

ticketholders

weaving an intricate web of trust and deceit in a fictionalized F.B.I. sting operation aimed at catching a local politician in the act.

Playwright Matthew Witten has created a fascinating look into the ethics of greed and entrapment that begins to make the government pursuers look equally as slimy as their prey.

John M. Jackson is perfect as Peter, the F.B.I. agent whose meetings with smalltime politician Jimmy (Michael Cavanaugh) are being fed back to his boss via secret tapes. The trou-

ble begins for the man as he starts to feel sorry for his target ("You're the first one I've ever cared about," he explains later), then realizes the man himself was previously an honest guy set up by his own boss (Will Nye) in order to insure the conviction of a *really* crooked politician (Charles Siebert).

The work of these four splendid actors makes Witten's piece move along like turning the pages of a LeCarre novel. Cavanaugh plays a Jimmy ridiculously dumb but yet so lovable that if you initially wonder how such a guy was ever elected, you later might even see yourself vote for him. Nye's hardnosed F.B.I. boss, willing to do anything to score points, has an interesting human side, a vulnerability which is all his own. Siebert is so oily that even his treachery brings a smile to our faces as we learn to hate the guy. And Jackson lets us in on the grief and frustration of a man questioning the ethics of his

"The Deal", at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, is fine and absorbing drama,



POLITICAL PUZZLE -- John M. Jackson and Michael Cavanaugh in the Back Alley Theatre's production of Matthew Witten's 'The Deal.'

Photo by Ed Krieger

strange job investigating ethics. All four are marvelous to watch.

"The Deal" is tautly directed by Allan Miller, with scenes moving from one office to another only through the use of lights, with investigators listening to the tapes on one side, interrupting the original scene as its being played on the other. John Ivo Gilles has created a unique space to aid this interesting dramatic device of timeless-

ness, and Lawrence Oberman's lighting design accentuates the precision staging with ease.

This is slick, fascinating theatre, bringing us compelling relationships, intelligent dialogue, and expert direction and performances.

"The Deal" plays through October 29th at the Back Alley, 15231 Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys. For tickets, call (818) 780-2240.