

AMERICAN WAY

By Les Spindle

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Jeremy Gable's loopy new play is driven by an ingenious metaphoric concept. Competitive superheroes step right out of the comic-book pages to deal with such issues as wavering public support, deception among their ranks, and threats from invisible enemies. Gable's dark comedy /fantasy skewers U.S. political issues with

up-to-the-minute relevance while taking a frighteningly resonant look at the volatile state of international relations. Director Darin Anthony splendidly stages this timely parable, largely compensating for Gable's somewhat schizophrenic tone.

For much of its running time, this 80-minute piece has the feel of an elongated comedy sketch. The adept cast elicits laughs aplenty, as the broadly etched characters exchange clever barbs and dicey double entendres, pointing out their sundry foibles. There's the recently retired Crescent Wonder (wryly amusing Bill Dempsey), who derives his powers from his birthplace, the moon, though no one knows exactly what those powers are. Firebang (a hilarious J. Richey Nash) is a narcissistic lug in skin-tight shorts who shoots fireballs from his hands and collects sexual favors for his heroic deeds. Mandible Maiden (delightfully droll Johanna McKay), kindred spirit to Wonder Woman, catches projectiles with her teeth and spits out acid, handling such daily chores as breaking up riots in women's prisons. The apprentice superhero, Pungent Humboldt (splendidly played by Mark L. Young), is nipping at the heels of these aging prima donnas with his superhuman power: ice-cold breath, a mutant effect caused by his exposure to chemical waste.