

Acting Edition

SEA OF TERROR

BY **SAM CATLIN**

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SEA OF TERROR premiered at the Hudson Theatre Mainstage, Los Angeles, on July 27, 2023, produced by Joanna Colbert and Julie Dretzin. It was directed by Sam Catlin, the lighting design was by Steve Pope, the sound design was by Alysha Grace Bermudez, and the stage manager was Ellora Venkat. The cast was as follows:

ALICE	Julie Dretzin
BEN	John Ales
DANNY	Paul Schulze
DORIS	Amy Scribner

CHARACTERS

ALICE

BEN

DANNY

DORIS

SEA OF TERROR

SCENE ONE

“Scary music” comes in as—

The lights come halfway up on the living room of a modest, suburban home.

An upstage center door leads into the kitchen. A stage left door leads to a hallway. A stage right door leads to a bedroom. There is also a window downstage right.

Downstage, two couches are set around a coffee table.

Ben, a man wearing khakis, a dress shirt, and clean sneakers, half lies/lounges on a couch watching an offstage TV.

After a moment, Alice enters wearing a little sweater over a pretty dress and holding a tray of cocktail snacks.

She comes and goes arranging the snacks on the table.

At one point, Ben rises and crosses to the downstage “window” and looks out.

After several beats of Alice setting up, the lights come up full, the music cuts out, and—

ALICE. Ready?

Ben doesn’t respond.

After a moment of consideration...Alice rearranges the snacks into a different configuration.

Satisfied, she turns and heads back upstage.

(As she exits.) Your jacket’s hanging on the thing.

Alice exits.

(Offstage.) Honey?

Ben doesn’t respond.

(Offstage.) Hon?

Ben doesn't respond.

(Offstage.) Honey?

Ben rolls his eyes, stands, and exits stage right.

Ben reenters, putting on a sport coat. He returns to his spot on the couch. He takes a moment to consider the spread that Alice has laid out on the table before he resumes watching TV. Alice reenters and pauses upstage, uneasy.

I've lost the Christopher Cross CD.

Beat.

Baby? I can't find the Christopher Cross.

BEN. No?

ALICE. I know; I thought it would be nice.

BEN. It would be nice.

ALICE. (Noticing him.) What's wrong?

BEN. Nothing.

Alice considers her husband a moment before deciding to reach out with some "interested" conversation—

ALICE. (Referring to the TV.) What's that?

BEN. The John Deere Senior Classic.

She watches.

ALICE. Is that golf?

BEN. Yes.

She watches.

ALICE. Where's that man walking?

BEN. He's walking to hit his ball.

She watches.

ALICE. Again?

BEN. (Snaps.) Yes.

ALICE. What's wrong?

BEN. Nothing. You're just—you're talking a lot.

ALICE. And you're not.

BEN. Okay, so?

ALICE. So nothing. (*Then.*) So fine.

*Alice rises, crosses to the window, and “pulls back” the curtain.
She stands looking out for a long moment. Ben sits up.*

BEN. What?

ALICE. I thought I heard a car door. (*Releasing the curtain.*) Not yet. (*Turns to exit.*) Soon though.

Alice exits.

Ben stands and goes to look out the window himself.

As he looks outside we begin to build in sounds of an “outside world.” Cars honking, children playing, planes flying overhead, the din of a crowd, etc. The sounds begin to build and seem about to turn into something almost sinister, when—

(*Offstage.*) Oh no!

BEN. (*Startled.*) What?! What happened?

Alice reenters.

ALICE. I think I’ve lost it.

BEN. You haven’t lost it.

ALICE. Well, I don’t know where it went.

BEN. Alright, so, okay.

Ben keeps his cool and tries to problem solve.

If you can’t find the, uh...?

ALICE. Christopher Cross.

BEN. ...CD. Then how about some other one?

ALICE. Like what?

BEN. Like anything. Ambrosia? Gordon Lightfoot? How about the guy with the—that guy who started wearing those weird dresses?

ALICE. ...Cat Stevens?

BEN. Right? So good with the...

A moment as Ben attempts to hum a song he doesn’t know from an artist he can’t remember.

ALICE. (*Brightening a little.*) You think so?

BEN. (*His most reassuring.*) I really do.

Small beat.

ALICE. (*Frowns.*) I can't believe I lost the Christopher Cross.

BEN. (*Snaps suddenly.*) Well you did, Alice! You did! You lost it! It's gone, there's nothing we can do, so just, you need to just...

Ben can't think of how to complete the thought so he returns to the couch.

ALICE. I thought you were going to try and not get so nervous tonight?

BEN. I'm not nervous. (*"What about you?"*) I'm nervous?

Alice sits on the couch.

ALICE. Sweetheart we talked about this, remember? People are coming over for a drink and I love you. That's it. That's the beginning and the end of the big scary thing. Okay?

BEN. I said I'm not nervous.

ALICE. Good.

BEN. But it's not so crazy of me to have certain apprehensions.

ALICE. Did I just say that you were crazy?

BEN. No.

ALICE. Did you just say that I was crazy?

BEN. N-no.

ALICE. Has anyone ever said to anyone else that they were crazy?

BEN. (*A bit confused.*) W-what—?

ALICE. (*Overlap, with optimism.*) Life is a relentless sea of terror and peril. But you and I see this storm and are throwing up a brave sail. And tonight we're going to see what foreign beach we're thrown upon. (*Then.*) I am so proud of us.

BEN. I swear to gosh: if he starts teasing me about my hair.

ALICE. I know.

BEN. I will put my foot down so fast.

ALICE. Great! You should! You would have every right. (*Then.*) Although, I think it'll be fine. No one wants a repeat of last time.

Alice glances uneasily at the TV.

You'll turn that off soon.

She stands and moves to exit upstage center.

(*Noticing.*) That blazer looks wonderful on you, are those the penny loafers we bought you?

Ben shrugs.

Ben.

BEN. They don't fit.

ALICE. They don't fit?

BEN. The heels are tight.

ALICE. Now, hold on a minute: Your brand-new English Manners penny loafers that we just spent one hundred and twenty-five dollars on at Florsheim don't fit? The "heels are tight" so you're not wearing them? (*Then.*) This is news to me.

BEN. Well, now you're all caught up.

ALICE. (*Threatening.*) I'd put those shoes on if I were you.

BEN. No.

ALICE. I'd put those shoes on if I were you.

BEN. No.

ALICE. Go put on those shoes.

BEN. No.

ALICE. Go put those shoes on.

BEN. No.

ALICE. They're coming over.

BEN. So?

ALICE. "So?" She'll see you. She'll see you in those sneakers.

BEN. So?

ALICE. So she won't like them. She won't like them one bit.

BEN. She's not going to care.

ALICE. Oh, she'll care. Don't you worry about that. She'll care plenty.

BEN. What's that supposed to mean?

ALICE. It means *watch out.* (*Pleading.*) Don't you want to make an impression?

BEN. I'll make an impression!

ALICE. In those itty-bitty little gym jumpers? How are you going to make an impression?

BEN. I'll put my foot down, okay? I'll put my foot down and make an impression with my foot, if I have to. (*Had enough.*) Now, that's it about the shoes! End of discussion. You're just, you're being really weird and paranoid, Alice.

ALICE. I hope so.

Alice looks out the downstage window.

I hope I'm not right about anything I'm thinking.

BEN. I'm telling you. The loafers don't matter. They're just dropping by. We'll sit down and talk for an hour or so and then they'll go and leave us alone.

She joins him on the couch.

ALICE. I don't know.

BEN. We'll be fine. We'll "rise to the occasion," right? Isn't that what you always say?

ALICE. I'm sorry. I have a tendency to get caught up in the...

BEN. I know.

ALICE. I want everything to be, just exactly...

BEN. I know.

ALICE. But sometimes it isn't and that's life so get over it.

BEN. Exactly.

Ben double checks to make sure she's off this topic before he turns the TV back on.

Alice's attention slowly drifts back to the sneakers.

ALICE. I can't believe those shoes don't fit.

BEN. I know. The heels were a little pinchy.

ALICE. (*Sympathetic.*) Aw. Why didn't you say something?

BEN. I did say something.

ALICE. When?

BEN. At the store.

ALICE. You did?

BEN. Yeah.

ALICE. At the shoe store?

BEN. Yeah.

ALICE. That the heels were?

BEN. So pinchy. Like a fist with razors.

ALICE. Sweetheart.

Again, her attention slowly returns to his sneakers.

You never said those shoes—

BEN. *(Overlapping.)* Yes, I did!

ALICE. When?!

BEN. *(Repeats.)* At the store.

(Then.) I was sitting on the bench by the mirror next to the pole. You were standing by the rack with those hiking sneakers that you kept saying you liked. I put the loafers on and you said how much you liked the cable stitching on the sides and you asked me what I thought about the tassels, and I said I liked them fine.

(To be clear.) I said I liked the *tassels* fine, Alice.

(Then.) But when I stood up and walked around in them for a while and the salesman guy asked me how they felt, I said, “They’re a little tight in the heel. The heels are a little tight.” They were so uncomfortable, I actually began to consider the very real possibility of moving up to size elevens. But then, all of a sudden, that lady started screaming at her son because his feet stank and we got distracted when all hell started to break loose.

ALICE. You mean when you got nervous about those little children?

BEN. *(Defensive.)* I didn’t get “nervous.” And they weren’t “little children,” Alice. They were wilding teenagers. Crowding around, watching the lady yell, thinking it was so funny. I had no idea what was going to happen next. I was concerned for you and lost track of the loafers in all the confusion.

ALICE. You waited in the car while I put the shoes on my credit card.

BEN. Alice, I am seriously warning you to stop talking about my shoes.

ALICE. You never said anything about the heels being—

BEN. *(Talking over her.)* Alice, I am seriously warning you—

ALICE. I’m seriously warning YOU!

BEN. Alice, I swear to god: if you don’t stop talking about those penny loafers, I am really going to not like it.

ALICE. (*Mocking.*) You're "really going to not like it"?

BEN. (*Warning.*) Alice.

ALICE. (*Mimicking.*) Ben.

BEN. (*Another warning.*) Alice.

ALICE. (*Mimicking.*) Ben.

BEN. (*A really big warning.*) **ALICE.**

She stands to leave.

ALICE. (*Disgusted.*) Ugh, give me a break.

Ben stands too.

BEN. I will give you a bad break if you're not careful.

ALICE. No you won't. You know why, Ben? Because you never do anything.

Alice exits upstage right. Ben's head starts to bob, and then, softly like a lullaby to himself, he sings a few lyrics from a hip-hop song like LL Cool J's "Mama Said Knock You Out."

Ben goes to the downstage right window. And again those "outside" sounds begins to play. But only a short moment before the moment is interrupted as—

Alice reenters.

I so hope they like the cheese poppers.

Alice crosses and exits into the kitchen.

Ben finds his way back to the couch.

Alice reenters.

She crosses downstage and sits on the arm of the couch.

She watches.

(*Referring to the TV.*) What's this?

BEN. (*sulking.*) Today's Canadian Castles.

ALICE. Ben: I'm sorry.

Ben doesn't respond.

I'm sorry I said you don't do anything.

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Ben doesn't respond.

Ben—

BEN. I'm wearing my sneakers.

ALICE. Sweetheart, you can wear whatever you want.

BEN. I'm wearing these.

ALICE. Fine. *(Then.)* Great.

Alice turns away, checks herself in the stage right mirror.

BEN. *(Mutters pointedly.)* Sorry we all can't look as good as you.

ALICE. *(Wheels around.)* What did you just say?

BEN. I said, "Sorry we all can't—"

ALICE. I heard you. *(Self-conscious, defensive.)* This is a sweater and a dress, Ben. A dress and a sweater.

BEN. Fine.

ALICE. If you've got something on your mind let's hear it.

Ben hesitates.

Go on, let's get it out there. Let's talk about it.

Ben takes a deep sigh.

BEN. Okay, well—

ALICE. *(Immediately cuts him off.)* Forget it.

Alice exits upstage center.

She returns, dialing a phone.

BEN. What are you doing?

ALICE. I thought we were going to try and rise to the occasion but I guess not. They're going to be disappointed.

BEN. *(Alarmed.)* You're calling them?

ALICE. I'm not going to subject them to a man not willing to look his best.

BEN. What are you going to say, Alice? *(Then.)* What *the heck* are you going to say?

ALICE. I'm going to say they shouldn't come. *(Finally hangs up the phone.)* No answer.

BEN. They're on their way.

Alice stifles a sob as she exits stage right.

(Calls after her.) There wasn't anything you could've said.

Ben looks for some way to be helpful.

He turns off the television.

(Calls out.) I turned the TV off.

Ben contemplates the tray a moment.

(Musing.) "Got yer carrots, got yer celery sticks."

Calling out to Alice again—

Thinking we should put out some crackers?

Alice suddenly bursts into the room, furious.

ALICE. Did you go to King Kullen today?

BEN. What?

ALICE. *(Teeth clenched.)* Did you? Go to? King Kullen?

Ben realizes he may be in trouble here.

BEN. *(Attempt at "so what?" defiance.)* I got some frozen pizzas.

ALICE. You got some frozen pizzas at King Kullen? And did you get the toilet scrubby?

BEN. The—?

ALICE. The thing—the brush—for the bathroom.

BEN. No.

ALICE. Do you have some kind of death wish or something?

BEN. I forgot they had those there!

ALICE. What are you talking about? It's a superstore.

BEN. I know!

ALICE. If you can't get a toilet scrubby at a twenty-two-aisle King Kullen superstore, where the hell do you think you're going to get it?

BEN. I don't know!

ALICE. What is wrong with you? I must have told you fourteen times they had scrubbies there. *What the hell is wrong with you?!*

BEN. I got lost, okay? I got lost and I couldn't find anything. I don't know the last time you went to King Kullen on a Sunday but, it has gotten really crowded. Everyone's stacked on top of one another. Like goats. Like animals. And they moved the freezers around

somehow and changed the cereal section so I didn't know where I was half the time. I got turned around, I couldn't find the front checkouts, I couldn't see over all the heads. I kept walking around and ending up in a corner by men wrapping meat in brown paper. I'm sorry but I couldn't stay to look for housewares. I had to get out of there! I'll try to get it tomorrow.

ALICE. "Tomorrow"? They're on their way.

BEN. (*Outrage.*) So what?! So *what* they're on their way?! I'm not going to let them push us around this time! We've been doing fine all this time without the Christopher Cross and the penny loafers and we've been doing fine without that thing for the toilet so that is just going to have to do.

(*Outrage dissipating.*) And if that doesn't do, if that isn't good enough for them well then so be it. We'll just try and remember to keep the lid down.

ALICE. "Keep the—"?

BEN. The top of the seat looks fine. I can double-check but, I'm pretty sure it's clean on top. We'll just keep the lid down.

ALICE. She'll lift it up! She's going to lift it up! (*Then.*) He'll laugh and smile and talk to us about some new movie from Denmark while she sneaks off to the bathroom...

BEN. (*Talking over, "don't say it."*) Alice—

ALICE. ...locks the door, lifts the lid...

BEN. Alice, I mean it—

ALICE. ...and with big white eyes, kneels down...

BEN. Alice—!

ALICE. ...and drinks.

BEN. There's no reason to think that that's what she was—

ALICE. What was it then, Ben? What was that noise?

BEN. She said she was bulimic.

ALICE. That's not the sound we heard and you know it.

BEN. We don't know that that—

ALICE. I KNOW WE NEED THAT SCRUBBY.

BEN. (*Angry, determined.*) Okay fine.

Ben exits upstage center.

Alice crosses and stands outside the kitchen door.

ALICE. *(Looking into the kitchen.)* What are you doing?

Ben reappears holding a small wooden dish brush.

What are you doing with that?

Ben starts to cross stage left but Alice blocks his way.

Ben, answer me!

BEN. I'm going to the bathroom!

ALICE. Not with that dish utensil you aren't!

BEN. It's a stupid brush!

ALICE. It's a nineteen-dollar Merlin Brothers dish utensil Ben—and it's not going anywhere near that toilet.

BEN. Okay then.

Ben tries to snap the brush handle in two.

Alice tries to stop him.

ALICE. Ben! Ben stop that! Don't break it! Ben!

There's a scuffle, but soon Ben is able to turn away from her. He struggles intensely trying to break the little brush. But the handle's too small for him to get enough leverage.

BEN. ArrHHHHH!!!!

Ben bellows in rage as the effort drives him to his knees.

(Losing steam.) Guruhhhh...!!! unnnh....!!!

Finally, he gives up and...

ALICE. Okay... Why don't we just...?

...gives Alice the brush. She exits.

*Ben is sagging and needs Cool J to get him to his feet. In a voiceover, he sings a few lines from the hip-hop song from earlier.**

Ben momentarily goes into the bathroom before reemerging.

(Calling out, reassuring "like I said.") The top of the seat looks fine.

No response.

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Ben goes to the couch and turns on the TV.

Eventually he half reclines into his “lounge.”

Alice reenters, notes Ben, and, with some reluctance, comes to sit on the arm of the couch.

ALICE. What’s this?

BEN. Discovery Channel. *The Siege of Leningrad.*

ALICE. Oh, right. (*Then.*) That’s...?

BEN. World War Two.

A beat as Alice tries to watch.

ALICE. (*Flat.*) This is like...watching sand grow.

BEN. What?

ALICE. Nothing’s happening, Ben.

BEN. Seriously?

ALICE. (*Overlapping.*) Really ever, really.

BEN. (*Overlapping.*) It’s the largest military encirclement of all time.

ALICE. (*Overlapping.*) No, that’s not—

BEN. (*Overlapping.*) The city’s surrounded. They’re eating horses to survive.

ALICE. (*Overlapping.*) That’s not what I’m saying—

BEN. (*Overlapping.*) Pretty soon they’ll start eating each other.

ALICE. (*Cutting through.*) Here! I meant here! The sand is here!

BEN. What—?

ALICE. Nothing’s happening! Nothing’s happening to us!

BEN. Hey, hey—

ALICE. (*Losing it.*) THE SAND IS HERE! THE SAND IS EVERYWHERE! The ROOM is filling up with SAND! The carpet, Ben! The couch! The windows! We’re getting BURIED by the sand!

Ben is confused and spooked by her outburst.

BEN. Wait, WHAT? What are you talking about? There’s no sand, Alice! NO SAND! NO SAND!

ALICE. I—I—I just—

BEN. NO SAND!

Her episode is over. Alice sits back down on the couch.

ALICE. I know. I'm sorry. I—

Ben is still in crisis mode—

BEN. (*Insisting.*) NO SAND!

ALICE. Okay, I'm okay. I'm sorry.

BEN. It's alright.

Ben starts to catch his breath now—

(*Mocking.*) “The room's filling up with sand.”

Ben chuckles at the absurdity.

Oh my god, that was so nuts.

ALICE. (*Flat.*) It was an analogy.

BEN. (*Soothing.*) No, I know, sweetheart, I know. It's over. You're fine now.

Alice sniffs.

ALICE. Ben?

BEN. Yes, sweetheart?

ALICE. You won't be mean to me tonight, will you?

Ben looks at her.

BEN. Mean to you? Of course not. When am I mean to you?

ALICE. No, you're not.

BEN. Hold on now, tell me. I want to know when you think I'm being mean.

ALICE. I don't think that. I was just being—you know—I was just worrying.

BEN. Of course. (*Sincere.*) Because—and this might be a corny thing to say but, I don't think I ever *could* be mean to you, you know? I just love you too much.

ALICE. Yeah. (*Then.*) I think what I was talking about is that in certain situations you can get nervous or uncomfortable and sometimes you get frustrated and take it out on me because you know I won't fight back.

Ben lets go of her.

BEN. Wow.

ALICE. Only sometimes.

BEN. (*Defensive.*) No. That's how you feel.

ALICE. You know what I'm talking about though, right?

BEN. Well, I speak English, Alice. I know what "mean" means.

ALICE. Ben—

BEN. I guess all I can say in my defense is that I really, really think you're wrong about that and—

ALICE. Look, I didn't say—

BEN. —and also, please forgive me, but you're not exactly one to talk, are you Alice? So why don't we just leave it at that.

ALICE. What does that mean? You think I'm mean to you?

Ben isn't exactly sure what he meant, so he goes on the offensive. He reverts to shouting and "meanness."

BEN. So wait a second, first, you said I don't do anything but now, you're saying all I do is run around being mean all the time. I'm confused. Which is it?

ALICE. I didn't say all you did was run around—

BEN. No, I'm curious. I want to know: is it I don't *do anything*? Or is it that I'm *mean*?

ALICE. Ben, you're overreacting—

BEN. (*Talking over her.*) I want to understand your logic so tell me: mean or nothing? Am I nothing or am I mean?

ALICE. You alternate!

BEN. (*Stung.*) That's fine. Okay. Now I know.

He returns to the TV.

ALICE. I am not going to apologize!

She storms out into the kitchen. Sound of Alice slamming cabinet doors, banging silverware, etc.

Alice reappears, crosses downstage, and sits on the arm of the couch.

I'm sorry.

Ben turns off the TV.

BEN. (*Guilty.*) It's not that... I'm not trying to be mean.

ALICE. I know.

BEN. I'm sorry.

ALICE. I'm sorry, too.

Beat.

Suddenly—

(Happy, laughing.) What's wrong with us?!

BEN. What do you mean?

ALICE. I mean this happens every time they come over. We get anxious and paranoid and then we start fighting and it's just a complete waste of time.

Alice's optimism is infectious.

BEN. I know! It's crazy.

ALICE. This is what people do. Every now and then you have other people over.

BEN. It's true.

ALICE. And of course it's going to be scary not knowing what's going to happen, but you know what? And I really mean this: it's worth it.

BEN. It usually turns out fine anyways.

ALICE. They're dropping by. That's it. We sit around. We talk. We drink some wine.

BEN. We listen to how "great" everything is going.

ALICE. She doesn't always say things are "great."

BEN. No, I know. *(Can't think of anything.)* She's just...she's just...

ALICE. And maybe they are doing great? We're doing pretty good too, you know, right?

BEN. Yeah, no, definitely: it'll be good.

ALICE. I'm going to be really upbeat and friendly.

BEN. And beautiful.

ALICE. Thank you sweetheart. *(Then.)* I'll be beautiful and you'll be handsome and funny and we have jalapeño poppers and fresh-ground Easter Blend if people want it, and if, at some point, things start to get out of hand, you'll immediately deal with it.

BEN. Great.

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