

presents



take it off

BY JAY WEITZ

By virtue of the fact that our thoughts remain our own, every one of us lives a double life of sorts. But Carol, protagonist of MadLab's *Stripped Away*, goes most of us at least one better. By day, she's a sociology professor. By night, she waits tables at a strip club. Somewhere between day and night and in the hope of getting tenure, she squeezes in the time to write her dissertation on "group behavior influencing individual behavior" in the context of such clubs.

For reasons that are never made satisfying, Carol has kept her moonlighting a secret from almost everyone, including her boyfriend Ken and her sister Ellen. It never seems to occur to her that if she would be embarrassed by this revelation, then she's going to live a lifetime of mortification with that dissertation on her resume.

Chalk up this illogic to playwrighting by committee — Amanda Bauer, Jim Graham, Chris Morris and Stephen Woosley are credited as writers — which may also explain several other dead-end disclosures. Two in particular, involving Ken's family legacy and Ellen's relationship history, stick out as distracting

relics of plotlines not followed.

Working with the material she has, Wray Stretch makes Carol a much more grounded and consistent character than her contradictions suggest. Carol's sister Ellen may be written as a ditz, but Michelle Batt gives her a shrewdness that makes us wonder why she's hooked up with the likes of the strip club owner's son Lonnie.

Brendan Michna plays him with a public bravado and private vulnerability that almost make us understand Ellen's choice. Although boyfriend Ken's suspicions about Carol's nocturnal activities are understandable, the playwrights don't make it easy for Rob Stretch to gain much sympathy in the way he deals with it.

There's a salvageable and tighter play lurking somewhere within *Stripped Away*. Given that title, MadLab should also have a few clues about how the salvage work needs to begin.

"STRIPPED AWAY"

WHERE: MadLab,
Downtown

WHEN: 8 p.m. Fridays and
Saturdays, through Aug. 30

WEB: madlab.net

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