

THIEF OF TIME

[Unseen Theatre Company](#)

Review by [Benjamin Orchard](#) – Adelaide Theatre Guide

The 26th novel in Terry Pratchett's beloved "Discworld" series comes to the stage in a production that is sure to please fans of the author's trademark biting satirical wit and surrealist humour, but which is likely to leave the uninitiated feeling confused and somewhat underwhelmed. Here I must admit to what many readers will consider to be an embarrassing deficiency in my credibility as a reviewer – I haven't actually read the novel, despite it being one of the most critically acclaimed instalments in this popular series, and a fan favourite to boot. Therefore I can only review "Thief Of Time" on the basis of its effectiveness as a stage play; I can't say how well it lives up to its literary inspiration.

Pamela Munt, in adapting the novel for the stage, provides newbies like myself with just enough world-building exposition to get by... but only just. I found the first ten minutes or so of this play to be a bit of a jumble, and I would have appreciated a somewhat more detailed explanation as to the intricacies of this world. Fortunately, once the main plot kicks into gear, the play becomes somewhat easier to follow and Munt's script captures Pratchett's greatest strength as a writer, namely his gift for dialogue that is at once gleefully absurd and biting witty. This sublime wordplay is buoyed by an impassioned cast, ensuring that many scenes are hilariously entertaining to watch, even if they don't completely make sense and serve no purpose in driving the narrative forward.

The talented ensemble assumes multiple roles, Monty Python style, with chameleonic finesse, but a few performances stand out more than others. Leighton James is endearingly adorkable as both the naïve clockmaker, Jeremy, who is unwittingly recruited by malevolent otherworldly beings to construct a doomsday device and as novice monk, Lobsang, who is entrusted with the daunting quest of preventing the apocalypse. Philip Lineton has laconic charm to spare as Lobsang's aging mentor, Lu-Tze, whose sage wisdom is often filtered through bizarre "Karate Kid" style housework metaphors. Hugh O'Connor is surprisingly amiable as Death, and together with the other Four Horsemen (Lewis Baker, Tony Cockington, Daniel McInnes, Samuel Creighton) generate an off-kilter chemistry reminiscent of an over-the-hill rock band on a reunion tour. Amelia Lorien is deliciously snarky as Death's granddaughter, Susan, and the filmed narration by Melanie Lyons is a hoot, her relaxed, casual tone adding an extra layer of humour to many life or death situations in the story.

The general enthusiasm of the proceedings helps to compensate for some technical slip ups. The volume level of Lyons' narration is sometimes quieter than the ambient sound effects, a few of the scene transitions are rather clunky and could be much snappier. That said, the direction of Munt and David Dye is generally quite sound as far as blocking is concerned and Michelle Whichello's costumes are quite eye-catching in their use of colour, yet always practically suited to the action of a given scene. Much the same could be said for Kylie Goodcliffe's stylized but effective props. Andrew Zeuner's minimalist sets do their bit to create an otherworldly ambience, as does Stephen Dean's atmospheric lighting (though be warned, the show does make use of strobes occasionally).

Though I can't say how faithful it is to the novel, this show does capture Pratchett's unique style well enough that I'm sure the man's many fans will get a kick out of seeing his witticisms brought to life in a live theatre setting – and by a theatre troupe who are obviously passionate devotees themselves. The uninitiated should approach with caution, as much of this is likely to confuse, and the leisurely pace may test their patience at times – although ultimately it's hard not to be won over by such dedicated sincerity and enthusiasm on display. This is a show with heart, BIG heart.