



April 8-14, 2010

## Bellona, Destroyer of Cities



**The Kitchen** (see Off-Off Broadway).  
By Samuel Delany. Adapted and  
directed by Jay Scheib. With  
ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins.  
No intermission.

There are several beginnings to Jay Scheib's adaptation of Samuel Delany's 1974 cult-hit *Dhalgren*—appropriately enough, since the novel itself makes a structural fetish of beginnings. Scheib's unnerving *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities* starts with the cast—seen on a giant projection screen—bouncing noisily through an orgy. The room catches fire. Then an astronaut (Tanya Selvaratnam) wanders through the show's blackened brick arcades, stepping lightly in the smoke like she's visiting the moon. We've just met the triple godhead of postapocalyptic Bellona: Debauchery, Destruction and Displacement.

In this American wasteland, deities rule, but rules collapse. Nature, gender and morality all slip their bonds in Delany's transgressive epic, which watches as a cocky, sexually voracious naïf (Sarita Choudhury) explores a gutted city, populated by homicidal gangs and violent poets. Luckily, Scheib (who went sci-fi with 2008's *Untitled Mars* as well) has his own immutable laws to ground us: his customarily elegant use of live video,



**OFF THE WALL**  
Hammond, left,  
reveals a stash of  
pornographic posters.

a grimy aesthetic indebted to Cassavetes, and a sprung-rhythm acting style—embodied by the disquieting Caleb Hammond, the only actor to ever physically frighten me from the stage.

There is one nagging concern: In order to mirror the brutality of Delany's pornographic excess, Scheib unleashes dancers Natalie Thomas and Jon Morris, and here the piece paradoxically loses momentum. Even in the strongest sections, audiences must stay alert, since it requires a conscious effort to adjust to Scheib's anticathartic style. But rest assured, all that labor is a passport to a thoroughly convincing alternate world—one that seems to weirdly overlay our vision even as we stumble outside onto the suddenly unfamiliar concrete of far-west 19th Street.—*Helen Shaw*