

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2014-15 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE



SEPTEMBER 11 – OCTOBER 5, 2014

YEAR ZERO

by Michael Golamco

Charles Towers, Artistic Director



Elizabeth Kegley, Executive Director

SEPTEMBER 11 - OCTOBER 5, 2014
YEAR ZERO
by Michael Golamco

Featuring

JULIETTE HING-LEE
MICHAEL ROSETE

ARTHUR KENG
DANIEL VELASCO

Scenic Designer

RANDALL PARSONS

Lighting Designer

BRIAN J. LILIENTHAL

Casting Director

HARRIET BASS

Costume Designer

DEBORAH NEWHALL

Sound Designer/Composer

DAVID REMEDIOS

Stage Manager

CASEY LEIGH HAGWOOD

Directed by

KYLE FABEL

Year Zero is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

Originally produced by Victory Gardens Theatre, Chicago, IL - Dennis Zacek, Artistic Director; Jan Kallish, Executive Director
Produced by Second Stage Theatre, New York, 2010 - Carole Rothman, Artistic Director

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PLAYGUIDE

THE CAST OF *YEAR ZERO*



Juliette Hing-Lee (Ra). **MRT:** Debut. **FILM:** *Elle: A Modern Cinderella Story*, *Las Angels*, *Why Am I Doing This*, *A-Date*. **TELEVISION:** *Courtroom K*, *iCarly*, *Lucky 13*, *Anne & Jake*, *The Ex-box*, *NKTOB*, *The Upside of Down*, *Lucky 13*, *#LAProblems*. **OTHER:** Growing up in Long Beach, as a Cambodian-American, I am thrilled and honored to be part of this production. Love and gratitude to

my beautiful mother whose strength is a constant inspiration. Love to my family, loving husband, Johnny, and Lil Paloozo, Jillian for your endless support. Thanks to my manager Tina Treadwell, Shawn Caulin-Young, Treadwell Entertainment, AMAW, Media Artists Group, MRT, and the cast and crew of *Year Zero* for this amazing opportunity. **AWARDS:** *Elle: A Modern Cinderella Tale*, Best Family Film at the Newport Beach Film Festival; *The Ex-Box*, top pick for TV on the Web by USA today.



Arthur Keng (Glenn). **MRT:** Debut. **REGIONAL:** *Everything You Touch* (World Premiere), Boston Court; *King Lear*, California Shakespeare Theatre; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Center Repertory Theatre; *Take Me Out*, New Conservatory Theatre; *Mr. Marmalade*, Custom Made Theatre; *The Cherry Orchard*, Scene Dock Theatre; *Mrs. Bob Crachit's Wild Christmas Binge!*, San

Francisco Playhouse. **TELEVISION:** *Criminal Minds*, CBS; *The Eric André Show*, Cartoon Network (Adult Swim). **EDUCATION:** MFA, University of Southern California; BA, UC Berkley. **OTHER:** Arthur is thrilled to be making his Merrimack Repertory Theatre debut with *Year Zero*! Great thanks to everyone at MRT, my agent Orion Barnes, and the USC School of Dramatic Arts.



Michael Rosete (Han). **MRT:** Debut. **OFF-BROADWAY/NEW YORK:** *Holycrab!*, Ensemble Studio Theatre; *Thirty Minutes or Less*, New York International Fringe Festival; *The Flower Hunter*, Ensemble Studio Theatre. **TELEVISION:** *Royal Pains*, *Mercy*. **EDUCATION:** Joanne Baron/D.W. Brown Studio in Los Angeles. **OTHER:** Michael would like to thank Kyle, Charles, and the talented cast for bringing this

moving play to life; Michael visited Cambodia years ago and the memory of his experience stays with him to this day. He would like to dedicate this performance to all the Khmer people he has met along the way.



Daniel Velasco (Vuthy). **MRT:** Debut. **REGIONAL:** *Words of Wisdom*, Ma-Yi Benefit, Playwrights Horizons. **EDUCATIONAL THEATRE:** *Swoony Planet* (dir Mia Katighak), *Eurydice*, Fordham. **EDUCATION:** BA in Theatre, Fordham University; London Dramatic Academy. **OTHER:** Huge thanks to Kyle, Juliette, Arthur and Michael. Thanks Mom for your

never ending love and support.

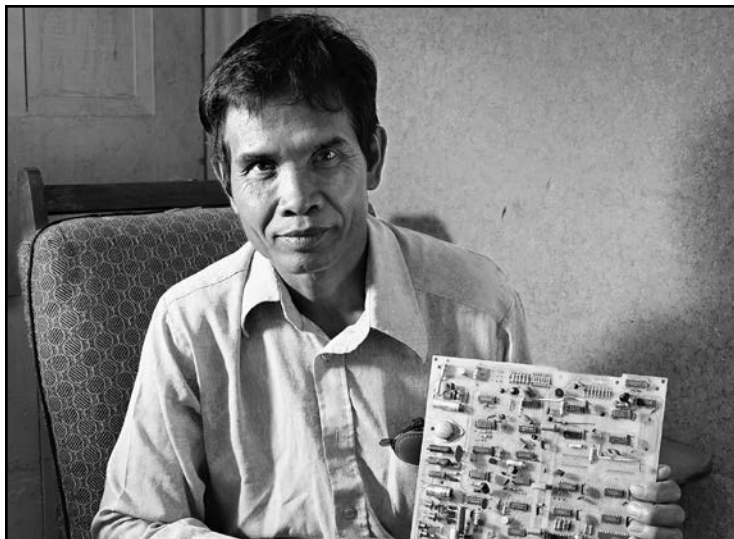
FROM LONG BEACH TO LOWELL

By George Chigas

The Cambodians who arrived in Lowell starting in the early 1980's were different from previous waves of new arrivals to the city in two important ways. First and foremost, they were refugees, not immigrants. They had fled Cambodia after 1979, when Vietnamese forces removed the Khmer Rouge regime from power, thereby ending Pol Pot's four-year reign of terror. Secondly, the Cambodians were Lowell's first significant population to come from a non-European, non-Christian socio-cultural background. Unlike the Irish, French-Canadian, Greek, and Portuguese populations before them, the Cambodians were Asian, Buddhist rice farmers from a tropical climate whose dress, food, language and art forms were unlike anything Lowell had seen before.

Why Lowell? In the midst of the chaos and civil war following the genocide, hundreds of thousands of malnourished Cambodian survivors fled the country and crossed the heavily mined Thai border seeking food, medical care and safety in makeshift camps organized by political factions in the ongoing civil war. As fighting escalated, Cambodian families carrying their belongings and infant children took great risks to enter the only United Nations-controlled refugee camp (Khao I Dang), where they could apply for asylum and resettlement in so-called "third countries," such as the US, Australia, France and Canada. Many of the refugees accepted by the US were resettled in states where the climate is similar to Cambodia's: Southern California, Texas and Georgia. Their subsequent move to Lowell was in search of employment and family reunification.

In the early 1980's, the US was in the midst of a difficult recession marked by high unemployment, particularly on the West Coast. As the economy started to revive, the high tech and biomedical manufacturing sectors along Route 128 and surrounding areas outside Boston were among the first to create significant demand for employment, particularly for low-skilled assembly and machine workers. One would think



Many of Lowell's new arrivals found work in the tech industry. By Higgins and Ross

Long Beach, California.



that the Cambodian refugees, mostly rice farmers, would have few transferable skills in these high-tech industries. Yet ironically, the repetitive motion of planting rice seedlings in exact rows across large paddies proved excellent training for the repetitive yet precise tasks required by these new manufacturing jobs. When word spread to cities like Long Beach, California (where unemployment was still north of ten percent) that steady jobs in clean, new companies were available near Boston, a phenomenon known as "**secondary migration**" began as the first Southeast Asian families moved from California, Texas, and Georgia, and settled in Lowell, Revere, and Lynn. These first families attracted others seeking jobs and opportunity and by the mid-1980's, Southeast Asian communities began to take root and the first Cambodian grocery stores and restaurants opened in Lowell.

The newly created Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants responded to the influx of Southeast Asian refugees into the state by creating a network of Mutual Assistance Organizations for the Cambodian, Vietnamese and Laotian refugees. The first **Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA)** office to open in Lowell was located at the International Institute located on High Street near Saints Memorial Hospital, around the corner from Merrimack Repertory Theatre. Its primary purpose was to assist the new arrivals with housing, job placement, and English and skill training. While this may sound promising and optimistic, it's important to keep in mind that the Cambodian refugees who settled in Lowell were for the most part uneducated rice farmers who knew little to no English. Almost every family had lost at least one family member during the genocide and subsequent fighting, and the vast majority of survivors were struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is little wonder that many of the families that crammed themselves into Lowell's poorest tenement neighborhoods were ill-equipped to cope with the difficulties and challenges of their new life in America. Alcoholism, drugs, gambling and domestic violence were prevalent. Many Cambodian youth, feeling alienated both from their parents and from mainstream American culture, turned to gangs for companionship and support. Having lived through and often participated in war in Cambodia and the border, these youth understood violence and power, and rivalries with Puerto Rican street gangs erupted in violence on the Lowell streets well into the 1990's.

At the same time, along with the violence, trauma, and



Lowell welcomes its first Southeast Asian restaurant. By Higgins and Ross.

dysfunction facing these refugee families, the ancient culture and traditions of Cambodia provided the growing community with a framework for rebuilding their lives. The Buddhist religion, and dance and music traditions were central to this effort. As with the waves of Irish and Greek immigrants that preceded them, religion provided the Cambodian community with a sense of common identity in an otherwise strange land where many felt dislocated and depressed. From out of this disarray, community leaders emerged and organized efforts to establish the first Cambodian Buddhist temple in Massachusetts. As in Cambodia, the temple was more than a place for worship and conducting religious ceremonies. It also served as a community center for traditional healing, meditation, organizing traditional holidays like New Year in April, and as a social center for the elderly. In 1984, the first Cambodian Buddhist temple in Lowell was established in a third floor tenement apartment off of Fletcher Street.

Though small and inadequate, the **Trairatanaram Temple**, as it was called, nevertheless provided a space for Lowell's Cambodian Buddhists to house the first head monk, Venerable Sao Khon, and participate in the merit making activities that were essential to restoring a sense of place and belonging after ten years of disruption and loss. Cambodian Buddhism is highly ritualistic and is largely based on the Law of Karma that encourages the laity to earn merit by supporting the temple and the monks; entering the monkhood (for men), and meditating and honoring the teachings and life of the Buddha. The importance of the temple to the Cambodian community was evidenced by the extraordinary speed that it was able to raise the substantial funds necessary to buy the much larger space in North Chelmsford on Quigley Avenue, formerly a Lions Club. This event marked the next stage of the growth for Lowell's Cambodian community. While the Trairatanaram temple still exists, it has divided into two factions, the so-called "upstairs" and "downstairs" groups that have divided the community. This kind of schism is not uncommon among new communities; a similar division emerged in Lowell's Greek community, for example. In this case, the division is an indication that the process of healing in the aftermath of the genocide continues, and will likely continue for some time.

Like Buddhism, Cambodian classical dance is a primary feature of Cambodian cultural identity. It is comparable to baseball for Americans: Just as Americans removed from their country might organize a baseball team to mark their new

surroundings, classical dance serves a similar function for Cambodians. Dance troupes were organized in the refugee camps along the Thai border almost as quickly as schools and hospitals. The same was true in the US cities where Cambodian refugees were resettled. In Lowell, the effort to establish a dance troupe was led by Mr. Tim Thou, whose family were court dancers in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh before the genocide. Tragically, an estimated nine out of ten classically trained dancers perished during the genocide, but the spirit of the dance and the determination to preserve the tradition lived on in the hearts and souls of survivors like Mr. Thou. Around the time that the Trairatanaram Temple was established off Fletcher Street, the first members of the **Angkor Dance Troupe** were gathering in the living room of Mr. Thou's apartment to practice the dances of the classical repertoire, which have their origins in the ancient Cambodian empire of Angkor from which the troupe got its name. Thirty years later, the Angkor Dance Troupe continues to conduct weekly rehearsals at the Mogan Center, where it has been allocated space by the Lowell National Historical Park. Lowell's Angkor Dance Troupe is nationally recognized and has performed at the White House. The Angkor Dance Troupe will be performing on the Merrimack Repertory Theatre stage in October, an arrangement both organizations hope will become an annual tradition.



Cambodian Dance arrives in Lowell. By Higgins and Ross.

Today, the Cambodian community accounts for as much as one third of the population of the City of Lowell. The first Cambodian city counselor in the United States, Mr. Rithy Uong, was elected to Lowell City Hall in 1999. Cambodian businesses flourish in the newly marked "**Cambodia Town**". For many survivors and their families, however, the genocide and process of healing continues and will always define their lives in many ways. A memorial to those who died in the Cambodian genocide was recently commemorated in Cambodia Town. Yet, after three decades in Lowell, there is also a growing sense that the Cambodian community has turned a corner. While difficulties exist as they do in any community, a new generation of bright, talented and ambitious Cambodian American youth are carrying on and making important contributions in Lowell and around the country.

FROM METROPOLIS TO LONG BEACH

*Many have noted the link between superheroes and immigrant communities. MRT's set for **Year Zero** draws on the connection.*

At a Marlborough, Massachusetts warehouse, the floor is jam packed with illustrated panels. In shades of blues and greys, they're sprawled across the ground and are beginning to creep up the walls. Larger than life, the imagery they evoke feels miles away from Massachusetts—and it is: the scenes are mostly of Long Beach, California. A few are of Cambodia: the ruins of a Buddhist temple, a pile of skulls.

Brett Rochford works for **BeNT Productions**, MRT's longtime scene shop partner. As Charge Artist, he helps to ensure that Scenic Designer Randall Parson's vision is effectively executed by the build team, especially when it comes to the painting and texture. For **Year Zero**, that carries a somewhat unusual responsibility: replicating a set of hand-watercolored illustrations done by Parsons, at 24 times their original size. He's currently in the thick of the work, painting with a brush affixed to the end of a long pole.

Comics are referenced throughout **Year Zero**, and the illustrations are in a “graphic novel style” (Parsons, like the character Vuthy, is quick to draw the distinction from comics). Heavily focused on line and form, they retain a great deal of artistry without aiming for literal representation. The notion may seem whimsical, but Parsons' inspiration for the illustrations originated in a practical matter: the action of the play takes place almost exclusively in Vuthy and his sister Ra's apartment—but not quite. There's a scene at a temple; another in a car. How to create continuity in the set for those isolated scenes? The panels, which will frame the stage and infuse the set, offer a unified lens through which to watch the action.

This lens carries possibilities for reinterpreting the play; Parsons explains that **the panels help bridge between the real and the imaginary**. Perhaps it's a “memory play,” the reminiscences of Vuthy long after the curtain closes, drawing the graphic novel he's always aspired to draw and thinking back to his youth in Long Beach?

Or perhaps not. Either way, **Vuthy's obsession with comics is part of a long legacy in second generation immigrant communities**, and makes sense as a way of thinking about **Year Zero**. Superman, beloved by Vuthy and arguably the first modern superhero, was dreamed up in the 1930's by the kids of European Jewish immigrants. There's a sense of dual identity, of straddling two different selves,



Long Beach and Cambodia prepare to take the stage in graphic novel style.



Each panel is a different size and contains imagery described or referenced in the script.

that seems to resonate in the immigrant consciousness. Jerry Siegel, Superman's writer, grew up awkward, ostracized, and poor in Cleveland. He got bad grades in school despite a relentless bookishness, and after his father died, he worked as a delivery boy for four dollars a week, offering his earnings to the household where he shared a bed with his brother. But he had a rich creative life, and his meeting illustrator Joe Shuster, while in junior high school, would give rise to America's most recognizable man in tights.

Superman is somehow both singular and universal.

Though he couldn't fly in the comic's earliest years, he bore tremendous strength and unthinkable speed, repelling bullets, lifting train cars, and wrestling planes out of the sky. The causes he first championed were surprisingly human, and sometimes political. He fought to abolish unfair treatment of prisoners, to combat unsafe working conditions, and to bring down self-interested military industrialists. Yet his super-ness was always matched by the un-super-ness of his alter-ego Clark Kent, ever timid and deferential.

It doesn't stop there: Batman, Spiderman, The Hulk, Captain Marvel, Captain America—all created by the kids of Jewish-American immigrants. The Green Turtle, the first Asian-American superhero (created by Chinese American Lu Hing), was recently revived by writer Gene Luen Yang and illustrator Sonny Liew. Comic book creator Hector Rodriguez grew up in a Texas border town; his creation, El Peso Hero, now uses his superpowers to fight for Latino immigrant rights.

In the skin of the most ordinary person can live a superhero. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster looked to themselves

to better understand the character they had created (quite literally: Siegel would pose for Shuster to draw Clark Kent; Shuster himself would pose in the mirror as Superman). Vuthy could surely relate. He's nerdy and he's searching; and like both Siegel and "Supes" he's lost a parent at a young age. Grappling with his identity in California, he must learn how to reconcile the Cambodian and American sides of himself—though which side is Clark Kent and which side is Superman could be a matter for further discussion.



Digital projection helps scale up Parson's illustrations.



Rochford at work in BeNT Production's scene shop.

Meanwhile, back at the Marlborough scene shop, Brett Rochford puts the finishing touches on the scenes that will soon grace the MRT stage. He uses watered-down scene paint; acrylic-based, it "extends" easily, blurring colors to match designer Parsons' originals. Another scene is still in the early stages: a digital line drawing, derived from the watercolor, is projected directly onto a blank panel, where it is traced and filled. The works Parsons cites as his inspirations for the set (*The Watchmen*, *The Walking Dead*) are more in the "graphic novel" camp than they are "comics." But the superhero sensibility is palpable. The world should be a fitting one for the likes of Vuthy, Ra, Han and Glenn—and for all of us watching.

Sources:

Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero by Larry Tye
 "Comic Book Heroes and the Jewish People Who Created Them," Jspace.com. Oct. 8, 2012.
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 Jan. 6, 2014

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THE ORIGIN OF THE TIGER

A Cambodian Folk Tale



Panthera tigris corbetti, or the Indochinese Tiger, is the tiger native to Cambodia. By Bodlina

In Act II of Year Zero, Vuthy recalls a folk tale told to him by his mother. Another retelling of the story appears below:

A long time ago, there lived a great King who ruled over a rich kingdom. He had a wise and beautiful Queen, four Chief Ministers, a Royal Astrologer, who always helped the King make decisions, and a whole class of Mandarins and great officials to perform all the honors for the King.

But unfortunately, neither the King, nor the four chief Ministers knew anything of magic practices, which were so necessary for victory in battle. Because of this the King was very worried about his kingdom. As he got older, he worried that if an army should invade his kingdom, it might be easily overrun.

One day, early in the morning, the King, accompanied by the Queen, went to his Throne Room. The Royal Astrologer, all the Mandarins and Officials, and the four Chief Ministers were prostrated for the Royal Audience. It was then that the King formed the idea of going to learn magic with a great and famous teacher called Tisabamokkha, who lived in the far-off Kingdom of Takkasila. There they found Tisabamokkha and asked him to instruct them in magic, which the great teacher did.

So the King and his whole retinue were taught magic practices. They learned how to change themselves easily into all kinds of animals and heavenly beings.

When they had learned all that their teacher could tell them, the King decided it was time to return to their own kingdom. He set out on his journey again accompanied by the Queen, the Royal Astrologer and the four Chief Ministers. After they had traveled for three whole days from Takkasila, they got lost in a huge forest. They had eaten all the food they had brought with them and they began to eat all the roots and berries they could find. The King began to worry that perhaps he would die so he called all the other members of the group together. "Our end may be near because we have no food to keep us alive, what should we do?" The Royal Astrologer suggested to the

King "perhaps we should use the magic which we learned to turn ourselves into a tiger, then we could catch other animals to eat. We could wait until we got back to our own kingdom to turn ourselves back into humans again. The other members of the group all agreed with the Astrologer's idea. "Which part of the tiger's body do you each wish to be?" the King asked. The four Chief Ministers wanted to turn into the four legs of the tiger, the Astrologer into the tiger's tail and the Queen into the tiger's body. The tiger's head was left for the King himself.

So they all recited the magic formulae to transform their bodies and...there stood a Royal Tiger. Soon the Tiger felt quite hungry and bounded off to catch deer and antelope to eat. After a time, the Tiger was so happy that he forgot to return to his own kingdom. He did not regret his wonderful new life.

This is how there came to be tigers in the world which are stronger than any other animals. When the tiger goes off to hunt for his prey, the tail, waving from side to side and guiding him on is the Royal Astrologer; the supple, pliant body is the Queen, that wise woman; the four strong feet of the tiger, with their sharp claws, are the four Chief Ministers; and the head, awesome and majestic as it looks around, is the King greater and more powerful than all the other Kings.



Panthera tigris corbetti | H. Zell - Own work

"The Origin of the Tiger" in Cultural Context, by Toni Shapiro-Phim

The word Tisabamokkha is a word of Pali origin, which means "great teacher." Also Takkasila is a district in north-west India. The use of such words shows the Indian influence in Cambodia.

This story is a famous Cambodian folktale because it explains the origin of the tiger and also emphasizes the idea that people must cooperate together for the common good. However, it is also meant to teach the audience that people should not turn their backs on their country or community when they experience increased wealth or great happiness. Many Cambodian proverbs warn people not to forget their responsibilities. In this tale, the King and his entourage originally wanted to help the people of the kingdom. However, in their excitement of being able to transform themselves into the tiger they forgot the original reason that they wanted to learn such powerful magic, which was to assist the people of the kingdom.

Q&A: JULIETTE HING-LEE

Juliette is primarily a screen actress, and is making her MRT debut. In **Year Zero**, she plays Ra, Vuthy's sister.



Juliette Hing-Lee and Daniel Velasco. Photo by Meghan Moore.

Thank you for being here today. Have you enjoyed your time here in Lowell so far?

I have enjoyed my time here at Lowell. It's actually... I've never been in a town that is so friendly and quiet and everything.

Visited any cool places yet?

Not yet. I do plan on it though. I did however go to the... what is it... the Concord River, right outside the window. So I visit that every morning.

Did you see the herons out there?

I did! And I saw a beaver. I was on the phone, and I remember, once I saw it, I started screaming, because I've never seen a beaver in person, but it was huge! And I saw the little tail, in person.

YEAR ZERO is set in Long Beach, California, and that's also where you grew up, correct?

Yeah, I grew up in Long Beach from... I think I was eight. Eight until about 17; 17 was when I moved out of Long Beach.

So from eight to 17, what were your impressions of the city?

Long Beach was very different. I was born in Batavia, Illinois. Warrenville, where I lived in, was the suburbs kind of... so we were basically the only, you know, ethnic family there on the block. So as soon as we moved to California, and then specifically Long Beach, it was interesting to see people that

were of my nationality. Which I didn't have in Warrenville. So it was a huge culture shock for me I would say.

And is it true that the high school that inspired the play is actually the same high school that you went to?

Yes. I did go to Lakewood High School. Both Ra and Vuthy went to Lakewood High School in **Year Zero**.

Are there any moments where you're just like, "Ahh, they're talking about things I know..."

The moment that came in the play, when they mention Lakewood High School, (is) about "getting shivved in Lakewood High School." I saw a clear image of what my time there was. We had race riots, and trash cans were lit on fire, but that was just the environment, I guess. And kids were just... going through a bit, as most teenagers are. So...

I imagine there was more to your high school experience, though, than just race riots...

There was more to Lakewood High School; I mean the faculty are amazing. Even the... I like to call them the gatekeepers, cause they would just sit there and scan you... so making sure nobody's smoking in the locker room, or no fights are happening.

What does it mean to you to be working on this play?

It means... that's interesting... You'd think I'd have just an immediate answer for that, but there's just so many different emotions involved into that answer.

So, as a starting point, as a Cambodian American yourself, what was life like for you in that community in Long Beach, which is the largest Cambodian American community in the country?

As hard as the life was for many people living there in Long Beach, I also remember it to be a wonderful community of people. You can go to your neighbors, and see them cooking outside, which you know, you could make Sach Ko (it's like beef sticks), on like little grills outside, and then they would give it to neighbors. But it was quite a time in my life, where one second you would think that you were... you were one certain way... I mean you're raised, culturally, that way, but then once you get sent off to school you're trying to fit in with the American culture, and it doesn't always fit.

It doesn't always fit in what way?

Meaning... I can tell you one specific story, where the worlds collide, and you have one foot in one world, and one in the other: It was when I brought noodles to school, that my mom had left over. And then it's lunch time—this must have been, like, middle school—and the noodles had, like, a fishy kind of sauce. So I remember the kids around at the table just staring at me very oddly. And it didn't hit me that "Oh, this is cultural food, so not everybody knows what it is." And it wasn't a time when you had Sushi restaurants on every corner. You know, it was a different time. So I remember that specifically: me realizing, "Okay, maybe there's some things from home that I should leave at home," and then, you know, picking and choosing what to bring.

The action of **YEAR ZERO** focuses on some pretty distinctive family dynamics: people who are the first generation born in America, growing up with parents who are refugees from overseas. Anything that comes up in the play, does it bring up memories for you? From your own family?

Funny you should ask that question; yes, it actually does. Even reading the play, it was like looking into a mirror. There's so many questions that come up within the play that are questions that I was having in my own life. For instance, I don't know my mother's family. I don't know what they're names were, I don't know what happened to them. And that's difficult. And I don't think I really realized that until I was going through the process of the rehearsal, and that's tough. Cause what do you say to your parents? What do you say to your mother, "What happened to your family?" And expect it to just come out? But everybody has their own process. And I believe, with the play... I believe the mother was just trying to be strong. Which I can relate to. You know... because once you start talking about that stuff, then you're just transported back to that time, and how do you cope? When you couldn't cope with it then, what makes you think you can cope with it now?

What do you think your character, Ra, is really all about?

Ra is very put together. She has goals in life. And I think these goals came from where she lived. They came from having that relationship with her mother that... it was always forced upon her. "You gotta do this, you have to make sure you get good grades, you have to make sure you're clean, you have to make..." So all of these things, and what a daughter should be, were put on her, but it was also her way of getting out. So I think she has huge goals for herself. It doesn't necessarily mean it makes her happy, these goals... but that's her way out. And so I think she's focused.

What's the hardest thing about doing a role like this?

The hardest thing about doing a role like this is... just human nature in general. When you're trying to hold everything together, you're trying to make everything fit. And it doesn't fit. There's gonna be a point in time where everything just collapses on you. And the tough part of playing this role is making sure that everything fits, and not letting it come down before it's supposed to.

I've heard that you're into zombie movies, is that true?

I am! That's so funny! How did you know I was into zombie movies?

You have any favorites?

Walking Dead is amazing. *28 Days Later*, oh my gosh. They did such an amazing... that was when they took zombies to a different level. First, you had the slow zombies in *Living Dead*, they were just slow. Every zombie movie, they were completely slow, so you can escape. I could never understand why people couldn't just escape these zombies when they were slow. But then *28 Days Later* took it to another level, and you couldn't get away from them. So I think *28 Days Later* is my "Best Zombie Movie."

What's your dream project to work on?

Year Zero is my dream project. I mean, come on! How can that not be my dream? I'm Cambodian-American, I lived in Long Beach, went to Lakewood High School, this... to make this into a film on top of doing a theatre production would be amazing. Yeah.

What's the first thing you'll do when you get back to California?

Probably hug my dogs. Get some In & Out [A fast food chain popular in California].

What kind of dogs?

I have two Pomeranians, and one... I like to call him Falcor. Cause he looks like Falcor from *Never Ending Story*. But he's Pekinese and Pomeranian. So he's like [showing small dog size] this big.



Max, aka "Falcor".

What does a typical day off look like for you?

Okay so a day off, for me, looks like this:

This is me texting: "Hey Michael [Rosete, who plays Han]! Do you wanna run lines?" "Hey Daniel [Velasco, who plays Vuthy]! Let's get together and run some lines." That's my day off. So I'm living and breathing this play.

How about in California?

California? I'm a boring person! I don't do much. I'd probably watch a movie! Sit in and rent some movies, or Netflix. I like to binge-watch. Okay, so the last couple of days I had off, I binge watched *Orange is the New Black*. So I like to do a lot of that.

Q&A: MICHAEL GOLAMCO

Michael Golamco is the playwright of **Year Zero**. He is also a screen writer, and currently writes for NBC's **Grimm**.



Playwright Michael Golamco. Photo by David Lee.

Thanks for taking some time to talk. Where did you grow up?

The San Francisco Bay Area. I grew up there, and then I went to UCLA for college and I just stayed here in LA. I've been here for a pretty long time.

How did you get into playwriting?

I started an Asian-American theatre company with a few people at UCLA. We would do these free shows for the student body. We'd do a new show every quarter, and we'd write all new material. So, essentially we're doing three shows a year, and we're doing two nights for each thing, and no one was a drama major or a theatre major; I was an English major. And we started packing that theatre that we used; it was like a 350-seat theatre and we had to turn people away both nights, I mean it would be just completely packed. So we're writing original material ourselves and getting it to work, and so that's where I learned playwriting: essentially by doing it.

You mentioned that you write for NBC's **GRIMM**, and you write for other media.

I've sold a couple pilots, one for ABC Family, and I'm working

on a pilot right now for Warner Horizon. Of film, television, and theatre, theatre is the place where you can really take the most risks and try things out... you know, really learn and experiment. So I like writing for it quite a bit.

Did you feel like there were any risks you took writing **YEAR ZERO**?

I think that doing characters that are unconventional for the stage—you don't really see these people on stage that much—I think was a little bit risky. But at the same time, I really just wanted to do that story. So in a sense, they're like all of us, really. Except they just happen to be these Cambodian American kids.

What was it that made you wake up one day and say, "I know, I'll write a play about the second generation Cambodian American experience?"

I have a friend that's Cambodian-American. We're college buddies, and her parents survived the Cambodian genocide. They came to the United States, and basically they had the total immigrant experience. They moved to Stockton, CA, they raised their kids, and they never really told my friend or her sister anything about their experiences back in Cambodia, because that was such a crazed thing.

I'm told that's a pretty common thing.

It's a common thread with a lot of different people, not just Cambodian-Americans. How does memory get transmitted from one generation to another? Why do you keep some things secret and other things not? When do secrets come out? That's all really great stuff that I think people can relate to, and so that's when I knew that I had a play; I had a play that worked.

Do you have a favorite character in the play?

I think they're all pretty great. I try to keep the number of characters down to an absolute minimum, because I don't want to service characters that don't really do anything.

Vuthy has this love of this American "nerd culture;" he reads comic books and plays **Dungeons & Dragons**. He's really a smart kid, in so many ways, and he also has this deep love of his Cambodian heritage... or at least a drive to learn more about it, because it hasn't really been shared with him.

Yeah, I think he's an effusion of so many different archetypes, and (that's) something that's so uniquely American.

There's a kind of a metaphor of Superman that's used in the play to describe the immigrant experience, and what that means, and how you have to transform in order to survive. I felt like there were a lot of dovetailing elements, the immigrant experience, and also with this particular story, with Cambodian-Americans. 'Cause there's a sense of reincarnation, reinventing yourself, starting a new life, and having a new face. I felt almost like a curator as opposed to a creator of something, because there were so many great little true things about that experience, and about our American experience—all of us together—that fit together really well. All I really had to do was bring them up, and put that on stage, and say "Oh, that clicks," or "That works, that's so true." I think

the people that created Superman, who are basically [kids of] Jewish-American immigrants, they essentially felt the same things that we do now. And that's why we can relate so well to that story.



Actors Daniel Velasco (Vuthy) and Michael Rosete (Han) show off their on-stage chemistry. Photo by Meghan Moore.

Then there's Glenn. What is it about Glenn that annoys Vuthy so much?

I think a lot of it is the conflict between cultures. When I was writing the play, the easy move would have been to make Glenn white [Glenn is Chinese-American]. I mean, that's just really obvious and simple. I thought that was a little too easy ...what's mentioned in the play is the "Asian Hierarchy." Like European immigrants went through a century before, and the United States will continue to go through in this new century: this conflict between people who are already here and people who are arriving. The cultural conflict between the "haves" and the "have nots." And so I think that Glenn is a personification of that. Glenn really believes in the American dream. They have completely different viewpoints on Superman. Which I think is really interesting. And with Han, there's two different warring male figures in Vuthy's life: there's Han and there's Glenn. And they're so different. One represents the American dream, and the other is the fight to survive... the struggle against the American dream, or the struggle to try to define yourself within that dream.

Ra exemplifies adult responsibility. She's looking after Vuthy after their mom dies.

Right, and that's too much to ask, for somebody who's that young. But it happens every day in America.

Do you have a favorite aspect of seeing your work on stage? Do you like it?

Yeah, I do. I mean, after opening night, it's basically activated. I can't really change it any more during the production. So I just have to kind of hang out and see it all come together. But yeah, that part is really fun. Making it belong to other people is really fun...

Do you have a dream project that you'd like to do?

Oh I have no idea. I'm just pushing forward with everything. Some of it is a lot harder to write than other stuff... I'm just trying to get through that stuff so I can get to the good stuff.

Thanks for talking, it sounds like you've got a lot going on these days.

Yeah, thank you guys for doing the play! I hope you have a lot of fun with it.



The cast of MRT's Year Zero. Clockwise from top left: Arthur Keng, Michael Rosete, Daniel Velasco, Juliette Hing-Lee. Photo by Meghan Moore.

WHERE IN CALIFORNIA?

Year Zero is set in California, and its characters often refer to places in the state. Where, and what, are they?

1. Long Beach

- Home to the largest Cambodian-American population in the U.S., which some estimate at 100,000.
- Second busiest container shipping port in the U.S.
- Home of the 1936 Art Deco Ocean Liner Queen Mary.
- Median household income: \$52,900.

2. Agoura Hills

- Small, affluent city near Los Angeles; median household income of \$110,716.
- Home to a number of actors, musicians, and athletes.

3. Orange County

- Comprised of 34 cities in Southern California, including Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Huntington Beach.
- Known for being politically conservative in a region that is predominantly liberal.

4. Berkeley

- Home of the oldest University of California campus, frequently ranked among the nation's best colleges and universities.
- Saw enormous protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960's.
- Known for its mix of politically liberal cultures, cafes, and book shops.
- Median household income: \$63,505.

5. Oakland

- Traditionally blue-collar shipping town that has recently begun attracting workers in the tech industry.
- Known for its history of revolutionary political movements, especially in its Black population.
- Birthplace of Gertrude Stein and Jack London.

6. Piedmont

- Small, residential city near Oakland.



*Sources:
The Rough Guide to California, 11th edition updated by Nick Edwards,
Charles Hodgkins and Stephen Keeling
United States 2010 Census: www.census.gov/2010census*

ORIGINS OF THE KHMER ROUGE

1941: Prince Norodom Sihanouk is enthroned as King in Cambodia, which has been a French Protectorate since 1863.

1953: Sihanouk secures independence from France. As Vietnam is divided into North (Communist) and South (pro-Western) regions, Sihanouk rejects American pressure to join an anti-Communist alliance, choosing instead to remain neutral; he abdicates his kingship in order to run for political office.

1958: Sihanouk wins more than 99% of the popular vote. The small opposition includes both pro-Western and Communist factions (Sihanouk coins the term “Khmer Rouges,” or Red Cambodians, to describe the Communists). Elements of the political opposition are persecuted; the Khmer Rouges flee to rural areas and form a resistance movement.

1965: The American War in Vietnam begins. Sihanouk reluctantly allows North Vietnam to install sanctuaries on Cambodian soil.

1969: The United States begins bombing North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. Sihanouk forms a “Salvation Government” headed by pro-Western Lon Nol.

1970-1975: Lon Nol’s government ousts Sihanouk from power and is renamed “The Khmer Republic.” Sihanouk flees to the countryside where he joins the Khmer Rouge resistance movement, which he had once persecuted.

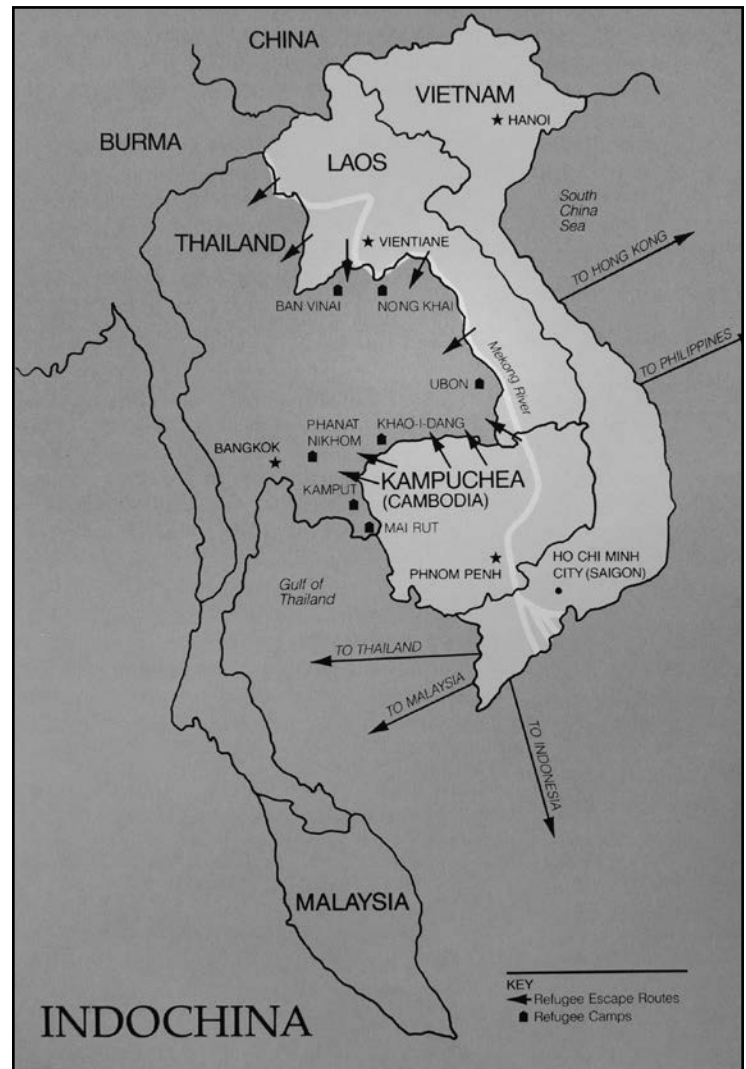
Meanwhile, the War in Vietnam spills farther and farther into Cambodian territory; the United States continues to bomb North Vietnamese-occupied sites throughout the country. By the time the Vietnam War winds down, Lon Nol has lost control of all of the Cambodian countryside, holding only the capital city of Phnom Penh and several other towns; the Khmer Rouge, which has supported North Vietnam, controls most of Cambodia.

April-May, 1975: Lon Nol flees to the United States. Falsely warning of an imminent American bombing, the Khmer Rouge invades and evacuates Phnom Penh and other cities and towns across Cambodia. Former allies of Lon Nol, as well as those resisting evacuation, are targeted for execution. Led by Pol Pot, the new regime is named “Democratic Kampuchea,” and is marked by forced labor, food scarcity, and genocide resulting in the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians (See page 14).

December 1978-January 1979: Vietnam establishes the “Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation” in occupied Cambodian territory, comprised of civilian refugees, Khmer Rouge soldiers who fled purges within the Khmer Rouge ranks, and captured soldiers. Under this front, Vietnam invades

Cambodia, sending Pol Pot and other leaders fleeing to the Thai-Cambodian border. Many Cambodians seek refuge in camps on the Cambodian-Thai border; some immigrate to the United States and elsewhere.

1979-1989: Though the Khmer Rouge has lost exclusive authority in Cambodia, they continue to have political influence in the region, which is embattled in a complex civil war as Vietnam continues its occupation. Sihanouk (who has by now defected from the Khmer Rouge) is instated as head of a new coalition government.



Escape Routes from Cambodia. By Higgins and Ross.

1997-1998: The Khmer Rouge disintegrates after factional infighting, and Pol Pot is tried for the murder of his right-hand man, Son Sen. He is found guilty, and dies in 1998; the cause of his death is unconfirmed.

*Source: Cambodia: Report from a Stricken Land by Henry Kamm. Chronology, pp. xiii-xiiv
Edited by George Chigas*

THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE



"Choeung Ek Monument," photo by Kate Brandt

The Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot

In the early 1970's, war was raging in Cambodia. The capital, Phnom Penh, was fortified by Marshal Lon Nol and his soldiers. A rebel group known as the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, defeated the Lon Nol's government and took power in April 1975. Many believed this to be the end of the war. They were wrong, however, and soon Khmer Rouge soldiers were moving through the streets with megaphones evacuating Phnom Penh, falsely warning that American planes would soon be bombing the city. Citizens were forced to the countryside to do agricultural work. The conditions were horrific: work started at five or six in the morning and went until well after dark. Starvation, rampant disease, and child labor were just some of the atrocities the population faced. Families were often deliberately separated by the Khmer Rouge, which hoped to build allegiance exclusively to the new order and dramatically expand Cambodia's rice production.

The Khmer Rouge sought to create an idealized, collectivized agrarian society and targeted teachers, doctors, and other intellectuals; even those who simply wore glasses were at risk. The Khmer Rouge believed that the only reliable people were the "old people" (poor farmers that remained in the countryside) and that the "new people" who lived in urban areas were infected with capitalist ideas. One could be killed for wearing jewelry, keeping food, grieving a family member, or showing the slightest sign of discontent with the new order. When the increase in rice production failed to meet expectations, the Khmer Rouge began to blame its own members, torturing and killing them.

On Christmas Day 1978, a Vietnamese invasion sent Pol Pot's forces to the Thai-Cambodian border and other Khmer Rouge leaders seeking refuge in the northwest region

of Cambodia. Though no longer in power, the Khmer Rouge remained intact until the late 1990's.

Tuol Sleng

The Chao Ponhea Yat High School was converted by the Khmer Rouge into a prison called Security Prison 21 (S-21), or Tuol Sleng, during its control in the 1970's. It was used as a torture center for an estimated 17,000 prisoners. When the prison was established, most of the prisoners were soldiers and government officials from Lon Nol's Khmer Republic. Others included doctors, teachers, students, factory workers, monks, and engineers. They were often beaten and tortured with electric shocks, hot metal instruments, hanging, and other crude forms of torture. Prisoners were not killed outright, as the Khmer Rouge demanded confessions for their crimes.

Upon arrival, prisoners were photographed and forced to give their full biography from childhood until their arrest, then strip to their underwear and give up their possessions. Some small cells fit only one person and required that they be shackled to the wall or floor; the bigger, shared cells held multiple prisoners, all chained to a bar. Prisoners received four small spoonfuls of rice porridge and watery soup of leaves twice a day, and had to ask permission before drinking water, or else were beaten by a guard.

Tuol Sleng was uncovered in 1979 when the Vietnamese army invaded. Today, the site remains as a memorial museum.



"Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum Cells," photo by Bjørn Christian Tørrissen.

Choeung Ek and the Killing Fields

Choeung Ek was one of the Khmer Rouge's "killing fields," a term referring to the open spaces where mass executions took place. Victims were usually killed by a blow to the head with an iron bar and dumped into pits that became their mass graves. At Choeung Ek, an estimated 17,000 men, women, and children from Tuol Sleng prison were executed. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, thousands of bodies were discovered in Cambodia's Killing Fields.

Today, Choeung Ek stands as a memorial with a Buddhist stupa (monument) with transparent sides filled with more than 5,000 human skulls. The site also contains the pits from which the bodies of the victims were exhumed.

Sources:

Cambodia Tribunal Monitor: www.cambodiatribunal.org
www.war-memorial.net/Killing-Fields-Memorial-at-Choeung-Ek-1.80
Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide. Alexander Laban Hinton, 2005
www.wikipedia.org
Edited by George Chigas

GLOSSARY OF TERMS IN YEAR ZERO

AC TRANSIT: (Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District) is an Oakland-based public transit agency that serves the western portions of Alameda and Contra Costa counties in the San Francisco Bay Area.

ACCLIMATIZE-: To adjust or adapt to a new climate, place, or situation.

ANGELINA JOLIE: While filming *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, Jolie experienced a war-torn Cambodia, an experience she credits with having brought her a greater understanding of the world, and would visit refugee camps and make field visits. She met with refugees in Pakistan, and donated \$1 million in response to an international United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) emergency appeal. She was subsequently named a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador for her humanitarian efforts.

BANANA REPUBLIC: A clothing and accessories store owned by the multinational corporation Gap Inc.

BART: Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is a rapid transit system serving the San Francisco Bay Area connecting San Francisco with cities in the East Bay and suburbs in northern San Mateo County.

BONNIE AND CLYDE: Infamous outlaws and robbers from the Dallas area who traveled the central United States with their gang during the Great Depression. They are mostly known for robbing banks and are believed to have killed at least nine police officers and several civilians. The couple was eventually ambushed and killed in Bienville Parish, Louisiana on May 23rd, 1934.

CHOEUNG EK: See p.16

CHAOTIC EVIL: One of the alignments in the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. A Chaotic Evil character tends to have no respect for rules, other people's lives, or anything but their own desires.

CONSUMMATE: Supremely skilled, being at the highest or most extreme degree.

DAPPER: Having a neat and sophisticated appearance.

"DON'T TIE UP THE PHONE": Refers to dial-up Internet access which establishes an internet connection via telephone lines.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS: A fantasy role-playing game in which players are assigned a specific character and can form a party with other characters. The party then embarks upon

imaginary adventures and interacts with the environment as well as each other to solve dilemmas, engage in battles, and gather treasure and knowledge and earn experience points to become increasingly powerful over a series of sessions.

EBAY: A multinational internet consumer-to-consumer corporation. eBay.com is an online auction and shopping website in which people and businesses buy and sell a variety of goods and services worldwide.

GAMESTOP: A video game, consumer electronics, and wireless services retailer.

GEORGE W. BUSH: 43rd president of the United States. In office during the attacks of September 11th, 2001, Bush led the nation into war in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

GRAPHIC NOVEL: A fictional story that is presented in comic-strip format and presented as a book; carries associations of higher artistic merit than the term "comic book."

HENPECKING: Harassing or tormenting by persistent nagging.

INTERSTATE 405: A major north-south Interstate Highway in Southern California.

IRAQ WAR: An armed conflict in Iraq beginning with the invasion on March 20th, 2003, and continuing with the long phase of fighting to follow after an insurgency emerged to oppose the occupying forces. Both United States and United Kingdom's governments claimed that Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction posed a threat to not only their security, but their allies as well. The US completed the withdrawal of its military in December 2011, though the insurgency is still ongoing.

JOHNS HOPKINS: The teaching hospital and biomedical research facility of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine located in Baltimore, Maryland.

KAL-EL: The birth name of iconic superhero Superman. He was born on the planet Krypton and later rocketed to Earth by his scientist father just moments before the planet's destruction. He was found and adopted by a Kansas farmer and his wife and raised as Clark Kent.

KHMER: (pronounced KA-MAI) The predominant ethnic group in Cambodia, accounting for approximately 90 percent of the 15.2 million people in the country.

KHMER ROUGE: See p. 15

"KIRK SCREAMING KHAN": A memorable scene from the 1982 movie, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* in which Captain Kirk (William Shatner) shouts the name of his nemesis, Khan Noonien Singh (Ricardo Montalban) after Khan refuses to hand over the Genesis Device, a technology designed to reorganize matter to create habitable worlds for colonization.

LASIK: (Laser-Assisted in situ Keratomileusis) is laser eye surgery performed by an ophthalmologist who uses a laser to reshape the eye's cornea in order to improve vision.

LOUIS FARRAKHAN: The leader of the religious group Nation of Islam.

MCAT: The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is an examination given to prospective medical students in the United States and Canada.

OMISSION: Something neglected or left undone.

OXTAILS: A bony, gelatin-rich meat, usually slow-cooked as a stew but is also a traditional stock base for a soup.

PATRONIZE: To speak to someone in a way that shows that you believe you are the most intelligent or better than most people.

RASTA: Refers to an individual who is a follower of the Rastafarian religion. Notable members include Bob Marley, Leonard Howell, and Peter Tosh.

RONALD REGAN: Former president Ronald Reagan issued the Reagan Doctrine in the early 1980's which was a strategy orchestrated and implemented by the United States to oppose the global influence of the Soviet Union during the final years of the Cold War. The Heritage Foundation and the Reagan Administration wanted to apply the Doctrine in Cambodia. President Reagan authorized the provision of aid to a small Cambodian resistance movement called the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) in an effort to force an end to the Vietnamese occupation. The Vietnamese eventually withdrew and the communist regime fell.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: Served as the fifth president of Iraq from July 16 1979 until April 9, 2003. He was captured on December 13, 2003 by a coalition led by the United States and United Kingdom, and convicted on November 5, 2006 on charges related to the 1982 killing of 148 Iraqi Shi'ites, as well as having ties to Al-Quaeda. He was sentenced to death by hanging.

SMALLVILLE: The fictional childhood hometown of iconic superhero Superman, where he was adopted after being rocketed to Earth from Krypton.

TAUNTAUN: A species found in the Star Wars franchise. Tauntauns are indigenous to the ice planet Hoth. They are covered with white fur, have downturned horns, four nostrils, a foul body odor, are omnivores, and are used primarily as mounts by the Rebel Alliance.

TOUCAN SAM: The cartoon toucan mascot for Froot Loops cereal.

TUOL SLENG: See p. 16

TRG GANGSTERS: The "Tiny Rascal Gang" is the largest Asian-American street gang in the United States. It originated among Cambodian refugees living in Long Beach, California in the 1980's after a massive wave of Cambodian refugees entered the United States fleeing Cambodia's violent Khmer Rouge insurgency.

VOLTRON: An animated television series that featured a team of space explorers that pilot a giant super robot known as "Voltron". It ran from September 1984 – November 1985.

VULCAN: A humanoid race from the Star Trek franchise. Known for their logical reasoning, which was used to contrast humanity's emotional shortfalls. The most famous Vulcan is Mr. Spock.

YEAR ZERO: The notion employed by the Khmer Rouge that in a revolution, society must begin its cultural history from scratch. The Khmer Rouge used this notion to justify its destruction of traditional culture and mass killings.

YIN-YANG: Concept used to describe how apparently opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary, interconnected and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other as they interrelate.

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SUGGESTED FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

Narratives of Life Under the Khmer Rouge

- *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* by Loung Ung (Book/Memoir)
- *Years of Zero: Coming of Age Under the Khmer Rouge* by Seng Ty (Book/Memoir)
- *The Missing Picture* by Rithy Panh (Film/Memoir)
- *The Killing Fields*, directed by Roland Joffé (Film)
- *Survival in the Killing Fields* by Haing Ngor (Book/Memoir)

History of Cambodia Before, During and After the Genocide

- *Cambodia: 1975-1982* by Michael Vickery (Book/History)
- *Enemies of the People* by Rob Lemkin and Thet Sambath (Film/Documentary)
- *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Book)
- *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* by Phillip Short (Book/Biography)

Cambodians in America

- *New Year Baby* by Socheta Poeuv (Film/Documentary)
- *Lost Child* by Janet Gardner and Sopheap Theam (Film/Documentary)
- "The Healing Fields of Long Beach's Cambodia Town," *OC Weekly*, by Michelle Woo. Nov. 29, 2012 (Article)
- *The Monkey Dance* by Julie Mallozzi (Film/Documentary)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What do you think Ra sees as her responsibility to Vuthy as the older sibling in a Cambodian family? Does this change with their mother's passing?
- Early on in *Year Zero*, Han says to Vuthy, "We are the sons of Kings. Don't forget that." What does this mean to Han? Do you think it means something different to Vuthy?
- What do you think the difference between Long Beach and Berkeley mean to each of *Year Zero*'s characters? Do those meanings change over time?
- What drives the attraction between Ra and Glenn? Why does Ra push Glenn away, but ultimately come back to him? Is the attraction different between Ra and Han?
- At the end of Act I, how do you think Ra's feelings about Han change based on the information he gives her about her mother?
- Why is Vuthy so hostile toward Glenn, but more open toward Han?
- What pushes Vuthy over the edge to attack another kid at school? Why is the particular way Vuthy is insulted in this instance enough to make him resort to violence?
- Why do you think Vuthy talks to a skull? Do you think he took it from Choeung Ek, or was he telling the truth when he says that it's a fake he bought on Ebay? Does it make a difference?
- Why does Vuthy tell the story of the King who becomes a Tiger? Folk tales often vary depending on who's telling the story; another retelling is printed on page 9 of the playguide. What are the differences between the two versions? Do the differences change the story's meaning?
- Where do you think Han goes at the end of the play? What do you think his plans are for the future?

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