

LIBRIS

We know
books

SOURCERY

A Discworld® Novel

Terry Pratchett

GOLLANCZ
LONDON

There was a man and he had eight sons. Apart from that, he was nothing more than a comma on the page of History. It's sad, but that's all you can say about some people.

But the eighth son grew up and married and had eight sons, and because there is only one suitable profession for the eighth son of an eighth son, he became a wizard. And he became wise and powerful, or at any rate powerful, and wore a pointed hat and there it would have ended ...

Should have ended ...

But against the Lore of Magic and certainly against all reason – except the reasons of the heart, which are warm and messy and, well, *unreasonable* – he fled the halls of magic and fell in love and got married, not necessarily in that order.

And he had seven sons, each one from the cradle at least as powerful as any wizard in the world.

And then he had an eighth son ...

A wizard squared. A source of magic.

A sourcerer.



Summer thunder rolled around the sandy cliffs. Far below, the sea sucked on the shingle as noisily as an old man with one tooth who had been given a gobstopper. A few seagulls hung lazily in the updraughts, waiting for something to happen.

And the father of wizards sat among the thrift and rattling sea grasses at the edge of the cliff, cradling the child in his arms, staring out to sea.

There was a roil of black cloud out there, heading inland, and the light it pushed before it had that deep syrup quality it gets before a really serious thunderstorm.

He turned at a sudden silence behind him, and looked up through tear-reddened eyes at a tall hooded figure in a black robe.

IPSCORE THE RED? it said. The voice was as hollow as a cave, as dense as a neutron star.

Ipslore grinned the terrible grin of the suddenly mad, and held up the child for Death's inspection.

'My son,' he said. 'I shall call him Coin.'

A NAME AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER, said Death politely. His empty sockets stared down at a small round face wrapped in sleep. Despite rumour, Death isn't cruel – merely terribly, terribly good at his job.

'You took his mother,' said Ipslore. It was a flat statement, without apparent rancour. In the valley behind the cliffs Ipslore's homestead was a smoking ruin, the rising wind already spreading the fragile ashes across the hissing dunes.

IT WAS A HEART ATTACK AT THE END, said Death. THERE ARE WORSE WAYS TO DIE. TAKE IT FROM ME.

Ipslore looked out to sea. 'All my magic could not save her,' he said.

THERE ARE PLACES WHERE EVEN MAGIC MAY NOT GO.

'And now you have come for the child?'

NO. THE CHILD HAS HIS OWN DESTINY. I HAVE COME FOR YOU.

'Ah.' The wizard stood up, carefully laid the sleeping baby down on the thin grass, and picked up a long staff that had been lying there. It was made of a black metal, with a meshwork of silver and gold carvings that gave it a rich and sinister tastelessness; the metal was octiron, intrinsically magical.

'I made this, you know,' he said. 'They all said you couldn't

make a staff out of metal, they said they should only be of wood, but they were wrong. I put a lot of myself into it. I shall give it to him.'

He ran his hands lovingly along the staff, which gave off a faint tone.

He repeated, almost to himself, 'I put a lot of myself into it.'

IT IS A GOOD STAFF, said Death.

Ipslore held it in the air and looked down at his eighth son, who gave a gurgle.

'She wanted a daughter,' he said.

Death shrugged. Ipslore gave him a look compounded of bewilderment and rage.

'What is he?'

THE EIGHTH SON OF AN EIGHTH SON OF AN EIGHTH SON, said Death, unhelpfully. The wind whipped at his robe, driving the black clouds overhead.

'What does that make him?'

A SOURCERER, AS YOU ARE WELL AWARE.

Thunder rolled, on cue.

'What is his destiny?' shouted Ipslore, above the rising gale.

Death shrugged again. He was good at it.

SOURCERERS MAKE THEIR OWN DESTINY. THEY TOUCH THE EARTH LIGHTLY.

Ipslore leaned on the staff, drumming on it with his fingers, apparently lost in the maze of his own thoughts. His left eyebrow twitched.

'No,' he said, softly, 'no. I will make his destiny for him.'

I ADVISE AGAINST IT.

'Be quiet! And listen when I tell you that they drove me out, with their books and their rituals and their Lore! They called themselves wizards, and they had less magic in their whole fat bodies than I have in my little finger! Banished!

Me! For showing that I was human! And what would humans be without love?’

RARE, said Death. NEVERTHELESS—

‘Listen! They drove us here, to the ends of the world, and that killed her! They tried to take my staff away!’ Ipslore was screaming above the noise of the wind.

‘Well, I still have some power left,’ he snarled. ‘And I say that my son shall go to Unseen University and wear the Archchancellor’s hat and the wizards of the world shall bow to him! And he shall show them what lies in their deepest hearts. Their craven, greedy hearts. He’ll show the *world* its true destiny, and there will be no magic greater than his.’

NO. And the strange thing about the quiet way Death spoke the word was this: it was louder than the roaring of the storm. It jerked Ipslore back to momentary sanity.

Ipslore rocked back and forth uncertainly. ‘What?’ he said.

I SAID NO. NOTHING IS FINAL. NOTHING IS ABSOLUTE. EXCEPT ME, OF COURSE. SUCH TINKERING WITH DESTINY COULD MEAN THE DOWNFALL OF THE WORLD. THERE MUST BE A CHANCE, HOWEVER SMALL. THE LAWYERS OF FATE DEMAND A LOOPHOLE IN EVERY PROPHECY.

Ipslore stared at Death’s implacable face.

‘I must give them a chance?’

YES.

Tap, tap, tap went Ipslore’s fingers on the metal of the staff.

‘Then they shall have their chance,’ he said, ‘when hell freezes over.’

NO. I AM NOT ALLOWED TO ENLIGHTEN YOU, EVEN BY DEFAULT, ABOUT CURRENT TEMPERATURES IN THE NEXT WORLD.

‘Then,’ Ipslore hesitated, ‘then they shall have their chance when my son throws his staff away.’

NO WIZARD WOULD EVER THROW HIS STAFF AWAY, said Death. THE BOND IS TOO GREAT.

'Yet it is possible, you must agree.'

Death appeared to consider this. *Must* was not a word he was accustomed to hearing, but he seemed to concede the point.

AGREED, he said.

'Is that a small enough chance for you?'

SUFFICIENTLY MOLECULAR.

Ipslore relaxed a little. In a voice that was nearly normal, he said: 'I don't regret it, you know. I would do it all again. Children are our hope for the future.'

THERE IS NO HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, said Death.

'What does it contain, then?'

ME.

'Besides you I mean!'

Death gave him a puzzled look. I'M SORRY?

The storm reached its howling peak overhead. A seagull went past backwards.

'I meant,' said Ipslore, bitterly, 'what is there in this world that makes living worth while?'

Death thought about it.

CATS, he said eventually, CATS ARE NICE.

'Curse you!'

MANY HAVE, said Death, evenly.

'How much longer do I have?'

Death pulled a large hourglass from the secret recesses of his robe. The two bulbs were enclosed in bars of black and gold, and the sand was nearly all in the bottom one.

OH, ABOUT NINE SECONDS.

Ipslore pulled himself up to his full and still impressive height, and extended the gleaming metal staff towards the child. A hand like a little pink crab reached out from the blanket and grasped it.

'Then let me be the first and last wizard in the history of the world to pass on his staff to his eighth son,' he said slowly and sonorously. 'And I charge him to use it to—'

I SHOULD HURRY UP, IF I WERE YOU ...

'—the full,' said Ipslore, 'becoming the mightiest—'

The lightning screamed from the heart of the cloud, hit Ipslore on the point of his hat, crackled down his arm, flashed along the staff and struck the child.

The wizard vanished in a wisp of smoke. The staff glowed green, then white, then merely red-hot. The child smiled in his sleep.

When the thunder had died away Death reached down slowly and picked up the boy, who opened his eyes.

They glowed golden, from the inside. For the first time in what, for want of any better word, must be called his life, Death found himself looking at a stare that he found hard to return. The eyes seemed to be focused on a point several inches inside his skull.

I did not mean for that to happen, said the voice of Ipslore, from out of the empty air. *Is he harmed?*

NO. Death tore his gaze away from that fresh, knowing smile. HE CONTAINED THE POWER. HE IS A SOURCERER: NO DOUBT HE WILL SURVIVE MUCH WORSE. AND NOW — YOU WILL COME WITH ME.

No.

YES. YOU ARE DEAD, YOU SEE. Death looked around for Ipslore's wavering shade, and failed to find it. WHERE ARE YOU?

In the staff.

Death leaned on his scythe and sighed.

FOOLISH. HOW EASILY COULD I CUT YOU LOOSE.

Not without destroying the staff, said the voice of Ipslore, and it seemed to Death that there was a new, thick, exultant quality to it. *And now the child has accepted the staff you cannot destroy it without destroying him. And that you cannot do without upsetting destiny. My last magic. Rather neat, I feel.*

Death prodded the staff. It crackled, and sparks crawled obscenely along its length.

Strangely enough, he wasn't particularly angry. Anger is an emotion, and for emotion you need glands, and Death didn't have much truck with glands and needed a good run at it to get angry. But he was mildly annoyed. He sighed again. People were always trying this sort of thing. On the other hand, it was quite interesting to watch, and at least this was a bit more original than the usual symbolic chess game, which Death always dreaded because he could never remember how the knight was supposed to move.

YOU'RE ONLY PUTTING OFF THE INEVITABLE, he said.

That's what being alive is all about.

BUT WHAT PRECISELY DO YOU EXPECT TO GAIN?

I shall be by my son's side. I shall teach him, even though he won't know it. I shall guide his understanding. And, when he is ready, I shall guide his steps.

TELL ME, said Death, HOW DID YOU GUIDE THE STEPS OF YOUR OTHER SONS?

I drove them out. They dared to argue with me, they would not listen to what I could teach them. But this one will.

IS THIS WISE?

The staff was silent. Beside it, the boy chuckled at the sound of a voice only he could hear.



There was no analogy for the way in which Great A'Tuin the world turtle moved against the galactic night. When you are ten thousand miles long, your shell pocked with meteor craters and frosted with comet ice, there is absolutely nothing you can realistically be like except yourself.

So Great A'Tuin swam slowly through the interstellar deeps like the largest turtle there has ever been, carrying on

its carapace the four huge elephants that bore on their backs the vast, glittering waterfall-fringed circle of the Discworld, which exists either because of some impossible blip on the curve of probability or because the gods enjoy a joke as much as anyone.

More than most people, in fact.

Near the shores of the Circle Sea, in the ancient, sprawling city of Ankh-Morpork, on a velvet cushion on a ledge high up in the Unseen University, was a hat.

It was a good hat. It was a *magnificent* hat.

It was pointy, of course, with a wide floppy brim, but after disposing of these basic details the designer had really got down to business. There was gold lace on there, and pearls, and bands of purest vermine, and sparkling Ankhstones*, and some incredibly tasteless sequins, and – a dead giveaway, of course – a circle of octarines.

Since they weren't in a strong magical field at the moment they weren't glowing, and looked like rather inferior diamonds.

Spring had come to Ankh-Morpork. It wasn't immediately apparent, but there were signs that were obvious to the cognoscenti. For example, the scum on the river Ankh, that great wide slow waterway that served the double city as reservoir, sewer and frequent morgue, had turned a particularly iridescent green. The city's drunken rooftops sprouted mattresses and bolsters as the winter bedding was put out to air in the weak sunshine, and in the depths of musty cellars the beams twisted and groaned when their dry sap responded to the ancient call of root and forest. Birds nested among the gutters and eaves of Unseen University, although it was noticeable that however great the pressure on the nesting sites they never, ever, made nests in the invitingly open

* Like rhinestones, but different river. When it comes to glittering objects, wizards have all the taste and self-control of a deranged magpie.

mouths of the gargoyles that lined the rooftops, much to the gargoyles' disappointment.

A kind of spring had even come to the ancient University itself. Tonight would be the Eve of Small Gods, and a new Archchancellor would be elected.

Well, not exactly *elected*, because wizards didn't have any truck with all this undignified voting business, and it was well known that Archchancellors were selected by the will of the gods, and this year it was a pretty good bet that the gods would see their way clear to selecting old Virrid Wayzygoose, who was a decent old boy and had been patiently waiting his turn for years.

The Archchancellor of Unseen University was the official leader of all the wizards on the Disc. Once upon a time it had meant that he would be the most powerful in the handling of magic, but times were a lot quieter now and, to be honest, senior wizards tended to look upon actual magic as a bit beneath them. They tended to prefer administration, which was safer and nearly as much fun, and also big dinners.

And so the long afternoon wore on. The hat squatted on its faded cushion in Wayzygoose's chambers, while he sat in his tub in front of the fire and soaped his beard. Other wizards dozed in their studies, or took a gentle stroll around the gardens in order to work up an appetite for the evening's feast; about a dozen steps was usually considered quite sufficient.

In the Great Hall, under the carved or painted stares of two hundred earlier Archchancellors, the butler's staff set out the long tables and benches. In the vaulted maze of the kitchens – well, the imagination should need no assistance. It should include lots of grease and heat and shouting, vats of caviar, whole roast oxen, strings of sausages like paper-chains strung from wall to wall, the head chef himself at work in one of the cold rooms putting the finishing touches

to a model of the University carved for some inexplicable reason out of butter. He kept doing this every time there was a feast – butter swans, butter buildings, whole rancid greasy yellow menageries – and he enjoyed it so much no one had the heart to tell him to stop.

In his own labyrinth of cellars the butler prowled among his casks, decanting and tasting.

The air of expectation had even spread to the ravens who inhabited the Tower of Art, eight hundred feet high and reputedly the oldest building in the world. Its crumbling stones supported thriving miniature forests high above the city's rooftops. Entire species of beetles and small mammals had evolved up there and, since people rarely climbed it these days owing to the tower's distressing tendency to sway in the breeze, the ravens had it all to themselves. Now they were flying around it in a state of some agitation, like gnats before a thunderstorm. If anyone below is going to take any notice of them it might be a good idea.

Something horrible was about to happen.

You can tell, can't you?



You're not the only one.

'What's got into them?' shouted Rincewind above the din.

The Librarian ducked as a leather-bound grimoire shot out from its shelf and jerked to a mid-air halt on the end of its chain. Then he dived, rolled and landed on a copy of *Maleficio's Discouverie of Demonologie* that was industriously bashing at its lectern.

'Oook!' he said.

Rincewind put his shoulder against a trembling bookshelf and forced its rustling volumes back into place with his knees. The noise was terrible.

Books of magic have a sort of life of their own. Some