

The Ogreling - an African adaptation, at the Baxter

 By [Johann Smith](#)

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Sit down, sit down. Now shhh. Mama has something to tell you. You're father is an ogre, and so are you.



The Ogreling is the anti-cool, gauche and charming hero - a person you can fall in love with and someone you would hate to be. His story is told from a simple homestead, in no obvious time or place. It's a fairy tale told with shadowy textures and beauty, not in the traditional sense. It's been a long time since a good children's story came along. One far from post-modern flash.

Written by Canadian Suzanne Lebeau in French (way before Shrek was a few polygonal lines on a designer's flat screen), The Ogreling has enjoyed many awards and has adaptations and translations in several countries. Its latest incarnation has been personalised for a South African audience by director Yvette Hardie (Is It Because I'm Jack?, Between Cup and Lip) and assistant director Ntombi Makhutshi (better known for her top acting in London Road).

From his father, The Ogreling has adopted a desire for flesh - despite being raised on mother's love and paranoia, and only on vegetables (none of which are red). The Ogreling desperately wants to escape his destiny, but to do so he has to complete a series of challenges.

Them bani Luzipho (best known for his TV roles in Backstage and Interrogation Room) makes a convincing ogre, sans make-up, and received an exuberant response from the audience. Nonceba Constance Didi plays The Ogreling's mother and her biggest challenge was being a "different mother" from the one she plays in Tsepang. The confusion never crossed my mind.

The play's shiniest moments come in its darkest. Incorporating shadow puppetry by Beren Belknap, The Ogreling's mother

recalls meeting The Ogreling's father, Simon. The scene is acted with belief and joy, and with the knowledge it's not going to end well.

If there's one thing I could change, which brings Fleur du Cap award-winner Ilka Louw's wardrobe efforts and set design to a halt, and took me out of an enchanting world, it's The Ogreling's Ben Ten backpack. Why, oh why?

Despite The Ogreling's origins and where it's been, it gives the impression of an African myth and is, ultimately, a classic children's story like The Wizard of Oz or Alice in Wonderland, but benefits from more a macabre or twisted adaptation - unlike other folklore and modern-day children's stories, in which the story is predictable with a feel-good American idiosyncratic ending. For this reason alone, The Ogreling lends itself to cult status, instead of merely gathering dust. The Ogreling is a child's delight, which also satisfies the adult contingent, but it lacks an excess for either, and that gives it one thumb up, instead of two.

The Ogreling runs until 12 February at the Baxter Golden Arrow Studio. Tickets are R38 for the school's performances and R80 for public performances.

Booking is through Computicket on +27 (0)83 915 8000, online at www.computicket.co.za or at any Shoprite Checkers outlet countrywide. For discounted charity bookings, school workshops and post-performance talks, contact assitejsa@acyta.co.za.

ABOUT JOHANN SMITH

Johann MSmith is a music journalist turned content hacker. Known as the IDMMAG launch designer, Johann specialises in entertainment, travel and social commentary. Or as he puts it: "I speak as and for companies through social and design."

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