way for the lover? Did Susan want to kill her father’s rival? Or did James kill Mark out of jealousy? Only at the very end were the answers to these questions revealed, we discover we had never asked the right question and the audience was gripped throughout. Frank’s cool, bordering on intimidating, approach to Paula, punctuated by occasional bursts of anger and emotion were impressive. The contrast with Paula’s growing desperation that her world was being turned upside down was strong. James’ insistence on long walks and inability to find Paula’s car keys were perhaps a giveaway but at the time there had been no crime. This was a cleverly crafted thriller given full justice by the cast and its director. Congratulations to all.