



C. Edward Wheaton

Adapted from the 1927 novel by E. A. Wyke-Smith

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THE MARVELLOUS LAND OF SNERGS

CLASSIC. Adapted from the 1927 novel by E. A. Wyke-Smith, audiences of all ages will be enthralled with this delightful tale, which inspired J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Joe and Sylvia run away from Mrs. Watkyns' Home for Superfluous Children and set out to find the village of the Snergs. In the forest, Joe and Sylvia encounter a jovial, fun-loving Snerg named Gorbo, who foolishly gives them a tour of the Forest of Twisted Trees and suddenly discovers he's lost. As the weary travelers try to find their way back to the Snergs' village, they encounter a lazy dragon who has no interest in pillaging towns, a knight who dislikes fighting, and a court jester who loves to play bad practical jokes. When the travelers follow an underground cavern and arrive on the other side of the river, they find themselves in deadly peril when they fall into the clutches of a fiendish witch and a "reformed" ogre who claims he no longer eats children.

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

ABOUT THE STORY

English author E. A. Wyke-Smith (1871-1935) published eight novels, four of which were novels for children. His children's novel, *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*, experienced a resurgence of popularity after it was reported that J.R.R. Tolkien admired the novel and noted that the Snergs served as an "unconscious" model for his hobbits. Tolkien read the novel to his children and said, "I should like to record my own love and my children's love of E.A. Wyke-Smith's *Marvellous Land of Snergs*, at any rate of the Snerg element of that tale and of Gorbo, the gem of dunderheads, jewel of a companion in an escapade." Journeying through perilous forests and through dark underground caverns are elements present in both Tolkien's books and in *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*. Wyke-Smith's fascination with caverns is perhaps due to his experience as a mining engineer in which he managed mines in countries all over the world including Mexico, South America, Spain, Portugal, and Norway.

Characters

(9 M, 7 F, 12 flexible, extras)

(With doubling: 9 M, 3 F, 9 flexible. Tripling possible.)

GORBO: A Snerg who encounters Joe and Sylvia lost in the forest; short in stature and carries a small bow and arrow; male.

JOE: Adventurous boy who likes to play pranks and lives at Miss Watkyns' home for superfluous children; male.

SYLVIA: Joe's friend who is afraid of witches and ogres but yearns for a bit of adventure; has blonde hair and wears a dress and necklace; female.

GOLITHOS: A "reformed" ogre who no longer eats children; large in stature with a lot of hair and whiskers and a big silly face; male.

MOTHER MELDRUM: Fiendish witch who lives in the Dark Woods and sells curses; wears a long outdoor cloak and high peaked hat; female.

DRAGON: A dragon who leads a quiet, peaceful life lying around lazily watching the clouds and smelling flowers and doesn't breathe fire or pillage towns and villages; flexible.

BALDRY: Served as the King Kul's High Jester but was fired and exiled; likes to joyously leap about slapping people with a bladder tied to the end of a stick; wears a jester's costume with tights of which one leg is red and the other yellow; flexible.

SIR PERCIVAL: Knight sworn to rescue the oppressed and to right wrongs but dislikes bloodshed, fighting, or causing injury; wears knight's armor and a helmet with a visor that tends to fall down at inopportune times; male.

MISS WATKYNs: Founder and principal of the Society for the Removal of Superfluous Children; female.

MISS GRIBBLESTONE: Works at the Society for the Removal of Superfluous Children; female.

MISS SCADING: Works at the Society for the Removal of Superfluous Children; female.

JIMMY/JAIME: Kid at Miss Watkyns' home for superfluous children who would like to see Joe punished; flexible.

CAPTAIN VANDERDECKEN: Ship captain; male.

COOK: Cook who works on Captain Vanderdecken's ship; wears a soup-stained apron; flexible.

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CREW MEMBER 1: Sailor who works on Captain Vanderdecken's ship; flexible.

OLD LADY: Crabby old woman on her way back from buying a curse from Mother Meldrum; wears a long dress and a cape with a hood.

KING MERSE: King of the Snergs; short in stature; male.

KING KUL: King Merse's cousin who is not a Snerg; male.

SIR GILES: King Kul's knight; wears armor; male.

SIR EVAN: King Kul's knight; wears armor; male.

LADY ERMYN TUDE: Damsel in King Kul's court who is ordered to watch over Sylvia and Joe; female.

LORD CHANCELLOR: King Kul's lord chancellor; flexible.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: King Kul's Sergeant-at-arms; flexible.

CAPTAIN: King Kul's captain of the city guard; flexible.

PAGES 1, 2: King Merse's pages; flexible.

SCRIBE: King Kul's scribe; non-speaking; flexible.

DOCTOR: King Kul's royal doctor; flexible.

DONKEY: Mother Meldrum's donkey; wears a donkey costume; flexible. (Note: A wooden sawhorse on wheels or another prop may be used instead of an actor.)

EXTRAS: As Snergs, Sailors, and Children. Optional extras may be used as Guards, Pages, Courtiers, and Knights.

Options For Doubling

OLD LADY/LADY ERMYN TUDE (female)

MISS WATKYN'S/MOTHER MELDRUM (female)

MISS GRIBBLESTONE/DRAGON (female)

CREWMAN 1/LORD CHANCELLOR (flexible)

COOK/SERGEANT-AT-ARMS (flexible)

SIR EVAN/DOCTOR (male)

Setting

The Land of the Snergs.

Sets

The sets can be as simple or as elaborate as your budget allows. Simple props or backdrops can be used to depict setting.

Miss Watkyns' Children's Home. A playground of sorts. In the background is a tower with one window at the top. There is a bench and a window frame in the tower. A large sign SR reads, "Society for the Removal Of Superfluous Children. 478 Children Served. Miss Penelope Watkyns, Founder and Principal."

Clearing in the forest. There is a backdrop of a forest and a log CS.

Forest of Twisted Trees. There is a backdrop of twisted trees.

Forest of Twisted Trees, denser area. The trees are denser and the clearing is small. There is a functional door that is red with rust and green with moss located in the middle of a tree. The door has mighty iron hinges and clasps.

Other side of the river. There is a backdrop depicting a generally dull landscape with patches of coarse grass and clumps of thorny trees dotted here and there. There is a functional green door SR.

Interior of Golithos' tower. There is a wooden door SL. In the corner, there are a table, chair, two barrels, and a wooden plank. At SL is a bed and window. Stairs are SR.

Outer wall of a small, cozy castle. There is a backdrop depicting the front of a castle's outer gate. Hanging on the gate is a trumpet.

Interior of the castle's kitchen. There is a table and three stools.

Interior of Mother Meldrum's house. At CS is a stool next to a fireplace with a pot hanging over the fire. At DSL are a table and some chairs. There is a door SR and SL. There is a door at the side of the fireplace.

Mothers Meldrum's house, a small upstairs bedroom. There is one window and a four-poster bed. The bed is so high off the floor there is a set of small steps next to the bed.

Palace of King Kul. There is a throne.

Before a deep ravine. There is a backdrop depicting a deep ravine of dry, jagged rocks and the walls rise in a cliff, which look precipitous and difficult to climb. There are large rocks and some scrub brush.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Miss Watkyns Children's Home.

Scene 2: Miss Watkyns Children's Home, later that day.

Scene 3: Clearing in the forest.

Scene 4: Clearing in the forest, the next morning.

Scene 5: Forest of Twisted Trees.

Scene 6: Forest of Twisted Trees, a denser area of the forest.

Scene 7: A cavern.

Scene 8: Another part of the cavern with four "passages."

Scene 9: Another section of the cavern.

Scene 10: The other side of the river.

Scene 11: Interior of Golithos' tower.

Scene 12: Interior of Golithos' tower, the next morning

Scene 13: A long way from Golithos' tower.

Scene 14: A long way from Golithos' tower.

Scene 15: Outer wall of a small, cozy castle.

Scene 16: Interior of the castle's kitchen.

Scene 17: The woods. (Same as clearing in a forest.)

Scene 18: The edge of the Dark Woods. (Same as clearing in a forest.)

Scene 19: Interior of Mother Meldrum's house.

Scene 20: Mother Meldrum's house, a small upstairs bedroom.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Mother Meldrum's house, a small upstairs bedroom, later that evening.

Scene 2: Edge of the Dark Woods. (Same as a clearing in a forest.)

Scene 3: Further down the road. (Same as a clearing in a forest.)

Scene 4: Interior of Mother Meldrum's house, morning.

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Scene 5: Palace of King Kul.

Scene 6: Palace of King Kul.

Scene 7: Palace of King Kul.

Scene 8: Palace of King Kul.

Scene 9: A wood of scattered and stunted trees. (Can be the same as a clearing in a forest.)

Scene 10: A desolate land. (Can be a bare stage.)

Scene 11: Before a deep ravine.

Scene 12: Palace of King Kul.

Props

Large sign that reads, "Society for the Removal Of Superfluous Children. 478 Children Served. Miss Penelope Watkyns, Founder and Principal."	Bucket
Jump rope	2 Aprons, for Joe and Sylvia
Soup ladle	Plates
Handkerchief with bits of food wrapped in it	Cups
Fishing line	Eggs
Clothesline	Frying pans
Log	2 Mugs
5 Pears	Small package wrapped in leaves
Pouch, for Gorbo	Soup pot
Wheat cakes	Large spoon
Napkin	Silver-tipped horn
Set of steps	Necklace, for Sylvia
Bow, arrows, quiver, for Gorbo	Basket
Knife	Candle
Pans	Coin
Pots	Parsnips or another root (for mandrake roots)
Assorted vegetables	Shabby slippers, for Shoes of Swiftness
Lettuce	Seedy-looking cap, for Cap of Invisibility
Onions	Long tree sapling, for Sword of Sharpness
Mace	Large axe
Pitcher of milk	Serving trays of assorted food and drink
2 Earthenware mugs	Silver tray of tarts
Horse (can be a sawhorse)	Chains
Helmet with visor, for Sir Percival	Quill pen
Sawhorses (for Knights' horses, Mother Meldrum's donkey)	Scroll
Horse reins	Muskets, for Sailors
Slug-horn or trumpet	Half-armor, for Snergs
"Bladder" tied to the end of a stick, for Jester	Straw
	Gag
	Handkerchief
	Goblets

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Crust of bread

Rope

2 Baskets with lids

2 Large Sacks

Silver tray

3 Medallions with colored
ribbon

SOUND EFFECTS

Owl hooting	Angry men shouting
Stomach growling	Footsteps
Rustling bushes	Sound of heavy door creaking
Twigs snapping	open
Snoring	Cracking noise
Shuffling footsteps	Sound of horses and riders
Clanking noise	approaching
Footsteps descending	Trumpet fanfare
2 Pot lids	Clanking of chains
Hoof beats fading into the distance	Volley of musket fire

"It'll be a grand adventure!"

—Joe

ACT I

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Miss Watkyns' Children's Home, a playground of sorts. In the background is a tower with one window at the top. A large sign SR reads, "Society for the Removal of Superfluous Children. 478 Children Served. Miss Penelope Watkyns, Founder and Principal." Children are playing catch and tag. Girls are skipping rope, etc. Miss Watkyns, Miss Gribblestone, and Miss Scading are overseeing the activities. All of a sudden, all activities stop and everyone's attention is directed SL. Captain Vanderdecken enters along with a few members of his Crew. An angry Cook is carrying a ladle and his apron shows signs of soup being splashed all over it. Captain Vanderdecken has Joe in tow either by the arm or by the ear. Vanderdecken approaches Miss Watkyns.)

VANDERDECKEN: This is the last straw! We have put up with his pranks long enough! We must insist that something be done!

COOK: Aye. I have several suggestions!

CREW MEMBER 1: A good keelhauling is what the lad needs!

(Crew agrees.)

JIMMY: (To other Children.) Gee! Do you think they'll let us watch?

WATKYNs: Shush, Jimmy! (To Vanderdecken.) What did Joe do this time?

(Joe is standing silent with his head hung.)

VANDERDECKEN: He heaved a brick into our afternoon pot of soup, that's what!

SILVIA: Oh, Joe!

VANDERDECKEN: If you don't do something, I am afraid that we will be forced to take matters into our own hands and resort to the punishment according to the laws of the sea.

JIMMY: (With delight.) Maybe they'll flog him.

WATKYNs: Jimmy! Captain Vanderdecken, surely the law of the sea doesn't apply here. We are on dry land.

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VANDERDECKEN: (*Rubbing chin.*) Hmm. Well, you do have a point. (*Crew grumbles.*) But I must point out that our cook spent all morning preparing the soup.

WATKYNS: If you will excuse me for a moment, I must confer with the other ladies. (*To Miss Gribblestone and Miss Scading.*) Well, this time we must do something or no telling what they may do.

GRIBBLESTONE: Yes. Discipline must be our responsibility.

SCADING: We must decide on what course of action to take. I propose we give him a good talking to...appeal to his pride. It's just a case of high spirits. Boys are like that.

WATKYNS: I might agree with you if this was his first offense. This tossing of a brick has gone beyond high spirits. I think the time has come to settle the matter with six or ten of the very best with the back of a hairbrush applied firmly to his posterior.

GRIBBLESTONE: I quite disagree. Something like that could break his spirit.

WATKYNS: But we must make an example of him. We must show the other children that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated. Well, we can discuss the matter further later.

SCADING: But what are we going to do about Captain Vanderdecken?

WATKYNS: I have an idea that I believe will be quite agreeable to him. (*Approaches Captain Vanderdecken.*) Captain Vanderdecken, first, you have our sincere apologies for Joe's actions. And you have our assurance that he will be punished for his actions. And to make up for the loss of your soup, we would like to offer you our homemade soup with a generous supply of oyster crackers.

VANDERDECKEN: Excuse me a moment. (*Vanderdecken and Crew huddle together to discuss the matter. Approaches Miss Watkyns.*) That sounds agreeable.

COOK: But look at the mess he made of my apron!

WATKYNS: You leave it with us, and we will have it cleaned and pressed and returned to you later today.

VANDERDECKEN: (*To Crew.*) Then we are agreed? (*General agreement from Crew. To Miss Watkyns.*) Then we have an accord.

(*Vanderdecken shakes hands with Miss Watkyns and then hands Joe over to Miss Watkyns.*)

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CREW MEMBER 1: *(To Miss Watkyns.)* And don't forget the generous supply of oyster crackers.

COOK: *(To Miss Watkyns.)* Aye. It's the oyster crackers what makes the difference.

WATKYNS: Yes, yes. Come along, and I'll get your soup straight away. *(To Miss Gribblestone.)* Take charge of Joe and don't let him out of your sight for an instant. Then we'll decide what is to be done with him. *(Exits.)*

JIMMY: *(To other Children, disappointed.)* Aw, gee! I was hopin' to see him keelhauled. Come on!

(Exits. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Miss Watkyns' Children's Home, later that day. The playground is deserted. Joe is sitting on the window ledge of the tower, his feet dangling down. Sylvia enters.)

SYLVIA: (Looking up, in a low voice.) Oh, Joe, are you very beastly lonely up there?

JOE: Yes, Sylvia, I'm just as lonely and miserable! And I've had nothing to eat but some dry bread. I think they dried it on purpose.

SYLVIA: Why did you do it?

JOE: It seemed like a good idea at the time.

(Sylvia produces a handkerchief with bits of food wrapped inside it.)

SYLVIA: I've got some applesauce on bits of bread that aren't so dry, and a piece of seedy cake...and some pears. I suppose you haven't got a piece of string?

JOE: (Joyfully.) Yes, I have. I've got my fishing line. Here it is. (Shows her the fishing line.) I've been fishing for hours and hours trying to fish up something to play with, but all I got was some bits of twigs and I couldn't do much with them.

(Joe lowers the fishing line to her. Sylvia ties the package of food to the fishing line. Joe pulls up the package, unwraps the handkerchief, and begins to eat the contents.)

SYLVIA: You look like a captive princess in a tower...like Rapunzel.

JOE: Except I haven't got long hair. I feel like an old cat up a pole, except I can't get down. When are they going to let me out?

SYLVIA: Miss Watkyns said when all of us are in bed. Isn't she vicious?

JOE: Oh, but that's hours and hours! Oh, Sylvia, I must get out! (Begins to bounce up and down on the window ledge.)

SYLVIA: (Frightened.) Oh, Joe! Please don't do that! You'll fall!

JOE: Not me, don't you think it! (Bounces up and down again.)

SYLVIA: Oh, Joe! Please don't!

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JOE: All right. *(Pause.)* I've got an idea. Go and bring me the clothesline.

SYLVIA: What for? It's got all the nighties drying on it.

JOE: I don't want them. I only want the rope.

SYLVIA: I don't know...you're in enough trouble.

JOE: If you don't, I'll show you how to hang out of a window head downwards.

SYLVIA: No, don't! I'll bring it.

(Sylvia runs off and returns with the clothesline. Joe lowers the fishing line.)

JOE: Now, attach the rope to the fish line.

(Sylvia attaches the clothesline to the fishing line.)

SYLVIA: Nighties all over the grass. Miss Watkyns is not going to be very happy about this.

(Joe does not answer. He hauls the clothesline up and securely ties it to a bench. He jams a bench across the window frame.)

JOE: You had better move out of the way because it's a rather rotten piece of rope, and, besides, I don't think this silly old bench is going to stand much jerking about. But we'll soon see...

(Sylvia covers her eyes. Joe slides down the rope to the ground. Sylvia slowly lowers her hands and sees that Joe has made it down safely. She hugs him.)

SYLVIA: Oh, Joe, you are a brave boy. But how are you going to get the rope back?

JOE: I'm not bothering about the rope. You see, we're just going to run away.

SYLVIA: Run away?! What for?

JOE: For fun. I'm not going to be locked up by anybody.

SYLVIA: But where will we go?

JOE: I've been thinking about what Miss Watkyns told us about the Snergs and decided I would like to see for myself.

SYLVIA: But you don't even know the way there.

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JOE: Sure, I do. Remember what Miss Watkyns said? Their village is over there... *(Points.)* ...just a little bit this side of where the sun goes down. It'll be a grand adventure!

SYLVIA: But what about tomorrow? The sun's always over the sea in the morning.

JOE: Then all we've got to do is go the other way. Can't you see? It's a cinch! You must come with me.

SYLVIA: But what will Miss Watkyns do when she finds out about it?

JOE: She can't do anything to us until we get back.

SYLVIA: That's what I'm afraid of. We'll both be put in the tower.

JOE: At least we'll have someone to talk to. Come on, Sylvia. It'll be an adventure like those read to us by Miss Gribblestone. It's much better to be in an adventure than just to hear about it. We'll sleep in the forest tonight – it's nice and warm – and tomorrow sometime we'll be at the Snerg's village and have a jolly time with them. Just think what the other kids will think of us?! Especially that Jimmy Callahan. He thinks he's so smart. I'll bet he never had even one adventure. I'll show him! Come on, Sylvia.

(Joe holds out his hand. Sylvia momentarily ponders the situation and then takes Joe's hand. Joe and Sylvia run off. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: A clearing in the middle of the forest. There is a log CS. Joe and Sylvia enter.)

SYLVIA: Joe, I'm tired. I would like to stop and rest a bit. *(Sits on the log.)* Are you sure you know where you are going?

JOE: Of course. It's a cinch!

SYLVIA: We've been walking a long time. We can't see the sun anymore. Do you know where we are?

JOE: *(Looking around.)* As near as I can figure out, we are in the middle of the forest.

SYLVIA: Oh, Joe! I didn't need you to tell me that.

JOE: Don't worry, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: How much farther do you think it is?

JOE: I don't rightly know. But it seems to be a lot farther than it was when we first started out.

SYLVIA: Perhaps we should go back and start again tomorrow.

JOE: If we go back now, we'll both be put in that tower. Then Jimmy Callahan will have a real laugh.

SYLVIA: But we can't see the sun anymore. How are we going to know which way to go?

JOE: I'll just climb this tree and see if I can see anything worth seeing. *(“Climbs” tree and looks around. Climbs back down. Note: Or he can exit and re-enter.)*

SYLVIA: Did you see anything?

JOE: Nothing but more trees.

SYLVIA: *(Sighs.)* Joe, I'm hungry.

(Joe reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handkerchief containing five pears.)

JOE: Here.

(Joe hands a pear to Sylvia. Both begin to eat.)

SYLVIA: Joe, I'm beginning to think this wasn't a very good idea.

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JOE: Nonsense! This is just the beginning of our adventure. Remember how the stories Miss Gribblestone told us started out with someone or another getting lost?

SYLVIA: Are we lost?

JOE: (*Quickly.*) No. Of course not. Why, this is the time when something exciting should happen any moment. (*Surveys the surroundings. Points.*) Look over there at that part where it's like a dark passage. (*Sylvia moves a little closer to Joe.*) Suppose an old witch was to come along there—flop, flop, flop—and tell us to go home with her?

SYLVIA: Oh, don't, Joe! We don't want it too much like those stories. (*Pause.*) It's getting awfully lonely.

JOE: But it's only lonely enough to be nice, Sylvia. Besides, it's great fun.

SYLVIA: (*Edging closer to Joe.*) Yes, great fun.

JOE: There's nobody to tell us we must do things or tell us when to go to bed. We can jolly well go to bed when we want.

SYLVIA: Yes, but where are we to go to bed?

JOE: Oh, somewhere or another. I know! We'll get some fallen leaves, like the babes in the woods, and cover ourselves up.

SYLVIA: But it's summertime and there aren't any fallen leaves.

JOE: Then what we've got to do is cuddle up close. I'll look after you, never fear. And if an old witch was to— (*Owl hoots. Joe stops suddenly and looks around at the deepening shadows.*) Well, maybe she won't come tonight.

SYLVIA: Oh, Joe!

(Joe and Sylvia settle down for the night, resting their backs against the log. As lights fade, Joe puts his arm around Sylvia.)

JOE: Things will look better in the morning.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: A clearing in the middle of the forest, the next morning. Joe is sleeping with his back against the log. Sylvia is sleeping with her head on Joe's lap. Joe wakes up and stretches.)

JOE: Sylvia! Sylvia! Wake up!

(Sylvia slowly sits up, yawns, and rubs her eyes. Joe stands and helps Sylvia to her feet. They rub their arms.)

SYLVIA: *(Rubbing her stomach.)* Joe, I'm hungry.

JOE: There's nothing left.

(Growling sound is heard.)

SYLVIA: Joe! What was that?

JOE: My stomach. Well, let's see if we can find some berries to eat.

(There is the sound of rustling bushes and then snapping twigs.)

SYLVIA: Joe! What's that noise?

(Sylvia hides behind Joe. Gorbo enters. Joe sees Gorbo.)

JOE: *(To Sylvia.)* It's a Snerg!

SYLVIA: Are you sure?

JOE: Yes, I remember how Miss Watkyns described them.

GORBO: *(To Sylvia.)* He's right, you know. I am Gorbo.

JOE: I'm Joe, and this is Sylvia.

GORBO: Pleased to meet you!

(Gorbo takes their hands in his and does a little dance step.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]