

# Review: Bull

Job wars

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*Diana Bentley feels Damon Runyan's abs in Bull, a brutal send-up of office politics.*

In the basement of an east-end pizzeria, the small stage is surrounded by a cage. It looks like the set-up for some illegal fight club, but inside are all the trappings of modern cubicle culture: files, office chairs, a water cooler. What follows is a savage fight to the death, a physical and psychological grudge match between three sales employees who know one of them will be let go. Think David Mamet vs David Brent.

Written by UK playwright **Mike Bartlett** in 2013 (and getting its Toronto premiere), **Bull** packs all the punch you'd expect from a show named after a strong, aggressive animal with a history of being tormented and killed for fun. In this human equivalent of bull-baiting, attractive and relatively successful employees Isobel (**Diana Bentley**) and Tony (**Damon Runyan**) gang up on sad sack Thomas (**Ryan Rogerson**) to try to get him fired. From gaslighting to belittling, their bullying tactics drive Thomas to his wit's end. Then their hard-ass boss (**Mark Caven**) - think Alec Baldwin's character from *Glengarry Glen Ross* - shows up to decide who keeps their job.

It's difficult to watch - the constant berating and humiliation are only occasionally broken up by cringe-inducing humour - but that's the point. Bartlett's critique of capitalism's supposed meritocracy stems from the revulsion all must feel at the blatant unfairness and cruelty on display. Thomas's tormentors use the language of Darwin and Spencer ("survival of the fittest") to justify what they see as a cull of the weak, but the unspoken collusion between Tony and Isobel more resembles the old structure of unassailable nobility, rather than the loose-dog capitalism that influenced Darwin's competition-based view of nature.

Under director **David Ferry**, the cast is strong, though the British accents could be tightened. Rogerson stands out as the complicated victim. Thomas certainly doesn't deserve the abuse he receives, but he doesn't come off as the ideal co-worker either.

Clocking in at just under one hour, Bull is a bleak blast that leaves you with a heavy head of depressing but important thoughts about the brutal side of office life.