

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Wit and Wisdom of Discworld

Terry Pratchett, compiled by Stephen Briggs

About the Book

For a quarter of a century, Terry Pratchett's Discworld - a flat world balanced on the backs of four elephants, which are standing on the back of a giant turtle, flying through space - has enchanted readers with its stories of a vast and diverse population, from ineffectual wizards to reformed thieves, and vampires who have foresworn the drinking of blood. It is a world that is vastly different from our own... except when it isn't.

The Wit and Wisdom of Discworld is a collection of the wittiest, pithiest and wisest quotations from this mad, chaotic and seductive universe, compiled by Stephen Briggs, a man who, they say, knows even more about Discworld than Terry Pratchett himself. Guaranteed to transport you back to your favourite or forgotten Discworld moments, it is the perfect book for die-hard Pratchett fans, with its comprehensive index and aid to finding specific quotations: as well as an ideal introduction for anyone coming to the Discworld for the first time.

WIT & WISDOM

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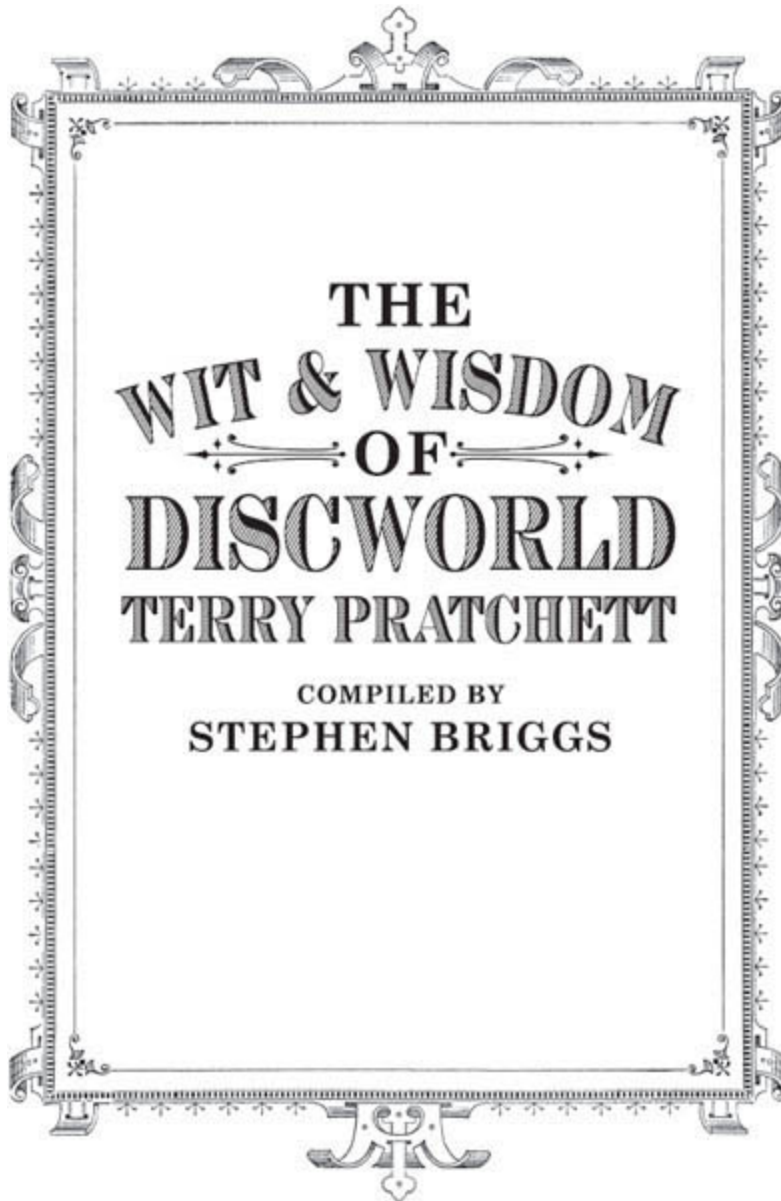
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THE
WIT & WISDOM
OF
DISCWORLD
TERRY PRATCHETT

COMPILED BY
STEPHEN BRIGGS

INTRODUCTION

THROUGH THE WARDROBE INTO DISCWORLD[®]

IT WAS THE wit of Terry Pratchett that first attracted me to the books, and which then led to my pushing past the fur coats and finding myself in his magical world – thankfully devoid of Turkish delight and talking beavers.

One of the big questions about Discworld for a newcomer is ‘Where do I start?’ This is a tricky one. For every diehard fan of Rincewind there’s an advocate for *Small Gods*. For everyone who loves the ‘Witch’ or ‘City Watch’ books, there is another who prefers the ‘one theme’ books, such as *Soul Music* and *Moving Pictures*. I, as it happens, kicked off with *Mort*.

Terry writes fantasy – but his books are grounded firmly in reality. They contain heroes (not many), cowards, villains, bigots, crooks, the strong-willed and the weak-willed. Sometimes they are human. A lot of the time they are not. The series extends across many genres and deals with real issues. But Terry uses his wit to sharpen his pen; the humour in the books can be dark, and it can be so corny you may groan out loud as you read him on the train.

In producing this book, I have not tried to extract every single gag and witty exchange from the series. There are too many, and to do that, I might just as well have tied a set of the novels up with string and added a tag: ‘The Complete Wit of Pratchett’.

What I *have* done is re-read every book in the canon, and pull out the extracts that appealed to me. Sometimes they'll be a page long, sometimes they'll be a single line of text. Sometimes a really good gag has been omitted because it needs the buildup that the novel can give but which would take too long to set up in a book of quotations. Here and there, I've had to change the *odd* word, or omit the *occasional* phrase, to help the quotation work outside its context in the novel.

The extracts are presented book by book, in the order in which they were published. Each book's section starts with the cover blurb (which in most cases was written by Terry), to give you the same sort of idea of the novel's plot as you'd get if you were browsing the shelves of your local bookstore.

IT'S A BIG BOOK **DO I HAVE TO READ IT ALL AT ONCE?**

Don't panic: you don't need to sit and read this book section by section, from cover to cover. This is more of a 'dip into' book. If you're new to Terry's novels, this cornucopia of snippets may inspire you to go out and buy and read one - or more - of them. Oh, and the maps, diaries, audio books, scarf ... As for you keen Discworld readers, what I hope is that, as you browse through this book - by torchlight under the covers last thing at night, smeared with sun lotion on a beach in Greece, on a long coach trip, sat on the privy - you'll find some of your favourite pieces from the Discworld canon. I haven't had the luxury of doing my research in any of these exotic locations - but I enjoyed the opportunity to wander once more through the roughly four million words which currently make up the series ... around twice the complete wordage of the Bible and all Shakespeare's plays.

Stephen Briggs

www.stephenbriggs.com / www.studiotheatreclub.com



An ornate, rectangular decorative border with intricate scrollwork and floral motifs at the corners and midpoints of each side. The border is composed of multiple layers, including a thin inner line with small star-like patterns and a thicker outer line with larger, more complex designs.

THE
COLOUR
OF
MAGIC

ON A WORLD supported on the back of a giant turtle (sex unknown), a gleeful, explosive, wickedly eccentric expedition sets out. There's an avaricious but inept wizard [Rincewind], a naive tourist [Twoflower] whose luggage moves on hundreds of dear little legs, dragons who only exist if you believe in them, and of course The Edge of the planet ...

How it all began:

In a distant and second-hand set of dimensions, in an astral plane that was never meant to fly, the curling star-mists waver and part ...

*

There was the theory that A'Tuin had come from nowhere and would continue at a uniform crawl, or steady gait, into nowhere, for all time. This theory was popular among academics.

An alternative, favoured by those of a religious persuasion, was that A'Tuin was crawling from the Birthplace to the Time of Mating, as were all the stars in the sky which were, obviously, also carried by giant turtles. When they arrived they would briefly and passionately mate, for the first and only time, and from that fiery union new turtles would be born to carry a new pattern of worlds. This was known as the Big Bang hypothesis.

*

The twin city of Ankh-Morpork, foremost of all the cities bounding the Circle Sea, was as a matter of course the home of a large number of gangs, thieves' guilds, syndicates and similar organizations. This was one of the reasons for its wealth.

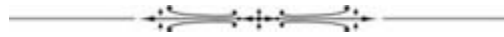
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The stranger smiled widely and fumbled yet again in the pouch. This time his hand came out holding a large gold coin. It was in fact slightly larger than an 8,000-dollar

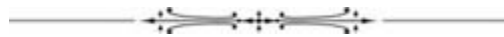
Ankhian crown and the design on it was unfamiliar, but it spoke inside Hugh's mind in a language he understood perfectly. My current owner, it said, is in need of succour and assistance; why not give it to him, so you and me can go off somewhere and enjoy ourselves?

*

If complete and utter chaos was lightning, then he'd be the sort to stand on a hilltop in a thunderstorm wearing wet copper armour and shouting 'All gods are bastards'.



Tourist, Rincewind had decided, meant 'idiot'.



At about this time a hitherto unsuccessful fortune-teller living on the other side of the block chanced to glance into her scrying bowl, gave a small scream and, within the hour, had sold her jewellery, various magical accoutrements, most of her clothes and almost all her other possessions that could not be conveniently carried on the fastest horse she could buy. The fact that later on, when her house collapsed in flames, she herself died in a freak landslide in the Morpork Mountains, proves that Death, too, has a sense of humour.

*

The Patrician of Ankh-Morpork smiled, but with his mouth only.

*

'I'm sure you won't dream of trying to escape from your obligations by fleeing the city ...'

'I assure you the thought never even crossed my mind, lord.'

'Indeed? Then if I were you I'd sue my face for slander.'

*

'Ah, Gorphal,' said the Patrician pleasantly. 'Come in. Sit down. Can I press you to a candied starfish?'

'I am yours to command, master,' said the old man calmly. 'Save, perhaps, in the matter of preserved echinoderms.'

*

There are said to be some mystic rivers - one drop of which can steal a man's life away. After its turbid passage through the twin cities the Ankh could have been one of them.

*

That's what's so stupid about the whole magic thing ... You spend twenty years learning the spell that makes nude virgins appear in your bedroom, and then you're so poisoned by quicksilver fumes and half-blind from reading old grimoires that you can't remember what happens next.

*

Death, on Discworld, is a character in his own right, and throughout the series is recognizable by always speaking IN BLOCK CAPITALS.

Death, insofar as it was possible in a face with no movable features, looked surprised. RINCEWIND? ... WHY ARE YOU HERE?

'Um, why not?' said Rincewind.

I WAS SURPRISED THAT YOU JOSTLED ME, RINCEWIND. FOR I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THEE THIS VERY NIGHT.

'Oh no, not—'

OF COURSE, WHAT'S SO BLOODY VEXING ABOUT THE WHOLE BUSINESS IS THAT I WAS EXPECTING TO MEET THEE IN PSEUDOPOLIS.

'But that's five hundred miles away!'

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME, THE WHOLE SYSTEM'S GOT SCREWED UP AGAIN. I CAN SEE THAT.

*

I'LL GET YOU YET, CULLY, said Death, in a voice like the slamming of leaden coffin lids.

*

Death sat in His garden, running a whetstone along the edge of His scythe. It was already so sharp that any passing breeze that blew across it was sliced smoothly into two puzzled zephyrs.

*

'Run away and leave Hrun with that thing?' Twoflower said.

Rincewind looked blank. 'Why not?' he said. 'It's his job.'

'But it'll kill him!'

'It could be worse,' said Rincewind.

'What?'

'It could be *us*,' Rincewind pointed out logically.

*

'We've strayed into a zone with a high magical index,' Rincewind said. 'Don't ask me how. Once upon a time a really powerful magic field must have been generated here, and we're feeling the after-effects.'

'Precisely,' said a passing bush.

*

'You don't understand!' screamed the tourist, above the terrible noise of the wingbeats. 'All my life I've wanted to see dragons!'

'From the inside?' shouted Rincewind.

*

'You're your own worst enemy, Rincewind,' said the sword.

Rincewind looked up at grinning men.

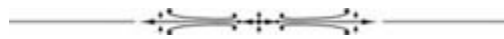
'Bet?' he said wearily.

*

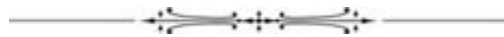
'Well,' said the voice. 'You see, one of the disadvantages of being dead is that one is released as it were from the bonds of time and therefore I can see everything that has happened or will happen, all at the same time except that of course I now know that Time does not, for all practical purposes, exist.'

'That doesn't sound like a disadvantage,' said Twoflower.

'You don't think so? Imagine every moment being at one and the same time a distant memory and a nasty surprise and you'll see what I mean.'



I'd rather be a slave than a corpse.



Plants on the Disc, while including the categories known commonly as *annuals*, ... and *perennials*, ... also included a few rare *reannuals* which, because of an unusual four-dimensional twist in their genes, could be planted this year to come up *last year*. The *vul* nut vine was particularly exceptional in that it could flourish as many as eight years prior to its seed actually being sown. *Vul* nut wine was reputed to give certain drinkers an insight into the future

which was, from the nut's point of view, the past. Strange but true.

*

'We know all about you, Rincewind the magician. You are a man of great cunning and artifice. You laugh in the face of Death. Your affected air of craven cowardice does not fool me.'

It fooled Rincewind.

*

'What is your name?' he said.

'My name is immaterial,' she said.

'That's a pretty name,' said Rincewind.

*

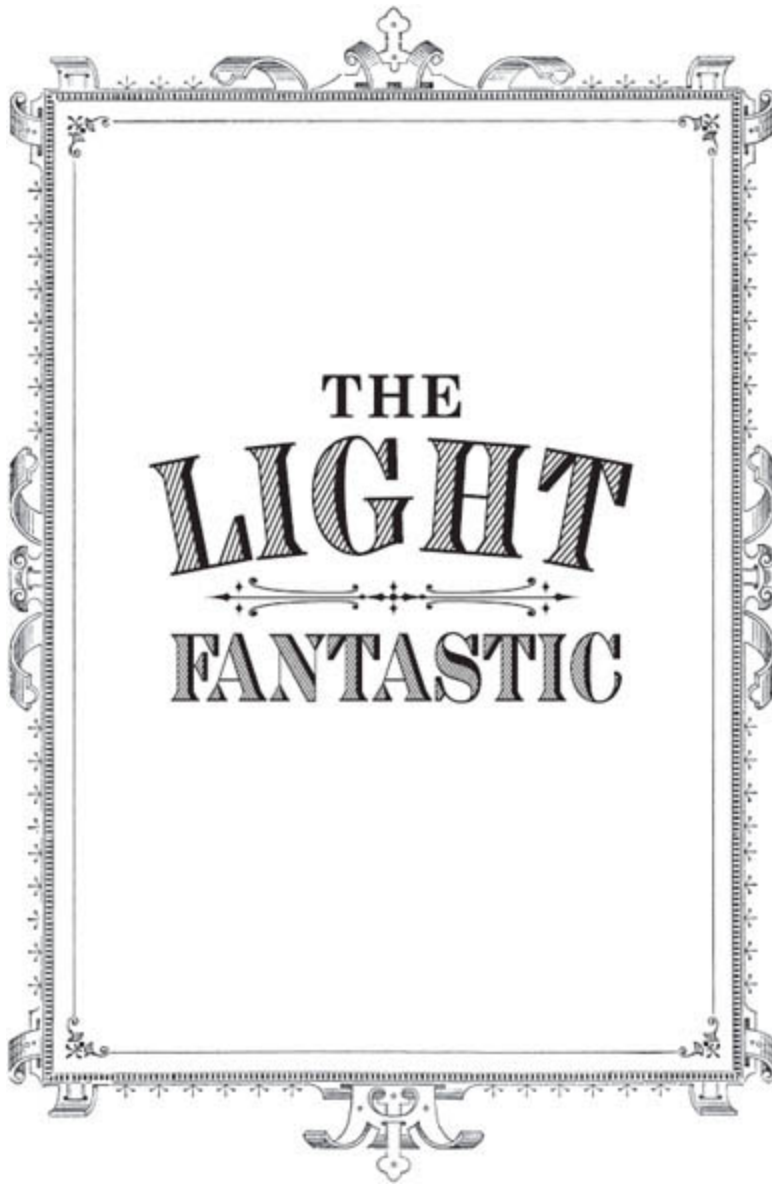
'I hope you're not proposing to enslave us,' said Twoflower.

Marchesa looked genuinely shocked. 'Certainly not! Whatever could have given you that idea? Your lives in Krull will be rich, full and comfortable—'

'Oh, good,' said Rincewind.

'—just not very long.'





THE
LIGHT
FANTASTIC

AS IT MOVES towards a seemingly inevitable collision with a malevolent red star, the Discworld has only one possible saviour. Unfortunately, this happens to be the singularly inept and cowardly wizard called Rincewind, who was last seen falling off the edge of the world ...

It is said that someone at a party once asked the famous philosopher Ly Tin Wheedle 'Why are you here?' and the reply took three years.

*

Cori Celesti, upon whose utter peak the world's quarrelsome and somewhat bourgeois gods lived in a palace of marble, alabaster and uncut moquette three-piece suites they had chosen to call Dunmanifestin. It was always a considerable annoyance to any Disc citizen with pretensions to culture that they were ruled by gods whose idea of an uplifting artistic experience was a musical doorbell.

*

Trymon didn't smile often enough, and he liked figures and the sort of organization charts that show lots of squares with arrows pointing to other squares. In short, he was the sort of man who could use the word 'personnel' and mean it.

*

'Do you think there's anything to eat in this forest?'

'Yes,' said the wizard bitterly, 'us.'

*

'[There are] some big mushrooms ... Can you eat them?'

Rincewind looked at them cautiously. 'No, no good to eat at all.'

'Why?' called Twoflower. 'Are the gills the wrong shade of yellow?'

'No, not really ...'

'I expect the stems haven't got the right kind of fluting, then.'

'They look okay, actually.'

'The cap, then, I expect the cap is the wrong colour,' said Twoflower.

'Not sure about that.'

'Well then, why can't you eat them?'

Rincewind coughed. 'It's the little doors and windows,' he said wretchedly, 'it's a dead giveaway.'

*

He moved in a way that suggested he was attempting the world speed record for the nonchalant walk.

*

'I said I hope it is a good party,' said Galder, loudly.

AT THE MOMENT IT IS, said Death levelly. I THINK IT MIGHT GO DOWNHILL VERY QUICKLY AT MIDNIGHT.

'Why?'

THAT'S WHEN THEY THINK I'LL BE TAKING MY MASK OFF.

He vanished, leaving only a cocktail stick and a short paper streamer behind.

*

When the first explorers from the warm lands around the Circle Sea travelled into the chilly hinterland they filled in the blank spaces on their maps by grabbing the nearest native, pointing at some distant landmark, speaking very clearly in a loud voice, and writing down whatever the bemused man told them. Thus were immortalized in generations of atlases such geographical oddities as Just A

Mountain, I Don't Know, What? and, of course, Your Finger You Fool.

*

Cohen the Barbarian enters the Discworld canon:

The barbarian chieftain said: 'What then are the greatest things that a man may find in life?'

The man on his right spoke thus: 'The crisp horizon of the steppe, the wind in your hair, a fresh horse under you.'

The man on his left said: 'The cry of the white eagle in the heights, the fall of snow in the forest, a true arrow in your bow.'

The chieftain nodded, and said: 'Surely it is the sight of your enemy slain, the humiliation of his tribe and the lamentation of his women.'

Then the chieftain turned respectfully to his guest, and said: 'But our guest, whose name is legend, must tell us truly: what is it that a man may call the greatest things in life?'

The warriors leaned closer. This should be worth hearing.

The guest thought long and hard and then said, with deliberation: 'Hot water, good dentistry and soft lavatory paper.'

*

[He was] a very old man, the skinny variety that generally gets called 'spry', with a totally bald head, a beard almost down to his knees, and a pair of matchstick legs on which varicose veins had traced the street map of quite a large city ...

*

'When I was a young man, carving my name in the world, well, then I liked my women red-haired and fiery.'

'Ah.'

'And then I grew a little older and for preference I looked for a woman with blonde hair and the glint of the world in her eye.'

'Oh? Yes?'

'But then I grew a little older again and I came to see the point of dark women of a sultry nature.'

He paused. Rincewind waited.

'And?' he said. 'Then what? What is it that you look for in a woman now?'

Cohen turned one rheumy blue eye on him.

'Patience,' he said.

*

Cohen [had] ... spent his life living rough under the sky [and] knew the value of a good thick book, which ought to outlast at least a season of cooking fires if you were careful how you tore the pages out. Many a life had been saved on a snowy night by a handful of sodden kindling and a really dry book. If you felt like a smoke and couldn't find a pipe, a book was your man every time.

Cohen realized people wrote things in books. It had always seemed to him to be a frivolous waste of paper.

*

'If you kill me a thousand will take my place,' said the man, who was now backed against the wall.

'Yes,' said Cohen, in a reasonable tone of voice, 'but that isn't the point, is it? The point is, *you'll* be dead.'

*

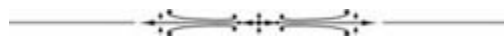
Greyhald Spold, currently the oldest wizard on the Disc and determined to keep it that way, has been very busy. The servants have been dismissed. The doorways have been sealed with a paste made from powdered mayflies, and protective octograms have been drawn on the windows. Rare and rather smelly oils have been poured in complex patterns on the floor; in the very centre of the room is the eightfold octogram of Withholding, surrounded by red and green candles. And in the centre of that is a box, lined with red silk and yet more protective amulets. Because Greyhald Spold knows that Death is looking for him, and has spent many years designing an impregnable hiding place.

He has just set the complicated clockwork of the lock and shut the lid, lying back in the knowledge that here at last is the perfect defence against the most ultimate of all his enemies, although as yet he has not considered the important part that airholes must play in an enterprise of this kind.

And right beside him, very close to his ear, a voice has just said: DARK IN HERE, ISN'T IT?

*

Seven league boots are a tricky form of magic at best, and the utmost caution must be taken in using a means of transport which, when all is said and done, relies for its effectiveness on trying to put one foot twenty-one miles in front of the other.



Cohen had heard of fighting fair, and had long ago decided he wanted no part of it.

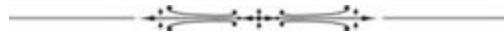


Twoflower didn't just look at the world through rose-tinted spectacles, Rincewind knew - he looked at it through a

rose-tinted brain, too, and heard it through rose-tinted ears.

*

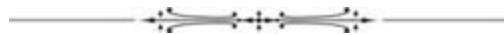
There was no real point in trying to understand anything Twoflower said, and all anyone could do was run alongside the conversation and hope to jump on as it turned a corner.



‘His name’s Twoflower. He isn’t from these parts.’

‘Doesn’t look like it. Friend of yoursh?’

‘We’ve got this sort of hate-hate relationship, yes.’



That’s old Twoflower, Rincewind thought. It’s not that he doesn’t appreciate beauty, he just appreciates it in his own way. I mean, if a poet sees a daffodil he stares at it and writes a long poem about it, but Twoflower wanders off to find a book on botany. And treads on it.

*

Then they all heard it; a tiny distant crunching, like something moving very quickly over the snow crust.

... It was louder now, a crisp rhythm like someone eating celery very fast.

*

Rincewind was to magic what a bicycle is to a bumblebee.

*

Trolls were not unknown in Ankh-Morpork, of course, where they often got employment as bodyguards. They

tended to be a bit expensive to keep until they learned about doors and didn't simply leave the house by walking aimlessly through the nearest wall.

*

There were many drawbacks to being a swordswoman, not least of which was that men didn't take you seriously until you'd actually killed them, by which time it didn't really matter anyway.

*

'It's the star, friend,' the man said. 'Haven't you seen it in the sky?'

'We couldn't help noticing it, yes.'

'They say that it'll hit us on Hogswatchnight and the seas will boil and the countries of the Disc will be broken and kings will be brought down and the cities will be as lakes of glass,' said the man. 'I'm off to the mountains.'

'That'll help, will it?' said Rincewind.

'No, but the view will be better.'

*

Ankh-Morpork!

Pearl of cities!

This is not a completely accurate description, of course - it was not round and shiny - but even its worst enemies would agree that if you had to liken Ankh-Morpork to anything, then it might as well be a piece of rubbish covered with the diseased secretions of a dying mollusc.

*

There have been bigger cities. There have been richer cities. There have certainly been prettier cities. But no city

in the multiverse could rival Ankh-Morpork for its smell.

*

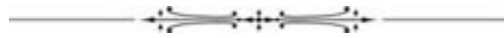
Ankh-Morpork, largest city in the lands around the Circle Sea, slept.

That statement is not really true.

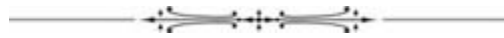
On the one hand, those parts of the city which normally concerned themselves with, for example, selling vegetables, shoeing horses, carving exquisite small jade ornaments, changing money and making tables, on the whole, slept. Unless they had insomnia. Or had got up in the night as it might be, to go to the lavatory. On the other hand, many of the less law-abiding citizens were wide awake and, for instance, climbing through windows that didn't belong to them, slitting throats, mugging one another, listening to loud music in smoky cellars and generally having a lot more fun. But most of the animals were asleep, except for the rats. And the bats, too, of course. As far as the insects were concerned ...

The point is that descriptive writing is very rarely entirely accurate and during the reign of Olaf Quimby II as Patrician of Ankh some legislation was passed in a determined attempt to put a stop to this sort of thing and introduce some honesty into reporting. Thus, if a legend said of a notable hero that 'all men spoke of his prowess' any bard who valued his life would add hastily 'except for a couple of people in his home village who thought he was a liar, and quite a lot of other people who had never really heard of him'. Poetic simile was strictly limited to statements like 'his mighty steed was as fleet as the wind on a fairly calm day, say about Force Three', and any loose talk about a beloved having a face that launched a thousand ships would have to be backed by evidence that the object of desire did indeed look like a bottle of champagne.

Quimby was eventually killed by a disgruntled poet during an experiment conducted in the palace grounds to prove the disputed accuracy of the proverb 'The pen is mightier than the sword', and in his memory it was amended to include the phrase 'only if the sword is very small and the pen is very sharp'.



Unseen University had never admitted women, muttering something about problems with the plumbing, but the real reason was an unspoken dread that if women were allowed to mess around with magic they would probably be embarrassingly good at it ...



The Octavo filled the room with a dull, sullen light, which wasn't strictly light at all but the opposite of light; darkness isn't the opposite of light, it is simply its absence, and what was radiating from the book was the light that lies on the far side of darkness, the light fantastic.

It was a rather disappointing purple colour.

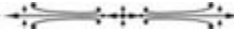
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It looked the sort of book described in library catalogues as 'slightly foxed', although it would be more honest to admit that it looked as though it had been badgered, wolved and possibly beared as well.

*

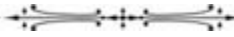
'All the shops have been smashed open, there was a whole bunch of people across the street helping themselves to musical instruments, can you believe that?'

'Yeah,' said Rincewind. 'Luters, I expect.'



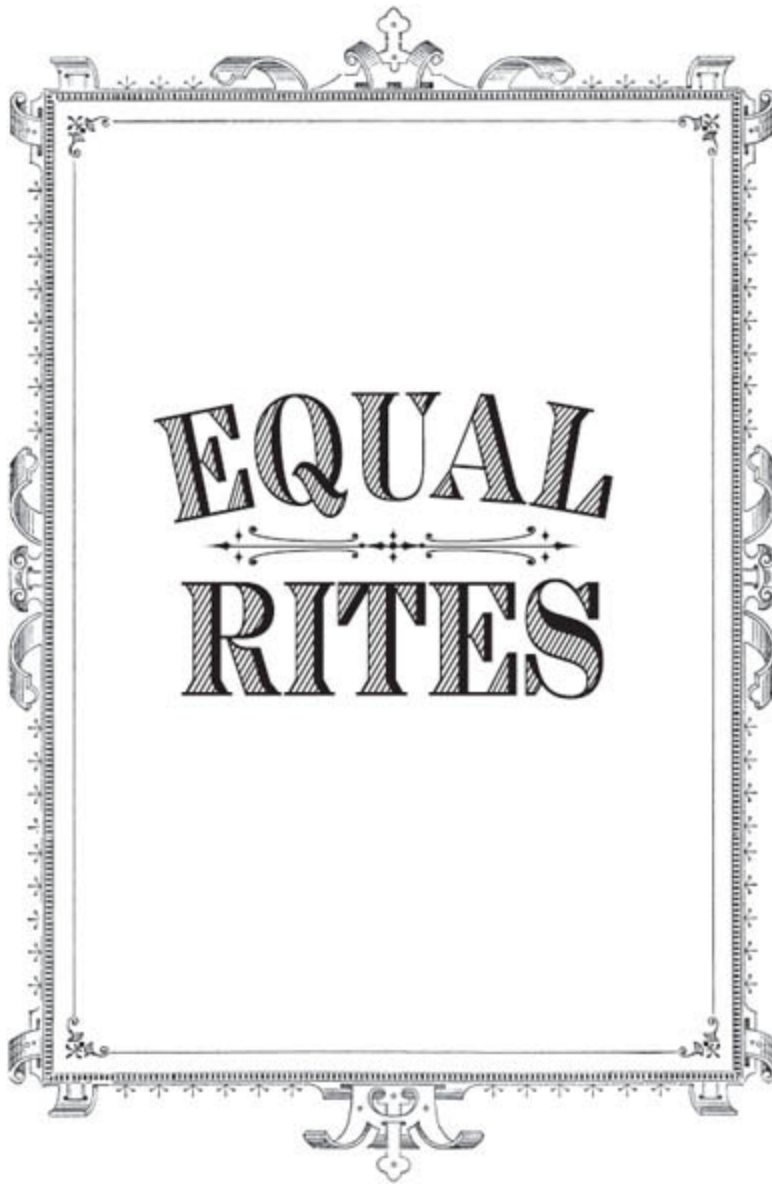
‘You know, I think I might re-enroll,’ said Rincewind cheerfully.

‘I think I could really make a go of things this time. I can really see myself getting to grips with magic and graduating really well. They do say if it’s summa cum laude, then the living is easy—’



A Thaum is the basic unit of magical strength. It has been universally established as the amount of magic needed to create one small white pigeon or three normal-sized billiard balls.





EQUAL
—
RITES

THE LAST THING the wizard Drum Billet did, before Death laid a bony hand on his shoulder, was to pass on his staff of power to the eighth son of an eighth son. Unfortunately for his colleagues in the chauvinistic (not to say misogynistic) world of magic, he failed to check on the new-born baby's sex ...