

In 1978, Ira Levin shared some of his views on *Deathtrap*, and thrillers in general, with the *New York THEATRE Review*. Below are some excerpted comments.



I was always interested in thrillers. There were the almost-standard mystery authors who impressed me — Agatha Christie, Ellery Queen — and I went through a big John Dixon Carr period when I was fifteen or sixteen. The works I remember specifically are plays — ANGEL STREET, which I saw at a tender age, TEN LITTLE INDIANS. DIAL ‘M’ FOR MURDER. They always seemed to me the most exciting, theatrical plays.

I’ve read and analyzed all the great thrillers, and have thought a lot about thriller construction. The starting point — for me, anyway — is always to find a good strong villain. Sometimes I don’t like to think of it in that old-fashioned a term, but that’s what he is — the negative force, the character that the audience wants ultimately to see caught and punished. I think finding the villain is half the battle.

Then, naturally, you have to have someone opposing the villain. It’s really almost like setting up a good prizefight. You want two kinds of equal contenders so that the decision, the result isn’t going to be evident at the outset — so that it’s going to be a close fight.

[*Deathtrap*] really started with the situation that’s presented in the opening scene: suppose a playwright who hasn’t had a success in a long time receives in the mail from one of his students this obviously commercial and successful play. Where does he go from there? I got the idea five or six years ago and just played it from different angles.

I don’t think you can get by anymore with just a straight villain-victim-detective story because we can see that on “Columbo,” and even there it has a style and flair and little something extra. So I do think one does have to find an angle of approach that can lead to some other level beyond the immediate melodramatic one.

Actually, the problem is that those old melodrama values are still the ones that work in the theatre, but we've become a little self-conscious about them so we have to deck them out with a little humor or whatever.

I'd like people to leave DEATHTRAP feeling that they've had some thrills and some laughs and been well entertained.

