

Electric

(burn... burn... burn)

F!O!R....(est)

.....(for) !E!S!T

By Alex(!) Perry(!)

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Alex Perry's Electric Forest gives us an exciting glimpse into a fantasy that might not be so far off. I mean, why can't we just grow electricity on trees that are plugged into the grid? Jules Verne wrote about submarines before they came into fruition, and next thing you know, voilà, we've gone nuclear! Not that I profess to understand the science behind it, but we've gotta be open to new sustainable energy sources - and this play offers us a solution in a fully electric forest that generates enough power to run several large American cities at the same time! That's why Chicago Mayor Yvonne Stanton is visiting the world's first electric forest and meeting with its developer, none other than the English billionaire and visionary Walter Gold, author of the autobiography, "They Call Me Walter Gold". Rest assured that safety is the utmost priority when touring new energy technology, and Walter's ranger, Charlie is on top of the protocols.*

Charlie: Sorry to butt in on your spiel, Mr. Gold, but you have forgotten to fasten your seatbelt.

Walter: That's why I chose this particular forest ranger, Mayor, this one is always looking out for others. We're all set, so drive on Charlie.

Charlie: Yes Sir!

The electric forest is so lush, so breathtaking, it's hard to believe that it's in the middle of the Sahara. But is this a prototype of an energy source that could change the world or is it a power play? Alex Perry's writing is sleek and wry with dialogue that is marvelously economical, provoking us to wonder (like Yvonne) what happens if "Nature has its own Agenda?" Just sayin'.

Electric Forest by Alex Perry

Cast:

Walter Gold, billionaire, male

Yvonne Stanton, Mayor of Chicago, female

Charlie Adamson, forest ranger, male or female

Synopsis:

The multi-billionaire, Walter Gold, has created the world's first electric forest with trees that have been genetically engineered to generate electricity. Walter wants more of his electric forests to be produced around the world and he has invited Yvonne Stanton, the Mayor of Chicago, for a promotional tour. However, things don't go according to plan...

Scene 1

Walter Gold (the billionaire) and Charlie Adamson (a ranger) greet Yvonne Stanton (the Mayor of Chicago) at the edge of the forest.

Walter: Mayor Stanton, welcome to the Electric Forest!

Yvonne: I don't know what to say...it's beautiful.

Walter: Save your words for the end of the tour, as you Americans like to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

This is Charlie Adamson, one of our forest rangers. Charlie will lead the tour and take care of any personal needs that you may have.

Charlie: I trust that you had a good flight from Chicago, Mayor Stanton.

Yvonne: Yvonne.

Walter: They call me Walter Gold.

Yvonne: Which just so happens to be the title of your autobiography. Walter, your capacity for, as you say in England, "blowing your own trumpet" makes this American blush.

Walter: Perhaps I should have gone into politics?

Yvonne: Touché.

Charlie: Let's get into the jeep.

Walter: Thank you, Charlie. Yvonne, as you have read my biography, you will know very well that I am so much more than a multi-billionaire, I am, as you will see, a visionary!

Charlie: Sorry to butt in on your spiel, Mr Gold, but you have forgotten to fasten your seatbelt.

Walter: That's why I chose this particular forest ranger, Mayor, this one is always looking out for others. We're all set, so drive on Charlie.

Charlie: Yes Sir!

Yvonne: These trees are unlike any I have ever seen. They have such unusual branches and such vibrant colours – they are truly breath-taking!

Walter: And if you didn't know better, you would never believe that we're slap bang in the middle of the Sahara Desert.

Yvonne: How did you accomplish all of this?

Walter: Genetic Engineering. I know that for some people “genetics” is a dirty word. They spout all kinds of crap about “tampering with Nature” and “playing God”.

You know that back in the day, some were afraid of a new-fangled invention called electricity. But where would humanity be without the lightbulb? Cowering in the dark.

Yvonne: I am all for Science, Technology and Progress, Mr Gold, provided it’s done ethically and responsibly.

Walter: And as the leader of a major city, it is your responsibility to ensure that every citizen, every voter, has their need for electric power met in full.

Yvonne: I know what my responsibilities are.

Walter: Relax, I’m not going to lecture you, I’m here to help. Park over there, Charlie, near the silver birch oak.

Charlie: You want me to clip a couple of leaves?

Walter: That’s the idea. Now mayor; how do you go about getting ethical electricity for Chicago?

Yvonne: Obviously, due to climate change, fossil fuels are a no no. And as for nuclear, though Chernobyl style accidents are a rarity, I have concerns about what happens to the hazardous waste.

My own preference is for renewables and that's why my administration has invested heavily in wind farms.

Walter: Those wind turbines are ugly.

Yvonne: Compared to the ravages of global warming, I would say that those silver windmills are beautiful.

Walter: Are they comparable to this forest?

Yvonne: No.

Charlie: Your leaves, Sir. And one for you, Yvonne.

Yvonne: Thank you Charlie.

Walter: What you have in your hand is a bioengineered leaf that I call the "Gold Leaf". This leaf has been designed to convert sunlight, wind and even the rare falling drops of rain in this desert into electricity.

Yvonne: Really?

Charlie: We have underground wires wrapped around the tree routes to collect all of this bio-electricity and to connect it to various national grids.

Yvonne: And just how much energy does this forest generate?

Charlie: Oh, I'd say enough to keep the lights on in Chicago, New York and San Francisco. And as we have succeeded in creating this Eden in the desert, then we can plant electric forests anywhere in the world.

Yvonne: That's amazing!

Walter: I know I'm blowing my own trumpet, but I have to agree.

Yvonne: Just one question though, what happens in Winter?

Walter: I don't understand.

Yvonne: Leaves do fall from trees.

Charlie: Not from these trees, they are evergreen and so they produce electricity all year round.

Yvonne: You appear to have thought of everything.

Walter: That's why I'm a multi-billionaire. We can monitor the production of energy from these trees with our biometers. Show her Charlie?

Charlie: As you can see on the screen, Yvonne, we have divided the forest into different sectors.

The readings show that the flow of power from Sector Alpha is good, Sector Beta is also good and Sector Gamma... Please excuse me, I have a matter to attend to.

Yvonne: I would like to go with you.

Walter: I'm sure it's nothing serious.

Yvonne: Walter Gold, you're the one who wants me to invest millions of tax payer dollars into your project. So, if there's a problem of any kind, then I want to be kept fully informed!

Walter: Very well, we'll all go. Sector Gamma is just a couple of minutes in that direction.

Yvonne: What do you think that the problem is, Charlie?

Charlie: Pesky kids!

Yvonne: Huh?

Walter: Like I said, for some folk “genetic” and “engineering” are dirty words.

Charlie: Protestors, so-called “Natural Forest” activists have chopped down trees and have started fires to disrupt our bio-power station. They don’t realise how dangerous their actions are to themselves and to others.

Yvonne: So, this technology does come with a risk.

Walter: Every technology that Man has ever invented has risks, have you never heard of electrocution!

Charlie: We’re almost there. Oh my God.

Walter: What the hell!

Yvonne: It’s like a Christmas tree decorated with lights.

Charlie: Except those are not artificial, fairy light bulbs...they’re leaves lit up with bio-electricity.

Yvonne: And just look at those vivid colours – red, green and gold.

Charlie: No wonder the output from this sector is down, this tree is using the bio-electricity for its own purposes.

Yvonne: Nature has its own Agenda!

Walter: So, this rogue tree is the problem, Charlie Adamson?

Charlie: Yes Sir.

Walter: Then it has to come down. Pass me the axe.

Charlie: But Sir.

Walter: I gave you a direct order.

Charlie: Here it is.

Walter: Thank you Charlie. I didn't get where I am today by making any concessions to Nature. This will be one small swing for Man, one giant leap for Progress.

He swings the axe.

Aargh!

Walter falls to the ground.

Yvonne: Oh my...

Charlie: He's dead, Walter Gold is dead! Killed by bio-electricity, I never thought it was possible. Yvonne, our tour is over.

Yvonne: I am sorry.

Charlie: The tree of light is flickering.

Yvonne: Perhaps because of the axe-head embedded in the trunk.

Charlie: Don't touch it! Don't go anywhere near it. I'm going to have to fence this whole area off for public safety.

Yvonne: Agreed.

Charlie: And I need you to help me to put this body...Walter, into the back of the jeep.

Yvonne: I will.

Charlie: Thank you, Yvonne.

Yvonne: If it helps, I think that Walter Gold really was a visionary. A forest in the desert, what an achievement!

Charlie: Maybe next time we'll do it better?

A pause.

Yvonne: Oh Charlie, look at the leaves...they are falling from all of the trees in this, our electric forest.

Charlie: The tree of light has stopped flickering; it has gone out. And these leaves no longer shine red, green and gold, they have faded to grey. This is the Fall.

THE END

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...*I have long wanted to write a play about the current Environmental Crisis with observations both about science and politics. I have noticed how billionaires, such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson, have put themselves at the forefront of a new Space Race with a dash of hubris. In addition, I am very aware that new technologies can be imposed on society, by powerful interests, without the consent of the people. This gave me the idea of writing a modern-day version of the Greek Myth of Icarus.*

AUTHOR BIO: Alex lives in the United Kingdom. He is a scientist with a PhD in chemistry. He has extensive experience in theatre including writing, acting, directing, producing and promoting shows. He has participated in the Royal Shakespeare Company Open Stages and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and has taught drama in Romania. During the corona virus pandemic, he has written plays for online performance and film screenplays.