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'Deal' is a Provocative Sting

By Terry Fisher

Matthew Witten's *The Deal* is a provocative play about the intricacies of an F.B.I. sting operation, the wily ways of politics, and the fine line between friend and enemy that conscience produces. Here one of the perpetrators of the sting is himself "stung" by his contribution to the downfall of a two-bit politician who has entrapped himself through his greed. The performance at the Back Alley Theatre is a winner.

Two F.B.I. undercover agents, Alex (Will Nye) and Peter (John M. Jackson), are on assignment in the small town of Burnie, PA; the target is Jimmy (Michael Cavanaugh), a ward boss with greasy palms who specializes in construction jobs. Of course Jimmy is only small potatoes, a way for the agents to get to the "big

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fish," State Senator Tommy O'Hara (Charles Siebert). How the four "players" — two cops and two thugs — enmesh each other proves once again if you lie down with dogs, you get fleas.

Witten is a promising playwright who makes the motivation of his characters who might have been somewhat sympathetic. Director Allan Miller's staging is precise and characters who might have been stereotypes do come alive. The two-level set (by John Ivo Gilles) with its sterile slate-grey panels define the set of power. Nancy Evans did the costumes.

On Thursday evenings, there is a post-performance TalkBack discussion with experts in related fields. ■

The Deal, Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys, (818) 780-2240. Plays Thurs.-Fri., 8 p.m., Sat. 7:30 p.m.; and Sun., 3 and 7:30 p.m., through Oct. 29. The theater is wheelchair accessible.