By Josh Austin

Amster knows reading the book can be daunting. “At best, it’s a leisurely read. At medium, it’s a tolerable read, and at worst, it’s an interminable read,” said Amster. “You want to throw the book across the room if he tells you one more thing about whaling. Get back to the story.”

Audiences who have not read the book will not be lost, assured Amster.

The play focuses on the revenge-bound Captain Ahab in the mid-19th century. Losing his leg to the whale, Ahab has sworn to kill the monster. The show centers around the tragic fate Ahab set for himself and his crew.

“This is a wonderful story about a man versus nature,” he said. “The story of a man who thinks he can outlive nature, who considers himself one of the gods who tempers his harpoon in the name of the devil. He’s defying nature, and he’s setting himself up to lose.”

“Moby Dick” opened in New York City in 2003. It was the first off-off-Broadway show to be nominated for a Drama Desk Award. The show was praised for its bare stage and period costumes, which will be reflected in Stage’s production.

“We don’t have a cast of 30; we don’t have the boat. We have a kind of bare, not bare bones, but very stripped-down, production,” said Amster.

The cast of nine will portray the ship’s crew, with some actors doing double duty as other characters.

To eliminate the whaling jargon and condense the novel’s 135 chapters, radix used 18 authentic sea chants to propel the story forward.

**THE DETAILS**

What: “Moby Dick,” playwright Julian Rad’s stage adaptation of Herman Melville’s 1851 novel.

When: 7:30 p.m. today, 8 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Oct. 19, 20, 26, 27, Nov. 2 and 3; 3 p.m. Saturday and Oct. 20, 27 and Nov. 3; 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Oct. 18, 25, 30, 31; 2 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 21, 24, 28 and 7 p.m. Oct. 28.

Where: Archbold Theatre, Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St., Syracuse. Tickets: $30 to $51.

Information: 433-3275 or suareastage.org.

Note: The Onondaga Historical Association has organized an exhibition in conjunction with the staging of “Moby Dick” at Syracuse Stage. The lobby exhibit, “Discovering Hidden Stories of Syracuse ... Tied to American Whaling,” features the Syracuse of the early 1850s, coinciding with the time of the story. The exhibit covers the history of the use of whale oil in Syracuse homes and industry; the story of fugitive slave Enoch Reed, with ties to Syracuse, the Jerry Rescue (a former slave freed from a Syracuse prison) and Melville; and the tragic tale of Burr Burton, a young whaler from Syracuse.
Read the novel with celebrities

Organizers of the Moby Dick Big Read initiative describe Herman Melville’s “Moby Dick” as the great American novel. “But it is also the great unread American novel.”

So they are doing their part to remedy the situation. Actors, writers and directors like Tilda Swinton, Stephen Fry and John Waters are lending their voices to the effort.

For 135 days, a new, narrated chapter of Melville’s saga will be posted online daily. Swinton kicked off the project Sept. 16. Others have signed on, including British Prime Minister David Cameron, teachers, authors, artists and everyday people to narrate the 1851 novel.

Each chapter is available as a free download on the website, mobydickebigread.com.