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Monstrous Regiment (Discworld Novels)



Synopsis

Polly Perks had to become a boy in a hurry. Cutting off her hair and wearing trousers was easy. Learning to fart and belch in public and walk like an ape took more time ...And now she's enlisted in the army, and searching for her lost brother. But there's a war on. There's always a war on. And Polly and her fellow recruits are suddenly in the thick of it, without any training, and the enemy is hunting them. All they have on their side is the most artful sergeant in the army and a vampire with a lust for coffee. Well ...they have the Secret. And as they take the war to the heart of the enemy, they have to use all the resources of ...the Monstrous Regiment.

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Customer Reviews

First of all, Monstrous Regiment is the 28th Discworld book, and Pratchett is just getting started. Every time you think he has run out of ideas, he comes up with something new (or an interesting take on something old). This book is no different, as this time he examines the military and the military mindset. Is it a good one? SIR, YES SIR! This is another winning Discworld book. It's a bit different in tone from Night Watch, if only because the humour is broader. In Night Watch, the humour was on the side and it was a fairly serious book except for that. This has a serious point to make as well, but the humour involves everybody. It was refreshing to see. Pratchett has some good points to make on military matters in the real world, and he skewers the entire mindset (not necessarily of the men, who he never really disparages, but the planners). He does have the obvious stereotypes of the hard drill sergeant and the lieutenant who doesn't really know what he's doing and has no experience. But even these stereotypes he turns on their heads, shakes them

upside down, and looks at what comes out. Pratchett, always a master of character, has created some new winners (though I don't believe they'll be back in another book, like some of Pratchett's recurring characters). Polly is the typical Pratchett hero: determined, relatively straight-laced, intelligent and resourceful. She's a wonderful viewpoint character, scared but determined to do what is right. When she's assigned to be the lieutenant's assistant, she's reluctant to take advantage of the position, though she does so to help out her mates. She helps Lieutenant Blouse along, though she's terrified of shaving him because she's never learned how to shave herself.

Borogravia is at war. Again. Or still. The country has been fighting with its neighbors so long that there aren't very many young men left to be soldiers. So even though a woman dressing as a man is an Abomination Unto Nuggan (garlic, chocolate, ears, rocks and much more at all Abominations unto the crazed Borogravian deity), Polly Perks dresses as a man and signs up for the Ins and Outs, the Tenth Division of the Borogravian army. No one looks too carefully; recruits are getting too hard to find. The title is a play on an obscure John Knox essay, a diatribe against women in leadership positions. Army life, officers, NCOs, patriotism, Army intelligence, institutional religion and especially sexism all get the Pratchett Treatment. More than any of his other books, I was strongly reminded of Mark Twain's later satires. Pratchett is a little gentler than Twain, and his approach is more methodical, but the same simmering anger is evident. Pratchett's distaste for the institutions and respect for the individuals is made completely clear. Stupidity, Polly Perks comes to realize, is simply too dangerous to have around. There are a few wonderful new characters, including Jackrum, a legendary sergeant in the Borogravian army, apparently ageless and, upon his word, "not a dishonest man;" and Maladict, one of Polly's fellow recruits, who has substituted a lust for blood for a lust for coffee (Pratchett is plainly a serious coffee drinker). And there are cameos of greater or lesser extent from Watch characters Duke Samuel Vimes, Corporal Angua, Buggy Swires and Reg Shoe; and William de Worde and his photographer, Otto. But mostly this is about Polly, an intelligent, decent person, placed in the madness and folly of war.

Monstrous Regiment is not as funny as Discworld novels mostly are; in fact, it's the best work Terry Pratchett had conjured in quite some time, possibly second to *The Truth*. It's not the laugh-a-minute, surreal fantasy-comedy that Terry had become famous for; it's actually much more satire than parody, and the humor is therefore much more subtle and less, shall we say, 'jokey'. Terry gives us very little of the familiar Discworld faces or places; many fans have found that to be a downside, as well. In fact, those were the very reasons I found 'Monstrous Regiment' so good. I feel that, despite

all my love for them, the old, old Discworld characters - Sam Vimes, Carrot, Rincewind, Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, Susan and the rest - have become quite repetitive over the last few years, especially Vimes who been quite overplayed recently. In 'Monstrous Regiment', he plays a minor role in which he excels. Death, too, is given a very brief cameo, and William De Worde and Otto (from 'The Truth') also grant a couple of cameos (although William is a character that had not yet fulfilled his potential, at least not as a supporting actor). Instead, we have a remarkably large cast of new characters, and the strangest part of it is - most of them are sane. The lead characters in 'Monstrous Regiment' are exquisitely 'normal' in Discworld standards, and though at first it seems like the cast includes 'a troll, a vampire, and Igor and A FEW OTHER GUYS' they all turn out to be very individual and well-rounded characters. Terry leans on character development here more than he ever did before, and lo! - there are hardly any physical descriptions of the characters, and yet we get to know each one individually through their actions, their behaviors, personalities, motives and past.

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