

methuen | drama

TERRY PRATCHETT

JINGO

Adapted for the stage by
Stephen Briggs

B L O O M S B U R Y

Jingo

also by Terry Pratchett, adapted by Stephen Briggs

THE FIFTH ELEPHANT
GOING POSTAL
INTERESTING TIMES
MONSTROUS REGIMENT
NIGHT WATCH
THE TRUTH

Terry Pratchett

Jingo

adapted by

Stephen Briggs

B L O O M S B U R Y
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Introduction

All the Discworld's a Stage

The first people *ever* to dramatise the Discworld, in any form, were the Studio Theatre Club in Abingdon, Oxon. That was in 1991, with *Wyrd Sisters*.

We had already staged our own adaptations of other works: Monty Python's *Life of Brian* and *Holy Grail*, and Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue* and *Blott on the Landscape*. We were looking for something new when someone said 'Try Terry Pratchett – you'll like him'. So I ventured into the previously uncharted territory of the 'Fantasy' section of the local bookstore ('Here Be Dragons'). I read a Terry Pratchett book; I liked it. I read all of them. I wrote to Terry and asked if we could stage *Wyrd Sisters*. He said yes.

Wyrd Sisters sold out. So did *Mort* the year after.

So did *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms*, and *Maskerade* in the years after that. In fact, 'sold out' is too modest a word. 'Oversold very quickly so that by the time the local newspaper mentioned it was on we'd had to close the booking office' is nearer the mark.

My casts were all happy enough to read whichever book we were staging, and to read others in the canon, too. The books stand on their own, but some knowledge of the wider Discworld ethos is essential when adapting the stories, and can also help directors to find out where it's all coming from, and the actors with their characterisations.

The Discworld novels have been getting longer (and darker) as the years pass and it is a problem to try to put over the plot while still meeting the overriding target for amdram – getting into the pub before closing. The important thing was to decide what was the basic plot: anything which didn't contribute to that was liable to be dropped in order to keep the play flowing. Favourite scenes, even favourite characters, have on occasions had to be dumped. These are hard decisions, but the book has to work as a *play*. You can't get four hundred pages of novel into two and a half hours on stage without sacrifices.

Each play also offers a challenge to directors in working out who can double for whom in order to stage them with a smaller cast. You'll see from the cast list which follows this introduction how *we* covered all the roles.

Although the majority of our audiences are 'fans', I've tried to remember when writing the plays that not *all* the audience will be steeped in Discworld lore. Some of them may just be normal theatregoers who've never read a fantasy novel in their whole lives – humorous fantasy may not be their 'thing', but I wouldn't want them to feel they were watching something which had been typed on an Enigma machine.

The books are episodic and have a sort of 'cinematic' construction; I have retained this format in *Jingo* and used different stage areas and levels with brisk lighting changes to keep the action flowing. Set changes slow down the action, even when they're really slick. A thirty-second blackout between each scene, accompanied by rustling, crashing and muffled swearing from your stage crew means you're in danger of losing the audience. Even *ten*-second changes, if repeated often enough, will lead to loss of interest. I've been to see many productions of the plays and the best have been those that have used bare stages or composite sets – leaving the majority of the 'scene-changing' to the lighting technician. The golden rule is: if you *can* do it without scene-shifting, *do* it without scene-shifting. It's a concept that has served radio drama very well (everyone *knows* that radio has the best scenery). And Shakespeare managed very well without it, too.

The plays do, however, call for some unusual props. Over the years, many of these have been made by my casts and crew: large hour-glasses for Death's house, shadow puppets, archaic rifles, dragon-scorched books, a church spire for *Jingo*. Other, more specialised props were put 'out to contract': Death's sword and scythe, an orang-utan, Detritus's head and hands, a Death of Rats, a Greebo, Scraps the dog and two swamp dragons (one an elaborate hand puppet and one with a fire-proof compartment in its bottom for a flight scene).

Since the Studio Theatre Club started the trend in 1991, Terry and I have had many enquiries about staging the plays – from as far afield as Finland, South Africa,

Indonesia, Australia, Bermuda and the Czech Republic (as well as Sheffield, Aberdeen, Exeter and the Isle of Man). One has even been staged in Antarctica! Royalties just from the five plays administered by me have raised over £50,000 so far for the Orangutan Foundation.

So how did our productions actually go? We enjoyed them. Our audiences seemed to enjoy them (after all, some of them were prepared, year after year, to travel down to Abingdon in Oxfordshire from Taunton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Ipswich, Basingstoke and . . . well, Oxford). Terry seems to enjoy them, too. He says that many of our members looked as though they had been recruited straight off the streets of Ankh-Morpork. He said that several of them were born to play the ‘rude mechanicals’ in Vitoller’s troupe in *Wyrd Sisters*. He said that in his mind’s eye the famous Ankh-Morpork City Watch *are* the players of the Studio Theatre Club.

I’m sure these were meant to be compliments.

Jingo

By the time we staged *Jingo* in 1997, we knew that the Discworld plays were a winner . . . though we’d learned that the flourishing trade in other groups staging the plays meant that we couldn’t afford to take full houses for granted. They’re still full, but we do have to work a bit now to achieve that.

As with all the adaptations, there were difficult choices about which scenes should be sacrificed to try and keep the play down to a reasonable running time. *Jingo* had a very complex plot and the version we staged in 1997 was quite lengthy. I have trimmed the script quite a bit, you will be pleased to hear, partly to simplify the plot slightly and partly to save a little time. Groups which are particularly keen to get to the pub earlier might also consider omitting Act One Scene Four. I like it because it introduces Nobby and Colon, but it does add nothing to the actual plot!

This dramatisation was written with Abingdon’s medieval Unicorn Theatre’s restrictions, and the number of players I expected to have available in mind. Really complicated

scenic effects were virtually impossible. Basically, we had a bare stage with an onstage balcony at the back of the stage and a small curtained area beneath it. 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 *Jingo can* be staged with only a relatively modest outlay on special effects. Bigger groups, with teams of experts on hand, can let their imaginations run wild!

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 enhanced by lighting effects and carefully chosen background music. 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 roles, though, you have to recognise that your audiences will expect them to look as much like the book descriptions as possible. Most drama clubs don't have a vast range from which to choose, though, and it's the acting that's more important than the look of the player when it comes down to it! There is some useful character information about Vimes, Vetinari, Colon, Nobby, Angua and some of the others in *The Discworld Companion*.

Costumes We played the 'present-day' scenes in a sort of late-Victorian setting (though the City Watch retained their English Civil War look throughout), with the Ankh-Morpork soldiery having a red-coated Victorian look to them. The Klatchians, of course, were a mix of *Arabian Nights* – traditional Arab dress, 'belly dancers' and, of course, striped shifts, sun glasses and fezzes for Colon and Vetinari.

Scenery Virtually none. Some bits of painted backing and free-standing pedals for the submarine interior, cut-out boats for the first scene . . . Apart from that, a virtually bare stage, with occasional bits of furniture and hand-props.

Oh, and a word on pronunciation . . . Having seen many of the plays staged, pronunciation of the names seems sometimes to be a stumbling block. Here are some pointers:

Ankh-Morpork	Ankh, as in ‘bank’, Morpork as in ‘more pork’, with the stress in the city’s name on the second syllable – Ankh- <i>Morpork</i> .
Vetinari	Long ‘a’ and stress the third syllable – Vetin <i>ah</i> -ri.
Angua	Hard ‘g’. Either ‘Angwa’ or ‘Ang-you-ah’ – stress on the first syllable for either.
Al Khali	Al <i>Kanley</i> (yes, I do know it’s a pun on ‘alkali’, but it doesn’t work on stage).

Thinking of staging it? Although Methuen control the amateur rights for *Jingo*, Terry and I are keen to know which of our plays are being staged where, so do feel free to write to me or email me with your production dates, just in case one of us can get to see your show. I also have some stocks of a snazzy City Watch badge. I have a website (www.StephenBriggs.com) or I can be contacted via Methuen, or direct by email (sbriggs@cix.co.uk).

Stephen Briggs
February 2005

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