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## Every Coin at Soho Theatre

11 May, 2011 by: [Naima Khan](#)

Power games, ego and violence collide under the guise of religion in the first part of the Synergy Theatre series at Soho Theatre.



Penned by incarcerated writer Carlon Campbell Robinson, [Every Coin](#) manages to depict the few fickle rules of logic that exist in a generally anarchic prison system. Through his lead character Mark, Robinson charts one man's methods of coping with his demons and protecting himself in a volatile environment. Mark finds comfort in a friend from his past, a mysterious man in solitary confinement, a prison officer-cum-councillor, and, finally, religion. It's a lot to present an audience with in just two hours of theatre, and, although the show is packed with strong scenes and some flawless performances, the writer's best points are cluttered by a surfeit of themes.

Nonetheless, it provides an interesting look at the power games, ego and violence that often comes with a belief in one narrow version of the truth. A version of orthodox Islam is thrust upon Mark by his fellow prisoners as they pressure him to choose a side: Islam or its enemies. One of the most striking characters in the play is Ikrimah, the head of the small but powerful Muslim population in prison. Robinson's superb writing shines in Ikrimah's speeches as he exudes a bravado which stirs up the men and earns him respect despite the sensationalist content of his sermons.

The psychotic Ikrimah is but one figure in a cast of many superbly formulated characters. He introduces us to hilarious would-be gangsters, sheepish racists, an endearing but inexperienced prison officer and, crucially, Mark's family. His confused and worried girlfriend provides a brief view of life for the relatives of a prisoner, but

his daughter very nearly steals the show. Played by the charming Danielle Vitalis, Chelsea brings the kind of honesty only kids can get away with, and opens up the audience to the idea of accepting the people you love as well as their beliefs.

This isn't something Mark sees in prison. Inside, alliances are crucial and sincerity is not. It's one of the points that the play conveys well, but there are numerous other issues thrown into the mix that don't get enough stage time. The prison officer is an Iraq veteran with a childhood just as troubled as Mark's but we don't learn enough about it. Mark's conversion to Islam comes out of nowhere after much resistance to pressure from "the brothers" and when he finally finds peace, we don't really see how or why.

While I could easily watch more of these characters, the plot moves so quickly it feels like a dozen scenes are missing. However, it's refreshing to see something so creative, loud and funny come out of one man's experience in such a closed environment.

*[Every Coin](#) runs at Soho Theatre until 14th May as part of the Synergy Theatre series 'Convictions'. The series also features [The Archbishop and the Antichrist](#).*