

How to hold an audience's attention

SINCE he became a household name as Bert Lynch in *Z Cars*, James Ellis has been part of the theatrical establishment. Chiswick's fringe Theatre at The Tabard pulled off a coup by persuading him to appear in *The Bedsit*, an hour-long thriller by a young author, Paul Sellar, which had its Press night last Thursday.

The 26-year old playwright, currently under commission by the National Theatre, certainly knows how to hold an audience's attention.

From the opening when Ellis's lonely fugitive sets the mood as he contemplates a bloodspoor painting hanging in his miserable London lodgings, he keeps the tension mounting.

The piece is punctuated by some haunting Irish folksongs movingly sung by Polly Bowles and Phillip Hoffman, and chilling performances by

Andrew Maclean and Cliff Hylands-Dempster as the young terrorists. They make you fear for your skin even in the safety of your tip-up seat.

The idea of hunter and hunted is well explored and there are clever twists and an overlay of poetic surrealism.

James Ellis is both vulnerable and enigmatic as the lonely malefactor who proves more cunning than his ruthless oppressors and Mike Friend's slick direction ensures the tale builds to an ingenious denouement.

Sellar has been heralded as a writer of great originality and potential and *The Bedsit* lives up to this promise. It could easily be expanded into a full evening's entertainment as part of a contrasting double bill.

Malcolm Richards