

Coma chameleon in 'Hospital 2008'

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A scene from 'Hospital 2008.'

A catastrophic tunnel collapse. A man in a coma. A medical staff at the end of their resources.

It may sound like an episode of "ER," but the story is that of another serial drama, the [Axis Theater Company's](#) "Hospital 2008."

The episodic play is now in its ninth incarnation. Every year, the company produces the segmented story of a comatose character - played by actor [Brian Barnhart](#) from year to year - as he lives out his final interior moments. The play runs in four episodes, each about 35 minutes long and self-contained enough that new audience members can easily catch up (this week marks the kickoff for episode two). In fact, the audience need not catch all four episodes - but many do.

"Hospital' has a big following," says Axis artistic director [Randy Sharp](#). "We missed a year because we made a feature movie and people were calling and calling. A lot of people do try to catch all four episodes."

The series had what Sharp calls a "rough start" in 1997, and gradually found its audience. Each version has focused on a different disaster.

"Every year he goes into the coma a different way," says Sharp of the central character. "One year he was frozen. One year he was murdered. One year he drowned. One year he was in a fire. One year he had bird flu. And this year he's in the collapse of Water Tunnel Number 3, which is the huge public works project in [New York](#) right now."

The audience is privy to the patient's final musings, which range from scary to hilarious and back again. Sharp, 45, has been writing what she calls the "framework" of the play since it began. The details of the story and the elaborate set and video design are filled in by [Axis Company](#) members.

"This year we had three episodes ready prior to the first rehearsal," Sharp says of the process. "That's a first. Normally I'd be writing the frame-work for episode two in the middle of episode one."

Still, the challenge of the production is what keeps things interesting. "It makes you produce smart work because you have to change the play every two weeks," says Sharp. "It's kind of an exercise in firing on all cylinders for us."

"Hospital 2008" is at 1 Sheridan Square, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., \$12. www.axiscompany.org.