

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Terry Pratchett's
MEN AT ARMS
The Play

adapted for the stage by
Stephen Briggs

'Alle Thee Dysk's a Stage'

About the Book

Terry Pratchett's MEN AT ARMS

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Scarcely a year on from the events of *Guards! Guards!*, the Ankh-Morpork City Night Watch find their services are once more needed to tackle a threat to their city. A threat at least as deadly as a 60-foot dragon, but mechanical and heartless to boot. It kills without compunction. It is the first gun on the Discworld.

The original Watch - Captain Vimes, Sergeant Colon, Corporal Carrot and Corporal Nobbs - are joined by some new recruits, selected to reflect the city's ethnic make-up - Lance-constables Cuddy (a dwarf), Detritus (a troll) and Angua (a w..., well, best to find out for yourself).

Stephen Briggs has been involved in amateur dramatics for over 25 years and he assures us that the play can be staged without needing the budget of *Industrial Light and Magic*. Not only that, but the cast should still be able to be in the pub well before closing time.

Oh, and a word of advice omitted from the play text:

'Learn the words'

Havelock, Lord Vetinari

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CORGI BOOKS

INTRODUCING DISCWORLD

The Discworld series is a continuous history of a world not totally unlike our own, except that it is a flat disc carried on the backs of four elephants astride a giant turtle floating through space, and that it is peopled by, among others, wizards, dwarves, soldiers, thieves, beggars, vampires and witches. Within the history of Discworld there are many individual stories, which can be enjoyed in any order. But reading them in the sequence in which they were written can increase your enjoyment through the accumulation of all the fine detail that contributes to the teeming imaginative complexity of this brilliantly conceived world.

INTRODUCTION

Having staged *Guards! Guards!* in 1993, it was of course logical to follow it up with *Guards! Guards! 2 (Men at Arms)* the following year.

We already had, amongst the Studio Theatre Club, some pretty close matches for Captain Vimes, Corporal Nobbs and Sergeant Colon. Also, *Men at Arms* gave the Patrician a much more important rôle (no prizes for guessing who played *that* part!).

Like *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms* does not offer many opportunities for female actors – three, with Angua, Lady Ramkin and our Footnote. Again, there are smaller rôles that may be played by either sex. Apart from the need for a troll and a talking gargoyle, our biggest problem (no joke intended) was the dwarf, Cuddy. In the event, we compromised and had him/her played by a girl (after all, sex is pretty vague when it comes to dwarfs!).

As readers of the earlier play texts will know, these were all premièred in Abingdon's tiny, medieval, Unicorn Theatre. The adaptations were written with the restrictions of the building, and the numbers of players I expected to have at my disposal, in mind. Really complicated scenic effects were virtually impossible. Anyone thinking of staging a Discworld play can be as imaginative as they like – call upon the might of Industrial Light & Magic, if it's within their budget. But *Men at Arms* can be staged with a very modest outlay on special effects and the notes that accompany the text are intended to be a guide for those, like us, with limited budgets. Bigger groups, with teams of experts on hand, can let their imaginations run wild!

The script as it appears here is now tried and tested, but it isn't the *only* way to adapt the book. Other groups might make different choices. Some might have many more people available than we did, and they might want to add in 'crowd' scenes. What is important, though, is to ensure that a scene left in at one point in the play doesn't rely for part of its humour or logic on a scene you've cut elsewhere - or that a scene you've added as a show-stopper doesn't end up just slowing it down instead!

In short, though, our experience and that of other groups is that it pays to work hard on getting the costumes and lighting right, and to keep the scenery to little more than, perhaps, a few changes of level. There's room for all sorts of ideas here. The Discworld, as it says in the books, is your mollusc.

Characterisation

Within the constraints of what is known and vital about each character, there is still room for flexibility of interpretation. With the main rôles, though, you have to recognise that your audiences will expect them to look as much like the book descriptions as possible. However, most drama clubs don't have a vast range from which to choose and it's the acting that's more important than the look of the player when it comes down to it!

The Footnote

When we staged *Mort*, we'd employed the device of allowing characters to step out of the play to comment on/advance the action and, in some cases, to help to cover for scene changes. By the time I came to adapt *Guards! Guards!* the idea of using Terry's own literary device - the footnote - had been placed in my mind. This allowed us to include some good gags that would have been difficult to

work into characters' dialogue and also, on occasion, to introduce a character to the audience.

Our Footnote was female. She wore tights, shoes decorated with spangly asterisks and a long white T-shirt bearing the legend -

****footnote***

She carried a long black pole surmounted by a disc with an asterisk painted on it. Attached to the pole was a klaxon. Whenever the Footnote needed to make an announcement, she would sound the klaxon; the action on stage would freeze and she would then walk in, say her piece, re-sound the klaxon to re-start the action and depart. It worked well, and we employed the same device the following year in *Men at Arms*.

Death

On the Discworld he is a seven-foot tall skeleton of polished bone, in whose eye sockets there are tiny points of light (usually blue). He normally wears a robe apparently woven of absolute darkness - and sometimes also a riding cloak fastened with a silver brooch. He smells, not unpleasantly, of the air in old, forgotten rooms.

His scythe looks normal enough, except for the blade: it is so thin you can see through it, a pale blue shimmer that could slice flame and chop sound. The sword has the same ice-blue, shadow-thin blade, of the extreme thinness necessary to separate body from soul.

Having staged *Mort* a couple of years previously, we were fortunate in having 'invested' in a Death costume which was then available to do guest appearances in later shows. We had had Death's head-mask and gloves, robes and weapons made for us to our design by a firm called Creative Madness (now run as Spyder's FX, 2D Veale Close, Hatherlea, Okehampton, Devon). His eyes glowed blue, and

the clear perspex blades of his sword and scythe - 'sharp' enough to see through!

Vimes

Captain of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch. Badge No. 177. An upright and honest man whose appointment to the Night Watch - regarded by all sensible people as a completely useless appendage to the running of the city - may have been the cause of his drinking problem. But it has also been suggested that he is in fact naturally more sober than other people. A state of acute sobriety is not one in which a man would like to view the society of Ankh-Morpork and he naturally sought to ameliorate this with a drink or five, and got the number wrong.

It is known that he was born in the Shades and would have joined the Watch shortly after leaving school if he had ever gone to school. Vimes never got the hang of ambition and worked his way sideways rather than up, and his promotion to Captain was simply the result of the sheer unthinkability of promoting any other watchman.

By his own account, he is a skinny, unshaven collection of bad habits marinated in alcohol. He is morose, cynical and ridiculously - and to his own embarrassment - soft-hearted in certain circumstances. He is almost certainly one of Nature's policemen; it has been said of him that his soul burns to arrest the Creator of the universe for getting it wrong.

He loathes kings, and hates undead and Assassins. He is also unashamedly speciesist - he deeply dislikes trolls and dwarfs, but in an almost proprietorial way, so that he has risked his life and badge to defend them merely so that he can continue to dislike them. He hates the city in the same way; it's his to hate.

Carrot

(Carrot Ironfoundersson). A dwarf (by adoption). His adoptive dwarf parents found him in the woods as a toddler, wandering near the bodies of his real parents, who had been victims of a bandit attack. Also in the wreckage of the cart was a sword, and a ring that was very similar to one recorded as having once been a part of the royal jewellery of Ankh.

He is six feet six inches tall with a big, honest forehead, mighty neck and impressively pink skin, due to scrubbing. He became known as Carrot not because of his red hair, kept short for reasons of hygiene, but because of his shape – the kind of tapering shape a boy gets through clean living, healthy eating and good mountain air in huge lungfuls. When Carrot flexes his muscles, other muscles have to move out of the way first. He has a punch which even trolls have learned to respect. He walks with a habitual stoop, which comes of being two metres tall but living with dwarfs. Like all dwarfs, when away from home he writes at least once a week.

His adoptive parents, embarrassed at his size and the fact that he had reached puberty at what, in dwarf terms, is about playgroup age, realised that he needed to be among his own kind. They arranged for him to join the Night Watch in Ankh-Morpork because, they had been told, it would make a man of him.

Being very literal-minded is a dwarfish trait. It is one which Carrot shares. In the whole of his life (prior to his arrival in Ankh-Morpork) no-one ever really lied to him or gave him an instruction that he wasn't meant to take literally. He is direct, honest, good-natured and honourable in all his dealings. Despite a full year in the Watch he still thinks everyone is decent underneath and would get along just fine if only they made the effort. He is genuinely, almost supernaturally likeable. And he is astonishingly simple – which is not at all the same as 'stupid'. It is just that he sees the world shorn of all the little lies and

prevarications that other people erect in order to sleep at night.

After a few initial setbacks, Carrot has had an exemplary career as a policeman, often helped by the fact that people confuse his simplicity with idiocy.

He has a crown-shaped birthmark at the top of his left arm. Coupled with his sword, his charisma, his natural leadership, and his deep and almost embarrassing love of Ankh-Morpork, this rather suggests that he is the long-lost rightful heir to the throne of the city.

He seriously believes that to be a policeman is to be the guardian of civilisation. He is, in fact, very happy in his job.

Colon

Sergeant in the Ankh-Morpork City Watch. Age believed to be about sixty. A fat man with a huge, red face like a harvest moon. He is married with three grown-up children, and some grand-children. He likes the peace and quiet of the night; he owes thirty years of happy marriage to the fact that Mrs Colon works all day gutting fish and he works all night.

Fred Colon used to be in an army (city unknown) but has been in the City Watch for thirty years, and he has known Captain Vimes for over twenty years. He smokes a pipe, and wears sandals with his Watch uniform, along with a breastplate with impressive pectoral muscles embossed on it, which his chest and stomach fit into in the same way that jelly fits into a mould.

He is the sort of man who, in a military career, will automatically gravitate to the post of sergeant. As a civilian, his natural rôle would be something like a sausage butcher - some job where a big, red face and tendency to sweat even in frosty weather are practically part of the specification.

Nobby

Corporal C.W.St J. (Cecil Wormsborough St John). A corporal in the Ankh-Morpork Night Watch. A four-foot tall, pigeon-chested, bandy-legged man, with the muscle tone of an elastic band and a certain resemblance to a chimpanzee. The only reason you can't say that Nobby is close to the animal kingdom is that the animal kingdom would move further away. Nobby is actually smaller than many dwarfs (er ... we compromised a bit on this!).

He is rumoured to have terrible personal habits, although these appear to be no more than a penchant for petty theft (usually from people too unconcious or, for preference, too dead to argue) an ability to do tricks with his facial boils, and a liking for folk dancing.

Men like Nobby can be found in any armed force. Although their grasp of the minutiae of the regulations is usually encyclopaedic, they take good care never to be promoted beyond, perhaps, corporal. He smokes incessantly, but the weird thing is that any cigarette smoked by Nobby becomes a dog-end almost instantly but remains a dog-end indefinitely or until lodged behind his ear, which is a sort of nicotine Elephants' Graveyard.

Nobby is known to have served as a quartermaster in the army of the Duke of Pseudopolis. There are rumours that he had to join the Watch after items missing from the stores were found in his kit. Since the items were the entirety of the store inventory, Nobby's kit at the time consisted of two warehouses.

Lord Vetinari

First name Havelock. Age uncertain. Background unavailable. Reputedly trained at the Assassins' Guild school. Now supreme ruler of the city of Ankh-Morpork, to which he is totally devoted. Tall, thin, and generally to be seen wearing black.

He appears to have survived by being equally distrusted and disliked by all interest groups in the city but also by carefully not being as unpopular as every interest group is to all the others.

Technically, Vetinari seems to have given in to every demand of every Guild for years, so the Guilds are driving themselves mad wondering why he is therefore still in charge. His genius lies in the realisation that everyone craves stability even more than they hunger after justice or truth. This policy is dimly perceived by the more intelligent Guild leaders in the city. Annoying as the Patrician is, however, it is so easy to think of someone worse.

He is entirely without vices in any normal sense of the word. If he had any, we can be sure some Guild or other would have made use of them by now. It is true that he has banned street theatre and hangs mime artists upside down in a scorpion pit opposite a sign which says 'Learn The Words', but this may be considered an excusable peccadillo or possibly an amusing character trait. He does have a small and very old terrier, called Wuffles, to which he is said to be quite attached.

Lord Vetinari lives in what was once the royal family's Winter Palace in Morpork. He manages the city either from a wooden seat at the foot of the steps on which is the ancient golden throne of the city, or more usually from the Oblong Office, high in the palace. This is where he gathers information. People tell him things, for all sort of reasons. He has a bedroom. He presumably sleeps.

Lady Ramkin

Sybil Deirdre Olgivanna. The Ramkin Family Motto is: NON SUMET NULLUS PRO RESPONSO (Never Take No For An Answer).

Lady Ramkin is the richest woman in Ankh-Morpork.

She is a toweringly big lady, with a mass of chestnut hair (a wig - no-one who has much to do with dragons keeps their own hair for long). The Ramkins have never bred for beauty, they've bred for healthy solidity and big bones, and Lady Sybil is the shining result.

For almost all of her life she has apparently confined her own personal breeding to swamp dragons, which she keeps in pens behind the house, and she is the tower of strength behind the Sunshine Sanctuary for Sick Dragons. For dragon handling, she wears huge and fearsomely padded armour. She is the author of several self-published volumes on the diseases of the dragon, which is a fruitful and probably endless field of study.

Costumes

We played most of the characters around the Georgian period, although the City Watch were attired in uniforms of the English Civil War period, which helped to point up the anachronism that they are viewed as by their citizens.

The clowns we dressed in the traditional gear - huge tailcoats, baggy trousers, tiny hats, fluorescent curly wigs, etc. Dr Whiteface, however, was dressed more severely in a white, Commedia del Arte, clown costume.

Our Patrician wore a long, voluminous black robe over a high necked 'Russian peasant' black shirt, black trousers and boots. On his head he wore a black skull cap. The effect was one of power combined with ecclesiastical austerity.

Scenery

Virtually none. We had our gargoyle mounted on the centre of the back wall of our stage, on our on-stage gallery, throughout. Other than that, we used the minimum of furniture necessary to establish the settings (a multipurpose table and chairs, a cut-out Victorian bath for Vimes, a bed (easily stowable)).

Special Effects

Other little bits and pieces included:

The Gonne

We made this ourselves - wooden stock, plastic tubing barrel painted with Hammerite, shoulder strap from a sports bag. The whole thing based very much on the picture by Josh Kirby on the cover of the hardback book, which I knew was how Terry imagined the gonne to look. Because it could not itself fire, whenever it had to be discharged on stage, the actor had concealed about his person a small starting pistol with loud blanks, so that he could fire *that* whenever the gonne was supposed to discharge itself.

The Gargoyle

Well, OK, he's not essential, but we thought he was a bit of fun and that it would have been a pity to cut him out. We had him built for us by Spyder's FX and he had eyes that could look left and right as he talked.

Detritus

Again, we had him made by Spyder's FX. Basically, he was a very effective head mask and gloves, worn with a knitted chainmail outfit, breast- and back-plate, hired from a local firm.

The Pork Futures Warehouse

Simply, we flooded the stage with cold blue light. If you can run to it, then a bit of stage smoke, or dry ice, would also be nice (yes, I know that dry ice, unlike the contents of the futures warehouse, is a real pig to handle but it does give a good effect!).

The Sewers

Again, a simple lighting effect - a rippling water effect on a bare stage otherwise lit with gungy green lamps, supplemented by a sound FX tape of dripping water. Surprisingly effective - and no set to change.

The Librarian

We didn't include him in our version, but if you have someone who's desperate to lose weight, you might like to know that the Orangutan Foundation do now have an orang-utan costume that they may be prepared to loan to a careful user - subject to its being returned in at least as good a condition as that in which it went out, and to a donation for their organisation. They can be contacted via Ashley Leiman, Orangutan Foundation, 7 Kent Terrace, London, NW1 4RP (Tel/Fax: 0171 724 2912).

The Music

We try to choose incidental music which complements the show. Here, the werewolf theme meant that we could underline for the audience the changes that Angua is undergoing off-stage by selecting incidental music which, initially, references itself to *American Werewolf in London - Bad Moon Rising* (Credence Clearwater Revival), *Blue Moon* (the Marcels) and so on. Careful choices can add to your play an additional dimension of humour, not available to the books, which reflects Terry's own propensity to make subtle, passing, references to literature, films, plays and so on.

Stephen Briggs

May 1997

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Edward d'Eath: *an assassin*
Samuel Vimes: *Captain, City Watch*
Havelock Vetinari: *the Patrician*
Frederick Colon: *Sergeant, City Watch*
Cuddy: *Dwarf Lance-Constable, City Watch*
Detritus: *Troll Lance-Constable, City Watch*
'Nobby' Nobbs: *Corporal, City Watch*
Carrot Ironfounderesson: *Corporal, City Watch*
Angua: *W ... Lance-Constable, City Watch*
Beano: *a Clown*
Death: *an anthropomorphic personification*
Morecombe: *solicitor & vampire*
Lady Sybil Ramkin: *a noblewoman*
Bjorn Hammerhock: *a dwarf artificer*
Downey: *an assassin*
Dr Cruces: *Head Assassin*
Drumknott: *Patrician's secretary*
Selachi: *a noble*
Rust: *a noble*
Skater: *a noble*
'Mayonnaise' Quirke: *Captain, City Day Watch*
Willikins: *Ramkin family servant*
Boffo: *a clown*
Dr Whiteface: *Head Clown*
Cornice-Overlooking-Broadway: *a gargoyle (possibly off-stage voice)*
Footnote: *a footnote*
Leonard Da Quirm: *an inventor*