

AMERICAN THEATRE

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Not many plays have been structured after the human genome, but that hasn't stopped Len Jenkin from trying. His newest play, *Port Twilight or A History of Science (A Chronicle of Folly, Wisdom and Madness)*—running Nov. 7–Dec. 5 at **Undermain Theatre**—is a sci-fi thriller that weaves together seemingly disparate plotlines and an unlikely raft of song-and-dance numbers.

"Twilight is the moment of day with the greatest visibility," ventures director Katherine Owens, who has helmed Jenkin's work in the past. "Len's pieces have a sense of voyage. You get the feeling that you are driving through small towns when the lights are just coming on in houses, and you catch these little vignettes of people and their lives as you drive by."

Twilight's protagonist is Daniel Milton, a Johnnie Walker–swigging scientist who grows disillusioned when he discovers he's been inadvertently making poisons for the government. He meets a troubled student, and together they wind up on the set of a futuristic B-movie. But just what *is* the future? Some characters envision a stark

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prospect of "horrific overpopulation, viral plagues, earthquakes, tsunamis, casual genocide, religious crusades, race wars, general fucking chaos," while others have a slightly more optimistic view: "The computers get to where they are no longer designed by idiots." Meanwhile, a homeless rabbi contends with a false prophet and monitors take turns talking to each other. *Twilight* is neither *Frankenstein* nor *Back to the Future*, the playwright contends, but rather a poetic portrayal of humanity with a touch of dark humor. "'Enjoy Yourself' is a carpe diem song the scientists sing as the bomb goes off," says Jenkins, who describes the show's dance sequences as "energetic surprises."

Twilight's characters manage to fall in love while doubting what science can and cannot achieve. As reluctant film star Kimmie Schott says gloomily to her producer/director boyfriend Marty, "Shadows we are, and like shadows we depart. This life has no meaning but what we poor creatures give it." Then she adds hopefully, "Write a good one, baby. Put in a joke or two. Let 'em laugh in the dark, and let the boy get the girl." —*Eliza Bent*