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Interesting Times

TERRY PRATCHETT
INTERESTING TIMES

READ BY TONY ROBINSON

'Funny, delightfully inventive and refuses to lie down in its genre'
Observer



Synopsis

Mighty battles! Revolution! Death! War! (and his sons Terror and Panic, and daughter Clancy) The oldest and most inscrutable empire on the Discworld is in turmoil, brought about by the revolutionary treaty, What I did on My Holidays. Workers are uniting, with nothing to lose but their water buffaloes. Warlords are struggling for power. War (and Clancy) are spreading throughout the ancient cities. And all that stands in the way of terrible doom for everyone is Rincewind the Wizard, who can't even spell the word "wizard," Cohen the barbarian hero, five feet tall in his surgical sandals, who has had a lifetime's experience of not dying, and a very special butterfly.

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Customer Reviews

With some minor magic, seasoned with a touch of quantum physics and a liberal dose of archaeology, Pratchett sends Rincewind the Wizard across the Discworld. From Ankh Morpork, he arrives at the Agatean Empire on the Counterweight Continent, cushioned by a snowbank. Those studying Auriental history [knowing where the gold is] will recognize the failed wizard is entering an alien environment. Luckily, familiar faces emerge. The first is the Discworld's most revered barbarian hero, Ghengiz Cohen - who is accompanied by some geriatric colleagues, the Silver Horde. Rincewind isn't a tourist in the Agatean Empire, as Twoflower was in Ankh Morpork. He's been sent for in the midst of a political crisis. A dying emperor, five families contending for power, a revolutionary cadre and a mythical army must all be brought together to make this story work. Oh, yes, plus the Horde and Rincewind. Who else but Pratchett could seamlessly weave all these elements together? And keep you smiling with the turning of every page? Yet, as usual, Pratchett

does even more. He can maintain a balance between a reflection of ancient and modern China [sorry, Agatean Empire], bring forth a string of fascinating personalities and turn an impossible situation into reality without missing a beat. At the same time we are given a dose of chaos theory, familiar images of today's world politics and some philosophical images of the universality of human nature. For an added touch, something you won't see in any other "fantasy" novel, Pratchett's astute perception allows him to resurrect the 6 000 terra cotta warriors found in a tomb in China and have them march again.

For those of you that aren't familiar with Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels, they're broken up into what are, essentially subseries. Different novels focus on different characters throughout the Disc and each follow a certain storytelling style. The Rincewind novels, of which this is one, are a sort-of antiheroical adventure mixed with what are, essentially, various travelogues. "Interesting Times" deals with what happens when the Disc's least impressive wizard - and greatest survivor - meet the Agatean Empire - a rather odd hodge-podge of Imperial China and feudal Japan run through Pratchett's colander of Discworld reality. "Interesting Times" follows a half-mad, half-Machiavellian plot where Rincewind, the aforementioned 'wizard', gets shipped off to the Agatean Empire following a request by the revolutionary "Red Army" for the "Great Wizzard" that will help them in their time of greatest need. What results from this is a mad rush through Chinese peasant culture, Japanese martial arts, an group of ancient barbarians with a most unbarbarian plot and revolution that can't help but have things go the right way for them. As with most of Pratchett's books, "Interesting Times" is a joy to read. Pratchett somehow seems to take every 'commonly known' reference about East Asia, mix them together in a large metaphorical bag, and spread them throughout his book, regardless of the history or accuracy involved. As with all of his works, what transpires is less a view of what foreign countries are actually like, but how it is that we as people view foreign cultures. Having recently reread "Interesting Times", I found myself liking it more in retrospect than I did when I first read it.

they first make mad." So said Euripides and so say the small gods of Discworld who set the plot in motion for Terry Pratchett's hilarious yet thoughtful "Interesting Times". The title of the book is based on the curse "may you live in interesting times" and because the phrase is reputedly of Chinese origin (its actual origin remains a mystery) the story is placed squarely in the Discworld equivalent of Asia - the Aurient. A group of gods, including Fate and Lady Luck are engaged in a pleasant evening of gambling. They decide to play "The Fall of Great Houses" and pick the Agatean Empire

as the playing ground. The game requires a Great Wizard (actually a Great Wizzard) and the spectacularly un-great Wizard Rincewind is elected to play the role. Rincewind is packed off to the Aurient. Bluesman Albert Kings sings that "if it wasn't for bad luck you know I wouldn't have no luck at all." That is also what Rincewind has to say for himself: "Luck is my middle name," said Rincewind, indistinctly. "Mind you, my first name is Bad." Upon his arrival in the Aurient Rincewind finds, through no fault of his own, himself working with a cadre of young revolutionaries known as the Red Army who are determined to overthrow the Agataen Empire. They recite some extraordinarily obtruse and silly slogans in support of their cause. The Red Army seems based on Chairman Mao's cadres of the same name. On the other hand, this could be a sly reference to the supporters of the Aberdeen (Scotland) Football Club who refer to themselves as The Red Army, after the colors of their team. With Terry Pratchett you never know for sure. Apart from Rincewind, Interesting Times features two other recurring Discworld players, Cohen the Barbarian and Two-Flower.

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