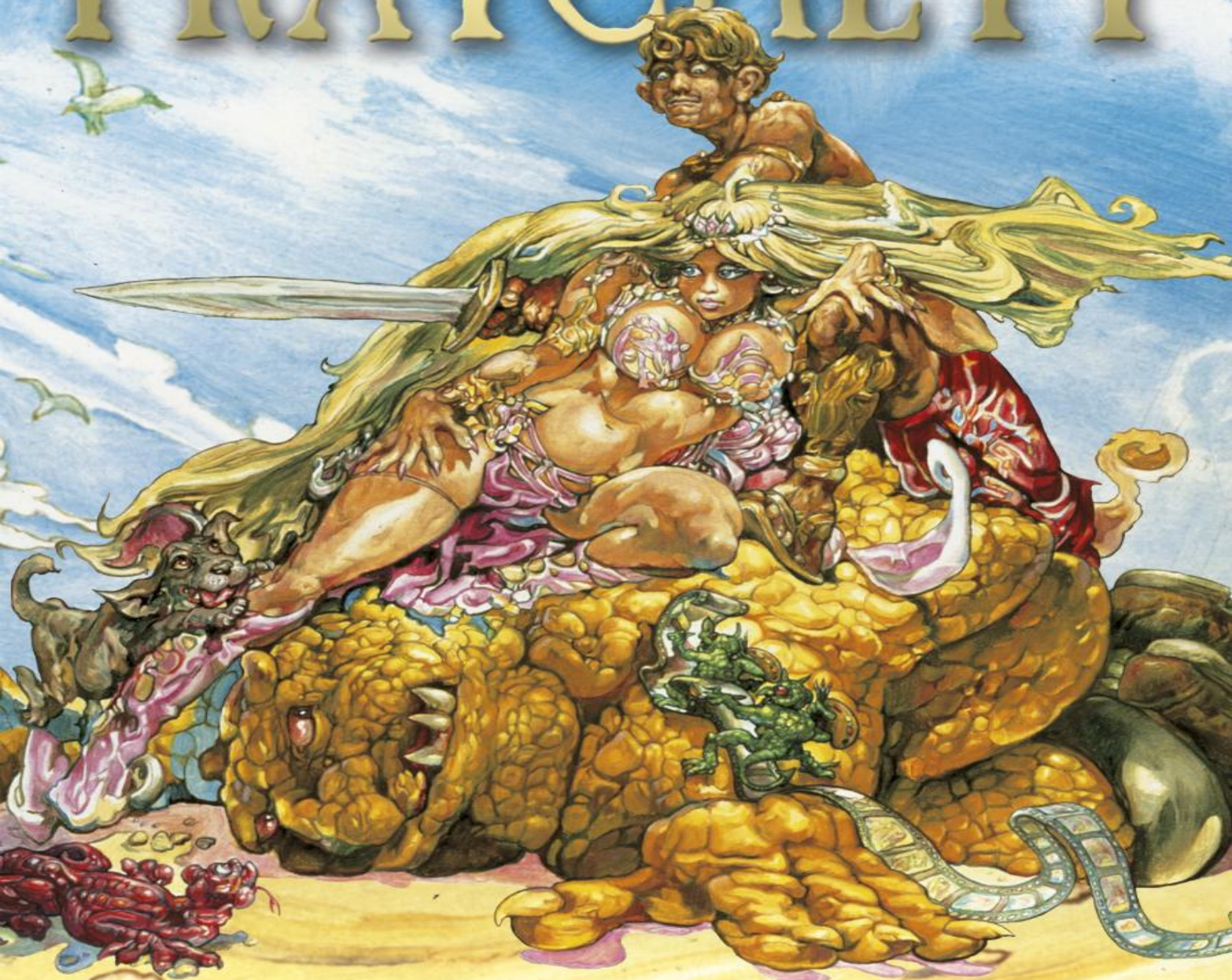


TERRY PRATCHETT



A DISCWORLD® NOVEL

MOVING PICTURES

About the Book

'Holy Wood is a different sort of place. People act differently here. Everywhere else the most important things are gods or money or cattle. Here, the most important thing is to be important.'

People might say that reality is a quality that things possess in the same way that they possess weight. Sadly alchemists never really held with such a quaint notion. They think that they can change reality, shape it to their own purpose. Imagine then the damage that could be wrought if they get their hands on the ultimate alchemy: the invention of motion pictures, the greatest making of illusions. It may be a triumph of universe-shaking proportions. It's either that or they're about to unlock the dark terrible secret of the Holy Wood hills – by mistake...

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Also by Terry Pratchett

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Terry Pratchett

MOVING PICTURES

A DISCWORLD® NOVEL

*I would like to thank all the
wonderful people who made this
book possible. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you...*

WATCH ...

This is space. It's sometimes called the final frontier.

(Except that of course you can't have a *final* frontier, because there'd be nothing for it to be a frontier *to*, but as frontiers go, it's pretty penultimate ...)

And against the wash of stars a nebula hangs, vast and black, one red giant gleaming like the madness of gods ...

And then the gleam is seen as the glint in a giant eye and it is eclipsed by the blink of an eyelid and the darkness moves a flipper and Great A'Tuin, star turtle, swims onward through the void.

On its back, four giant elephants. On their shoulders, rimmed with water, glittering under its tiny orbiting sunlet, spinning majestically around the mountains at its frozen Hub, lies the Discworld, world and mirror of worlds.

Nearly unreal.

Reality is not digital, an on-off state, but analog. Something *gradual*. In other words, reality is a quality that things possess in the same way that they possess, say, weight. Some people are more real than others, for example. It has been estimated that there are only about five hundred *real* people on any given planet, which is why they keep unexpectedly running into one another all the time.

The Discworld is as unreal as it is possible to be while still being just real enough to exist.

And just real enough to be in real trouble.

About thirty miles Turnwise of Ankh-Morpork the surf boomed on the wind-blown, seagrass-waving, sand-dune-covered spit of land where the Circle Sea met the Rim Ocean.

The hill itself was visible for miles. It wasn't very high, but lay amongst the dunes like an upturned boat or a very unlucky whale, and was covered in scrub trees. No rain fell here, if it could possibly avoid it. Although the wind sculpted the dunes around it, the low summit of the hill remained in an everlasting, ringing calm.

Nothing but the sand had changed here in hundreds of years.

Until now.

A crude hut of driftwood had been built on the long curve of the beach, although describing it as 'built' was a slander on skilled crude hut builders throughout the ages; if the sea had simply been left to pile the wood up it might have done a better job.

And, inside, an old man had just died.

'Oh,' he said. He opened his eyes and looked around the interior of the hut. He hadn't seen it very clearly for the past ten years.

Then he swung, if not his legs, then at least the memory of his legs off the pallet of sea-heather and stood up. Then he went outside, into the diamond-bright morning. He was interested to see that he was still wearing a ghostly image of his ceremonial robe – stained and frayed, but still recognizable as having originally been a dark red plush with gold frogging – even though he was dead. Either your clothes died when you did, he thought, or maybe you just mentally dressed yourself from force of habit.

Habit also led him to the pile of driftwood beside the hut. When he tried to gather a few sticks, though, his hands passed through them.

He swore.

It was then that he noticed a figure standing by the water's edge, looking out to sea. It was leaning on a scythe. The wind whipped at its black robes.

He started to hobble towards it, remembered he was dead, and began to stride. He hadn't stridden for decades, but it was amazing how it all came back to you.

Before he was halfway to the dark figure, it spoke to him.

DECCAN RIBOBE, it said.

‘That’s me.’

LAST KEEPER OF THE DOOR.

‘Well, I suppose so.’

Death hesitated.

YOU ARE OR YOU AREN’T, he said.

Deccan scratched his nose. Of course, he thought, you have to be able to touch *yourself*. Otherwise you’d fall to bits.

‘*Technic*’ly, a Keeper has to be invested by the High Priestess,’ he said. ‘And there ain’t been a High Priestess for thousands o’ years. See, I just learned it all from old Tendo, who lived here before me. He jus’ said to me one day, “Deccan, it looks as though I’m dyin’, so it’s up to you now, ’cos if there’s no-one left that remembers properly it’ll all start happening again and you know what that means.” Well, fair enough. But that’s not what you’d call a proper investmenting, I’d say.’

He looked up at the sandy hill.

‘There was jus’ me and him,’ he said. ‘And then jus’ me, remembering Holy Wood. And now ...’ He raised his hand to his mouth.

‘Oe-er,’ he said.

YES, said death.

It would be wrong to say a look of panic passed across Deccan Ribobe’s face, because at that moment it was several yards away and wearing a sort of fixed grin, as if it had seen the joke at last. But his spirit was definitely worried.

‘See, the thing is,’ it said hastily, ‘no-one ever comes here, see, apart from the fishermen from the next bay, and they just leaves the fish and runs off on account of superstition and I couldn’t sort of go off to find an apprentice or somethin’ because of keepin’ the fires alight and doin’ the chantin’ ...’

YES.

‘... It’s a terrible responsibility, bein’ the only one able to do your job ...’

YES, said death.

‘Well, of course, I’m not telling *you* anything ...’

No.

‘... I mean, I was hopin’ someone’d get shipwrecked or somethin’, or come treasure huntin’, and I could explain it like old Tento explained it to me, teach ’em the chants, get it all sorted out before I died ...’

YES?

‘I s’pose there’s no chance that I could sort of ...’

No.

‘Thought not,’ said Deccan despondently.

He looked at the waves crashing down on the shore.

‘Used to be a big city down there, thousands of years ago,’ he said. ‘I mean, where the sea is. When it’s stormy you can hear the ole temple bells ringin’ under the sea.’

I KNOW.

‘I used to sit out here on windy nights, listenin’. Used to imagine all them dead people down there, ringin’ the bells.’

AND NOW WE MUST GO.

‘Ole Tento said there was somethin’ under the hill there that could make people do things. Put strange fancies in their ‘eads,’ said Deccan, reluctantly following the stalking figure. ‘I never had any strange fancies.’

BUT YOU WERE CHANTING, said death. He snapped his fingers.

A horse ceased trying to graze the sparse dune grass and trotted up to death. Deccan was surprised to see that it left hoofprints in the sand. He’d have expected sparks, or at least fused rock.

‘Er,’ he said, ‘can you tell me, er ... what happens now?’

Death told him.

‘Thought so,’ said Deccan glumly.

Up on the low hill the fire that had been burning all night collapsed in a shower of ash. A few embers still glowed, though.

Soon they would go out.

....

...

..

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They went out.

.

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...

....

Nothing happened for a whole day. Then, in a little hollow on the edge of the brooding hill, a few grains of sand shifted and left a tiny hole.

Something emerged. Something invisible. Something joyful and selfish and marvellous. Something as intangible as an idea, which is exactly what it was. A wild idea.

It was old in a way not measurable by any calendar known to Man and what it had, right now, was memories and needs. It remembered life, in other times and other universes. It needed people.

It rose against the stars, changing shape, coiling like smoke.

There were lights on the horizon.

It *liked* lights.

It regarded them for a few seconds and then, like an invisible arrow, extended itself towards the city and sped away.

It liked *action*, too ...

And several weeks went past.

There's a saying that all roads lead to Ankh-Morpork, greatest of Discworld cities.