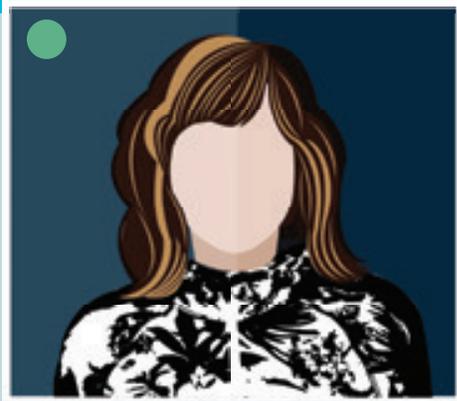


INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER HALEY

Skyler Gray, the Alley Theatre's Literary Manager, met with Jennifer Haley on Google Hangouts to talk about her award-winning play, *The Nether*.

Jennifer Haley has joined the chat.

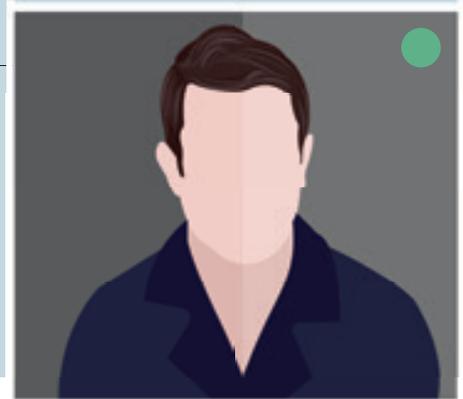


You are now connected to Jennifer Haley.

Jennifer Haley:
Hi Skyler!

Skyler Gray:

Hi Jen!
It is nice to meet you over
the internet.



JH: Very nice.

SG: Thanks for agreeing to chat in this format.
If you get sick of typing just let me know and we can pick up
the phone.

JH: No, typing is easy for me.

SG: Great. Just jumping in: I hear that you grew up in Texas, is that right?

JH: Yes. I lived in San Antonio until I was 9. Then Houston until 18. Then
college at UT Austin.

SG: And when did you get into theater?

JH: In middle school and high school, I acted in speech contests and plays.
Albright Middle School and Elsie High School.

SG: I know you have quite a few friends and family planning to see
The Nether. Did you grow up seeing shows at the Alley when you lived
in Houston?

JH: Oh yes – my family and I would sometimes see plays there. The one that sticks out in my mind is seeing *Glengarry Glen Ross*. My parents and I walked out because of the language! And now, look at the kind of plays I write. 😊 We've come a long way.

SG: I'm excited for you to see the renovations!

JH: I saw a magazine article about it. So exciting! I can't wait to see it in person.

SG: Did you start out as an actor?

JH: Yes, I acted for several years, through college and beyond. Started writing in college because I was thirsty for good female roles. Then that became my main thing. But I took everything I learned as a performer and applied it to playwriting.

SG: Do you still act?

JH: No, haven't in years.

SG: So moving on to *The Nether*. What inspired you to write the play?

JH: My playwriting teacher, Paula Vogel, used to say, Write what you hate. I decided to use that as a prompt for a new play... decided I disliked slick crime procedurals, with their predictable interrogation scenes. So I thought it would be fun to write a procedural I'd like to see. I'd already been writing about video games, so I thought – what would be so bad that they'd be interrogated for it? Which took me right into the subject matter...

SG: What was the developmental journey of the play?

JH: It was developed at the O'Neill [Theatre Center in Connecticut], then at the Lark [in New York City]. It got a reading with Philadelphia Theater Company. And then two workshops with Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles before the premiere there in 2013.

SG: And it won The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize* in 2012, which has very personal ties to Houston.

*The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize is a prestigious award given annually to recognize women who have written works of outstanding quality for the English-speaking theatre. The award was founded by Houston's own Mimi Kilgore (a former Alley Theatre Board Member) in honor of her sister Susan Smith Blackburn, an actress who began her career at the Alley.

JH: Yes, the Blackburn, and everything that came from it, made it possible for me to transition from web design to being a full-time writer.

SG: Have you always been interested in the mechanics of technology and the web?

JH: In retrospect, yes. I took a summer class in BASIC when I was 13. I was always messing with graphics programs and database software when I was an office temp. I became the "computer person" at the non-profit arts companies I worked for. And then I got the opportunity at one of those companies to learn web design.

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SG: I feel like I became the "computer person" when I figured out how to work Outlook.

JH: LOL

SG: I've heard many people talk about our society's lack of communication in this digital age. Do you think this is true? Or do you feel like we are communicating the same amount, just in a different way?

JH: Honestly, I don't know. The communication technology makes it cut both ways.

SG: I can see that. The play has now been performed at theatres around the world. Do you continue to learn things about it?

JH: Absolutely. Everyone has a different take, which illuminates different aspects. However, I feel they always end up telling the same story.

SG: Are there other writers whose work inspires you? Anything you've seen recently that really excited you?

JH: My favorite thing that I've seen recently is Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone*. I loved both the theatricality and the heart of it. Yes, many playwrights I love. Many contemporaries I'm a fan of - Anne Washburn, Lisa D'amour, Young Jean Lee.

SG: And what are you working on next?

JH: I want to write a play to be performed entirely by robots. And I'm working on a TV idea for *The Nether*.

SG: People playing robots or actual robots?

JH: Robots.

SG: I can't say that I've ever heard of that being done before. Sounds very exciting.

JH: I haven't tried it yet - don't know what it should be, or whether it will work.

SG: And as you create this tv idea for *The Nether*, are you finding that there are aspects of the story that you can explore on TV that you can't explore in the theater?

JH: Oh yes, you can get into much greater detail, follow the characters home, set up a variety of virtual spaces...

SG: We are very excited to have you join us at the Alley on May 14th for a post-show talkback.

JH: Yes, I'm excited for it all!

SG: Thanks so much for taking the time. I look forward to meeting you in person very soon!

JH: Thank you - I look forward to meeting you in May. bye! 😊

Jennifer Haley has signed off

