

TERRY
PRATCHETT
A DISCWORLD NOVEL
MEN AT ARMS



Men At Arms by Terry Pratchett

Corporal Carrot, Ankh-Morpork City Guard (Night Watch), sat down in his nightshirt, took up his pencil, sucked the end for a moment, and then wrote:

'Dearest Mume and Dad,
'Well here is another fine Turnup for the Books, for I have been made Corporal!! It means another Five Dollars a month plus also I have a new jerkin with, two stripes upon it as well. And a new copper badge! It is a Great responsibility!! This is all because we have got new recruits because the Patrician who, as I have formerly vouchsafed is the ruler of the city, has agreed the Watch must reflect the ethnic makeup of the City-'

Carrot paused for a moment and stared out of the small dusty bedroom window at the early evening sunlight sidling across the river. Then he bent over the paper again.

'-which I do not Fulley understand but must have something to do with the dwarf Grabpot Thundergust's Cosmetic Factory. Also, Captain Vimes of who I have often written to you of is, leaving the Watch to get married and Become a Fine Gentleman and, I'm sure we wish him All the Best, he taught me All I Know apart, from the things I taught myself. We are clubbing together to get him a Surprise Present, I thought one of those new Watches that don't need demons to make them go and we could inscribe on the back something like "A Watch from, your Old Freinds in the Watch", this is a pun or Play on Words. We do not know who will be the new Captain, Sgt Colon says he will Resign if it's him, Cpl Nobbs-'

Carrot stared out of the window again. His big honest forehead wrinkled with effort as he tried to think of something positive to say about Corporal Nobbs.

'-is more suited in his current Roll, and I have not been in the Watch long enough. So we shall just have to wait and See-'

It began, as many things do, with a death. And a burial, on a spring morning, with mist on the ground so thick that it poured into the grave and the coffin was lowered into cloud. A small greyish mongrel, host to so many assorted doggy diseases that it was surrounded by a cloud of dust, watched impassively from the mound of earth. Various elderly female relatives cried. But Edward d'Eath didn't cry, for three reasons. He was the eldest son, the thirty-seventh Lord d'Eath, and it was Not Done for a d'Eath to cry; he was - just, the diploma still had the crackle in it - an Assassin, and Assassins didn't cry at a death, otherwise they'd never be stopping; and he was angry. In fact, he was enraged. Enraged at having to borrow money for this poor funeral. Enraged at the weather, at this common cemetery, at the way the background noise of the city didn't change in any way, even on such an occasion as this. Enraged at history. It was never meant to be like this. It shouldn't have been like this. He looked across the river to the brooding bulk of the Palace, and his anger screwed itself up and became a lens. Edward had been sent to the Assassins' Guild because they had the best school for those whose social rank is rather higher than their intelligence. If he'd been trained as a Fool, he'd have invented satire and made dangerous jokes about the Patrician. If he'd been trained as a Thief,[1] he'd have broken into the Palace and stolen something very valuable from the Patrician. However . . . he'd been sent to the Assassins . . . That afternoon he sold what remained of the d'Eath estates, and enrolled again at the Guild school. For the post-graduate course.

He got full marks, the first person in the history of the Guild ever to do so. His seniors described him as a man to watch - and, because there was something about him that made even Assassins uneasy, preferably from a long way away.

In the cemetery the solitary gravedigger filled in the hole that was the last resting place of d'Eath senior.

He became aware of what seemed to be thoughts in his head. They went something like this: Any chance of a bone? No, no, sorry, bad taste there, forget I mentioned it. You've got beef sandwiches in your wosname, lunchbox thingy, though. Why not give one to the nice little doggy over there?

The man leaned on his shovel and looked around.

The grey mongrel was watching him intently.

It said, 'Woof?'

It took Edward d'Eath five months to find what he was looking for. The search was hampered by the fact that he did not know what he was looking for, only that he'd know it when he found it. Edward was a great believer in Destiny. Such people often are.

The Guild library was one of the largest in the city. In certain specialized areas it was the largest. These areas mainly had to do with the regrettable brevity of human life and the means of bringing it about.

Edward spent a lot of time there, often at the top of a ladder, often surrounded by dust.

He read every known work on armaments. He didn't know what he was looking for and he found it in a note in the margin of an otherwise very dull and inaccurate treatise on the ballistics of crossbows. He copied it out, carefully.

Edward spent a lot of time among history books as well. The Assassins' Guild was an association of gentlemen of breeding, and people like that regard the whole of recorded history as a kind of stock book. There were a great many books in the Guild library, and a whole portrait gallery of kings and queens,[2] and Edward d'Eath came to know their aristocratic faces better than he did his own. He spent his lunch hours there.

It was said later that he came under bad influences at this stage. But the secret of the history of Edward d'Eath was that he came under no outside influences at all, unless you count all those dead kings. He just came under the influence of himself.

That's where people get it wrong. Individuals aren't naturally paid-up members of the human race, except biologically. They need to be bounced around by the Brownian motion of society, which is a mechanism by which human beings constantly remind one another that they are . . . well . . . human beings. He was also spiralling inwards, as tends to happen in cases like this.

He'd had no plan. He'd just retreated, as people do when they feel under attack, to a more defensible position, i.e. the past, and then something happened which had the same effect on Edward as finding a plesiosaur in his goldfish pond would on a student of ancient reptiles.

He'd stepped out blinking in the sunlight one hot afternoon, after a day spent in the company of departed glory, and had seen the face of the past strolling by, nodding amiably to people.

He hadn't been able to control himself. He'd said, 'Hey, you! Who are y-ou?'

The past had said, 'Corporal Carrot, sir. Night Watch. Mr d'Eath, isn't it? Can I help you?'

'What? No! No. Be about your b-usiness!'

The past nodded and smiled at him, and strolled on, into the future.

Carrot stopped staring at the wall.

'I have expended three dollars on an iconograph box which, is a thing with a brownei inside that paints pictures of thing's, this is all the Rage these days. Please find enclosed pictures of my room and my freinds in the Watch, Nobby is the one making the Humerous Gesture but he is a Rough Diamond and a good soul deep down.'

He stopped again. Carrot wrote home at least once a week. Dwarfs generally did. Carrot was two metres tall but he'd been brought up as a dwarf, and then further up as a human. Literary endeavour did not come easily to him, but he persevered.

'The weather,' he wrote, very slowly and carefully, 'continues Very Hot . . .'

Edward could not believe it. He checked the records. He double-checked. He asked questions and, because they were innocent enough questions, people gave him answers. And finally he took a holiday in the Ram-tops, where careful questioning led him to the dwarf mines around Copperhead, and thence to an otherwise unremarkable glade in a beech wood where, sure enough, a few minutes of patient digging unearthed traces of charcoal.

He spent the whole day there. When he'd finished, carefully replacing the leafmould as the sun went down, he was quite certain.

Ankh-Morpork had a king again.

And this was right. And it was fate that had let Edward recognize this just when he'd got his Plan. And it was right that it was Fate, and the city would be Saved from its ignoble present by its glorious past. He had the Means, and he had the end. And so on . . . Edward's thoughts often ran like this.

He could think in italics. Such people need watching.
Preferably from a safe distance.

'I was Interested in your letter where you said people have been coming and asking about me, this is Amazing, I have been here hardly Five Minutes and already I am Famus.

'I was very pleased to hear about the opening of #7 shaft. I don't mind Telling You that although, I am very happy here I miss the Good Times back Home. Sometimes on my day Off I go and, sit in the Cellar and hit my head with an axe handle but, it is Not the Same.

'Hoping this finds you in Good Health, Yrs faithfully,

'Your loving son, adopted,
Carrot.'

He folded the letter up, inserted the iconographs, sealed it with a blob of candle wax pressed into place with his thumb, and put it in his pants pocket. Dwarf mail to the Ramtops was quite reliable. More and more dwarfs were coming to work in the city, and because dwarfs are very conscientious many of them sent money home. This made dwarf mail just about as safe as anything, since their mail was closely guarded. Dwarfs are very attached to gold. Any highwayman demanding 'Your money or your life' had better bring a folding chair and packed lunch and a book to read while the debate goes on.

Then Carrot washed his face, donned his leather shirt and trousers and chainmail, buckled on his breastplate and, with his helmet under his arm, stepped out cheerfully, ready to face whatever the future would bring.

This was another room, somewhere else.

It was a poky room, the plaster walls crumbling, the ceilings sagging like the underside of a fat man's bed. And it was made even more crowded by the furniture.

It was old, good furniture, but this wasn't the place for it. It belonged in high echoing halls. Here, it was crammed. There were dark oak chairs. There were long sideboards. There was even a suit of armour. There was barely room for the half dozen or so people who sat at the huge table.

There was barely room for the table.

A clock ticked in the shadows.

The heavy velvet curtains were drawn, even though there was still plenty of daylight left in the sky. The air was stifling, both from the heat of the day and the candles in the magic lantern.

The only illumination was from the screen which, at that moment, was portraying a very good profile of Corporal Carrot Ironfoundersson.

The small but very select audience watched it with the carefully blank expressions of people who are half convinced that their host is several cards short of a full deck but are putting up with it because they've just eaten a meal and it would be rude to leave too soon.

'Well?' said one of them. 'I think I've seen him walking around the city. So? He's just a watchman, Edward.'

'Of course. It is essential that he should be. A humble station in life. It all fits the classic p-attem.'

Edward d'Eath gave a signal. There was a click as another glass slide was slotted in. 'This one was not p-ainted from life. King P-paragore. Taken from an old p-ainting. This one' - click! - 'is King Veltrick III. From another p-portrait. This one is Queen Alguinna IV . . . note the line of the

chin? This one' - click! -'is a sevenpenny p-iece from the reign of Webblethorpe the Unconscious, note again the detail of the chin and general b-bone structure, and this' - click! - 'is. . .an upside d-down picture of a vase of flowers. D-elphiniums, I believe. Why is this?'

'Er, sorry, Mr Edward, I 'ad a few glass plates left and the demons weren't tired and-'

'Next slide, please. And then you may leave us.'

'Yes, Mr Edward.'

'Report to the d-uty torturer.'

'Yes, Mr Edward.'

Click!

'And this is a rather good - well done, Bl-enkin - image of the bust of Queen Coanna.'

'Thank you, Mr Edward.'

'More of her face would have enabled us to be certain of the likeness, however. There is sufficient, I believe. You may go, Bl-enkin.'

'Yes, Mr Edward.'

'A little something off the ears, I th-ink.'

'Yes, Mr Edward.'

The servant respectfully shut the door behind him, and then went down to the kitchen shaking his head sadly. The d'Eaths hadn't been able to afford a family torturer for years. For the boy's sake he'd just have to do the best he could with a kitchen knife.

The visitors waited for the host to speak, but he didn't seem about to do so, although it was sometimes hard to tell with Edward. When he was excited, he suffered not so much from a speech impediment as from misplaced pauses, as if his brain were temporarily putting his mouth on hold.

Eventually, one of the audience said: 'Very well. So what is your point?'

'You've seen the likeness. Isn't it ob-vious?'

'Oh, come now-'

Edward d'Eath pulled a leather case towards him and began undoing the thongs.

'But, but the boy was adopted by Discworld dwarfs. They found him as a baby in the forests of the Ramtop mountains. There were some b-urning wagons, corpses, that sort of thing. B-andit attack, apparently. The dwarfs found a sword in the wreckage. He has it now. A very old sword. And it's always sharp.'

'So? The world is full of old swords. And grindstones.'

'This one had been very well hidden in one of the carts, which had broken up. Strange. One would expect it to be ready to hand, yes? To be used? In b-andit country? And then the boy grows up and, and . . . Fate . . . conspires that he and his sword come to Ankh-Morpork, where he is currently a watchman in the Night Watch. I couldn't believe it!'

'That's still not-'

Edward raised his hand a moment, and then pulled out a package from the case.

'I made careful enq-uiries, you know, and was able to find the place where the attack occurred. A most careful search of the ground revealed old cart n-ails, a few copper coins and, in some charcoal . . . this.'

They craned to see.

'Looks like a ring.'

'Yes. It's, it's, it's superficially d-iscoloured, of course, otherwise someone would have spot-ted it. Probably secreted somewhere on a cart. I've had it p-artly cleaned. You can just read the inscription. Now, here is an ill-ustrated inventory of the royal jewellery of Ankh done in AM 907, in the reign of King Tyrril. May I, please, may I draw your a-ttention to the small wedding ring in the b-ottom left-hand corner of the page? You will see that the artist has hel-pfully drawn the inscription.'

It took several minutes for everyone to examine it. They were naturally suspicious people. They were all descendants of people for whom suspicion and paranoia had been prime survival traits. Because they were all aristocrats. Not one among them did not know the name of his or her great-great-greatgrandfather and what embarrassing disease he'd died of.

They had just eaten a not-very-good meal which had, however, included some ancient and worthwhile wines. They'd attended because they'd all known Edward's father, and the d'Eaths were a fine old family, if now in very reduced circumstances.

'So you see,' said Edward proudly, 'the evidence is overwhelming. We have a king!'

His audience tried to avoid looking at one another's faces.

'I thought you'd be pleased,' said Edward.

Finally, Lord Rust voiced the unspoken consensus. There was no room in those true-blue eyes for pity, which was not a survival trait, but sometimes it was possible to risk a little kindness.

'Edward,' he said, 'the last king of Ankh-Morpork died centuries ago.'

'Executed by traitors!'

'Even if a descendant could still be found, the royal blood would be somewhat watered down by now, don't you think?'

'The royal blood cannot be watered down!'

Ah, thought Lord Rust. So he's that kind. Young Edward thinks the touch of a king can cure scrofula, as if royalty was the equivalent of a sulphur ointment. Young Edward thinks that there is no lake of blood too big to wade through to put a rightful king on a throne, no deed too base in defence of a crown. A romantic, in fact.

Lord Rust was not a romantic. The Rusts had adapted well to Ankh-Morpork's post-monarchy centuries by buying and selling and renting and making contacts and doing what aristocrats have always done, which is trim sails and survive.

'Well, maybe,' he conceded, in the gentle tones of someone trying to talk someone else off a ledge, 'but we must ask ourselves: does Ankh-Morpork, at this point in time, require a king?'

Edward looked at him as though he were mad.

'Need? Need? While our fair city languishes under the heel of the tyrant?'

'Oh. You mean Vetinari.'

'Can't you see what he's done to this city?'

'He is a very unpleasant, jumped-up little man,' said Lady Selachii, 'but I would not say he actually terrorizes much. Not as such.'

'You have to hand it to him,' said Viscount Skater, 'the city operates. More or less. Fellas and whatnot do things.'

'The streets are safer than they used to be under Mad Lord Snapcase,' said Lady Selachii.

'Sa-fer? Vetinari set up the Thieves' Guild!' shouted Edward.

'Yes, yes, of course, very reprehensible, certainly. On the other hand, a modest annual payment and one walks in safety . . .'

'He always says,' said Lord Rust, 'that if you're going to have crime, it might as well be organized crime.'

'Seems to me,' said Viscount Skater, 'that all the Guild chappies put up with him because anyone else would be worse, yes? We've certainly had some . . . difficult ones. Anyone remember Homicidal Lord Winder?'

'Deranged Lord Harmoni,' said Lord Monflathers.

'Laughing Lord Scapula,' said Lady Selachii. 'A man with a very pointed sense of humour.'

'Mind you, Vetinari . . . there's something not entirely . . .' Lord Rust began.

'I know what you mean,' said Viscount Skater. 'I don't like the way he always knows what you're thinking before you think it.'

'Everyone knows the Assassins have set his fee at a million dollars,' said Lady Selachii. 'That's how much it would cost to have him killed.'

'One can't help feeling,' said Lord Rust, 'that it would cost a lot more than that to make sure he stayed dead.'

'Ye gods! What happened to pride? What happened to honour?'

They perceptibly jumped as the last Lord d'Eath thrust himself out of his chair.

'Will you listen to yourselves? Please? Look at you. What man among you has not seen his family name degraded since the days of the kings? Can't you remember the men your forefathers were?' He strode rapidly around the table, so that they had to turn to watch him. He pointed an angry finger.

'You, Lord Rust! Your ancestor was created a Baron after single-handedly killing thirty-seven Klatchians while armed with nothing more than a pin, isn't that so?'

'Yes, but-'

'You, sir . . . Lord Monflathers! The first Duke led six hundred men to a glorious and epic defeat at the Battle of Quirm! Does that mean nothing? And you, Lord Venturii, and you, Sir George . . .'

sitting in Ankh in your old houses with your old names and your old money, while Guilds - Guilds] Ragtags of tradesmen and merchants! - Guilds, I say, have a voice in the r-unning of the city!' He reached a bookshelf in two strides and threw a huge leather-bound book on the table, where it upset Lord Rust's glass.

'Twurp's P-eerage,' he shouted. 'We all have pages in there! We own it. But this man has you mesmerized! I assure you he is flesh and blood, a mere mortal! No-one dares remove him because they th-ink it will make things a little worse for themselves! Ye g-ods!'

His audience looked glum. It was all true, of course. . . if you put it that way. And it didn't sound any better coming from a wild-eyed, pompous young man.

'Yes, yes, the good old days. Towerin' spires and pennants and chivalry and all that,' said Viscount Skater. 'Ladies in pointy hats. Chappies in armour bashin' one another and whatnot. But, y'know, we have to move with the times-'

'It was a golden age,' said Edward.

My god, thought Lord Rust. He actually does believe it.

'You see, dear boy,' said Lady Selachii, 'a few chance likenesses and a piece of jewellery - that doesn't really add up to much, does it?'

'My nurse told me,' said Viscount Skater, 'that a true king could pull a sword from a stone.'

'Hah, yes, and cure dandruff,' said Lord Rust. 'That's just a legend. That's not real Anyway, I've always been a bit puzzled about that story. What's so hard about pulling a sword out of a stone? The real work's already been done. You ought to make yourself useful and find the man who put the sword in the stone in the first place, eh?'

There was a sort of relieved laughter. That's what Edward remembered. It all ended up in laughter. Not exactly at him, but he was the type of person who always takes laughter personally. Ten minutes later, Edward d'Eath was alone.

They're being so nice about it. Moving with the times! He'd expected more than that of them. A lot more. He'd dared to hope that they might be inspired by his lead. He'd pictured himself at the head of an army -

Blenkin came in at a respectful shuffle.

'I saw 'em all off, Mr Edward,' he said.

'Thank you, Blenkin. You may clear the table.'

'Yes, Mr Edward.'

'Whatever happened to honour, Blenkin?'

'Dunno, sir. I never took it.'

'They didn't want to listen.'

'No, sir.'

'They didn't want to l-isten.'

Edward sat by the dying fire, with a dog-eared copy of Thighbiter's The Ankh-Morpork Succesfion open on his lap. Dead kings and queens looked at him reproachfully.

And there it might have ended. In fact it did end there, in millions of universes. Edward d'Eath grew older and obsession turned to a sort of bookish insanity of the gloves-with-the-fingers-cut-out and carpet slippers variety, and became an expert on royalty although no-one ever knew this because he seldom left his rooms. Corporal Carrot became Sergeant Carrot and, in the fullness of time, died in uniform aged seventy in an unlikely accident involving an anteater.

In a million universes, Lance-Constables Cuddy and Detritus didn't fall through the hole. In a million universes, Vimes didn't find the pipes. (In one strange but theoretically possible universe the Watch House was redecorated in pastel colours by a freak whirlwind, which also repaired the door latch and did a few other odd jobs around the place.) In a million universes, the Watch failed. -In a million universes, this was a very short book.

Edward dozed off with the book on his knees and had a dream. He dreamed of glorious struggle. Glorious was another important word in his personal vocabulary, like honour.

If traitors and dishonourable men would not see the truth then he, Edward d'Eath, was the finger of Destiny.

The problem with Destiny, of course, is that she is often not careful where she puts her finger.

Captain Sam Vimes, Ankh-Morpork City Guard (Night Watch), sat in the draughty anteroom to the

Patrician's audience chamber with his best cloak on and his breastplate polished and his helmet on his knees.

He stared woodenly at the wall.

He ought to be happy, he told himself. And he was. In a way. Definitely. Happy as anything.

He was going to get married in a few days.

He was going to stop being a guard.

He was going to be a gentleman of leisure.

He took off his copper badge and buffed it absent-mindedly on the edge of his cloak. Then he held it up so that the light glinted off the patina'd surface. AMCW No.177. He sometimes wondered how many other guards had had the badge before him.

Well, now someone was going to have it after him.

This is Ankh-Morpork, Citie of One Thousand Surprises (according to the Guild of Merchants' guidebook). What more need be said? A sprawling place, home to a million people, greatest of cities on the Discworld, located on either side of the river Ankh, a waterway so muddy that it looks as if it is flowing upside down.

And visitors say: how does such a big city exist? What keeps it going? Since it's got a river you can chew, where does the drinking water come from? What is, in fact, the basis of its civic economy? How come it, against all probability, works?

Actually, visitors don't often say this. They usually say things like 'Which way to the, you know, the . . . er . . . you know, the young ladies, right?'

But if they started thinking with their brains for a little while, that's what they'd be thinking.

The Patrician of Ankh-Morpork sat back on his austere chair with the sudden bright smile of a very busy person at the end of a crowded day who's suddenly found in his schedule a reminder saying: 7.00-7.05, Be Cheerful and Relaxed and a People Person.

'Well, of course I was very saddened to receive your letter, captain . . .'

'Yes, sir,' said Vimes, still as wooden as a furniture warehouse.

'Please sit down, captain.'

'Yes, sir.' Vimes remained standing. It was a matter of pride.

'But of course I quite understand. The Ramkin country estates are very extensive, I believe. I'm sure Lady Ramkin will appreciate your strong right hand.'

'Sir?' Captain Vimes, while in the presence of the ruler of the city, always concentrated his gaze on a point one foot above and six inches to the left of the man's head.

'And of course you will be quite a rich man, captain.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I hope you have thought about that. You will have new responsibilities.'

'Yes, sir.'

It dawned on the Patrician that he was working on both ends of this conversation. He shuffled through the papers on his desk.

'And of course I shall have to promote a new chief officer for the Night Watch,' said the Patrician.

'Have you any suggestions, captain?'

Vimes appeared to descend from whatever cloud his mind had been occupying. This was guard work.

'Well, not Fred Colon . . . He's one of Nature's sergeants . . .'

Sergeant Colon, Ankh-Morpork City Guard (Night Watch) surveyed the bright faces of the new recruits.

He sighed. He remembered his first day. Old Sergeant Wimble. What a tartar! Tongue like a whiplash! If the old boy had lived to see this . . .

What was it called? Oh, yeah. Affirmative action hirin' procedure, or something. Silicon Anti-Defamation League had been going on at the Patrician, and now-

'Try it one more time, Lance-Constable Detritus,' he said. 'The trick is, you stops your hand just above your ear. Now, just get up off the floor and try salutin' one more time. Now, then . . .

Lance-Constable Cuddy?'

'Here!'

'Where?'

'In front of you, sergeant.'

Colon looked down and took a step back. The swelling curve of his more than adequate stomach moved aside to reveal the upturned face of Lance-Constable Cuddy, with its helpful intelligent expression and one glass eye.

'Oh. Right.'

'I'm taller than I look.'

Oh, gods, thought Sergeant Colon wearily. Add 'em up and divide by two and you've got two normal men, except normal men don't join the Guard. A troll and a dwarf. And that ain't the worst of it-

Vimes drummed his fingers on the desk.

'Not Colon, then,' he said. 'He's not as young as he was. Time he stayed in the Watch House, keeping up on the paperwork. Besides, he's got a lot on his plate.'

'Sergeant Colon has always had a lot on his plate, I should say,' said the Patrician.

'With the new recruits, I mean,' said Vimes, meaningfully. 'You remember, sir?'

The ones you told me I had to have? he added in the privacy of his head. They weren't to go in the Day Watch, of course. And those bastards in the Palace Guard wouldn't take them, either. Oh, no. Put 'em in the Night Watch, because it's a joke anyway and no-one'll really see 'em. No-one important, anyway.

Vimes had only given in because he knew it wouldn't be his problem for long.

It wasn't as if he was speciesist, he told himself. But the Watch was a job for men.

'How about Corporal Nobbs?' said the Patrician.

'Nobby?'

They shared a mental picture of Corporal Nobbs.

'No.'

'No.'

'Then of course there is,' the Patrician smiled, 'Corporal Carrot. A fine young man. Already making a name for himself, I gather.'

'That's . . . true,' said Vimes.

'A further promotion opportunity, perhaps? I would value your advice.'

Vimes formed a mental picture of Corporal Carrot-

'This,' said Corporal Carrot, 'is the Hubwards Gate. To the whole city. Which is what we guard.'

'What from?' said Lance-Constable Angua, the last of the new recruits.

'Oh, you know. Barbarian hordes, warring tribesmen, bandit armies . . . that sort of thing.'

'What? Just us?'

'Us? Oh, no!' Carrot laughed. 'That'd be silly, wouldn't it? No, if you see anything like that, you just ring your bell as hard as you like.'

'What happens then?'

'Sergeant Colon and Nobby and the rest of 'em will come running along just as soon as they can.'

Lance-Constable Angua scanned the hazy horizon.

She smiled.

Carrot blushed.

Constable Angua had mastered saluting first go. She wouldn't have a full uniform yet, not until someone had taken a, well, let's face it, a breastplate along to old Remitt the armourer and told him to beat it out really well here and here, and no helmet in the world would cover all that mass of ash-blond hair but, it occurred to Carrot, Constable Angua wouldn't need any of that stuff really. People would be queuing up to get arrested.

'So what do we do now?' she said.

'Proceed back to the Watch House, I suppose,' said Carrot. 'Sergeant Colon'll be reading out the evening report, I expect.'

She'd mastered 'proceeding', too. It's a special walk devised by beat officers throughout the multiverse - a gentle lifting of the instep, a careful swing of the leg, a walking pace that can be kept up hour after hour, street after street. Lance-Constable Detritus wasn't going to be ready to learn 'proceeding' for some time, or at least until he stopped knocking himself out every time he

saluted.

'Sergeant Colon,' said Angua. 'He was the fat one, yes?'

'That's right.'

'Why has he got a pet monkey?'

'Ah,' said Carrot. 'I think it is Corporal Nobbs to whom you refer . . .'

'It's human? He's got a face like a join-the-dots puzzle!'

'He does have a very good collection of boils, poor man. He does tricks with them. Just never get between him and a mirror.'

Not many people were on the streets. It was too hot, even for an Ankh-Morpork summer. Heat radiated from every surface. The river slunk sullenly in the bottom of its bed, like a student around 11 a.m. People with no pressing business out of doors lurked in cellars and only came out at night.

Carrot moved through the baking streets with a proprietorial air and a slight patina of honest sweat, occasionally exchanging a greeting. Everyone knew Carrot. He was easily recognizable. No-one else was about two metres tall with flame-red hair. Besides, he walked as if he owned the city.

'Who was that man with the granite face I saw in the Watch House?' said Angua, as they proceeded along Broad Way.

'That was Detritus the troll,' said Carrot. 'He used to be a bit of a criminal, but now he's courting Ruby she says he's got to-'

'No, that man,' said Angua, learning as had so many others that Carrot tended to have a bit of trouble with metaphors. 'Face like thu-face like someone very disgruntled.'

'Oh, that was Captain Vimes. But he's never been grunted, I think. He's retiring at the end of the week, and getting married.'

'Doesn't look very happy about it,' said Angua.

'Couldn't say.'

'I don't think he likes the new recruits.'

The other thing about Constable Carrot was that he was incapable of lying.

'Well, he doesn't like trolls much,' he said. 'We couldn't get a word out of him all day when he heard we had to advertise for a troll recruit. And then we had to have a dwarf, otherwise they'd be trouble. I'm a dwarf, too, but the dwarfs here don't believe it.'

'You don't say?' said Angua, looking up at him.

'My mother had me by adoption.'

'Oh. Yes, but I'm not a troll or a dwarf,' said Angua sweetly.

'No, but you're a w-'

Angua stopped. 'That's it, is it? Good grief! This is the Century of the Fruitbat, you know. Ye gods, does he really think like that?'

'He's a bit set in his ways.'

'Congealed, I should think.'

'The Patrician said we had to have a bit of representation from the minority groups,' said Carrot.

'Minority groups!'

'Sorry. Anyway, he's only got a few more days-'

There was a splintering noise across the street. They turned as a figure sprinted out of a tavern and hared away up the street, closely followed - at least for a few steps - by a fat man in an apron.

'Stop! Stop! Unlicensed thief!'

'Ah,' said Carrot. He crossed the road, with Angua padding along behind him, as the fat man slowed to a waddle.

'Morning, Mr Flannel,' he said. 'Bit of trouble?'

'He took seven dollars and I never saw no Thief Licence!' said Mr Flannel. 'What you going to do about it? I pay my taxes!'

'We shall be hotly in pursuit any moment,' said Carrot calmly, taking out his notebook. 'Seven dollars, was it?'

'At least fourteen.'

Mr Flannel looked Angua up and down. Men seldom missed the opportunity.

'Why's she got a helmet on?' he said.