


 HarperCollins e-books



Thief of Time

**Terry Pratchett**



**Terry  
Pratchett**

**thief of  
time**

**A Novel of Discworld®**



HarperCollins e-books



# Contents

Begin Reading	1
About the Author	
Praise	
Other Books by Terry Pratchett	
Cover	
Copyright	
About the Publisher	





**A**ccording to the First Scroll of Wen the Eternally Surprised, Wen stepped out of the cave where he had received enlightenment and into the dawning light of the first day of the rest of his life. He stared at the rising sun for some time, because he had never seen it before.

He prodded with a sandal the dozing form of Clodpool the Apprentice, and said: "I have seen. Now I understand."

Then he stopped and looked at the thing next to Clodpool. "What is that amazing thing?" he said.

"Er . . . er . . . it's a tree, master," said Clodpool, still not quite awake. "Remember? It was there yesterday."

"There was no yesterday."

"Er . . . er . . . I think there *was*, master," said Clodpool, struggling to his feet. "Remember? We came up here, and I cooked a meal, and had the rind off your *sklang* because you didn't want it."

"I *remember* yesterday," said Wen, thoughtfully. "But the memory is in my head *now*. Was yesterday real? Or is it only the memory that is real? Truly, yesterday I was not born."

Clodpool's face became a mask of agonized incomprehension.

"Dear stupid Clodpool, I have learned everything," said Wen. "In the cup of the hand there is no past, no future. There is only now. There is no time but the present. We have a great deal to do."

Clodpool hesitated. There was something new about his master. There was a glow in his eyes and, when he moved, there were strange silvery-blue lights in the air, like reflections from liquid mirrors.

“She has told me everything,” Wen went on. “I know that time was made for men, not the other way around. I have learned how to shape it and bend it. I know how to make a moment last forever, because it already has. And I can teach these skills even to you, Clodpool. I have heard the heartbeat of the universe. I know the answers to many questions. Ask me.”

The apprentice gave him a bleary look. It was too early in the morning for it to be early in the morning. That was the only thing that he currently knew for sure.

“Er . . . what does master want for breakfast?” he said.

Wen looked down from their camp, and across the snowfields and purple mountains to the golden daylight creating the world, and mused upon certain aspects of humanity.

“Ah,” he said. “One of the *difficult* ones.”

For something to exist, it has to be observed.

For something to exist, it has to have a position in time and space.

And this explains why nine-tenths of the mass of the universe is unaccounted for.

Nine-tenths of the universe is the knowledge of the position and direction of everything in the other tenth. Every atom has its biography, every star its file, every chemical exchange its equivalent of the inspector with a clipboard. It is unaccounted for because it is doing the accounting for the rest of it, and you cannot see the back of your own head.\*

---

\*Except in very small universes.

Nine-tenths of the universe, in fact, is the paperwork.

And if you want the story, then remember that a story does not unwind. It weaves. Events that start in different places and different times all bear down on that one tiny point in space-time, which is the perfect moment.

Suppose an emperor was persuaded to wear a new suit of clothes whose material was so fine that, to the common eye, the clothes weren't there. And suppose a little boy pointed out this fact in a loud clear voice . . .

Then you have The Story Of The Emperor Who Had No Clothes.

But if you knew a bit more, it would be The Story Of The Boy Who Got A Well-Deserved Thrashing From His Dad For Being Rude To Royalty, And Was Locked Up.

Or The Story Of The Whole Crowd That Was Rounded Up By The Guards And Told "This Didn't Happen, Okay? Does Anyone Want To Argue?"

Or it could be a story of how a whole kingdom suddenly saw the benefits of the "new clothes," and developed an enthusiasm for healthy sports\* in a lively and refreshing atmosphere that gets many new adherents every year, which led to a recession caused by the collapse of the conventional clothing industry.

It could even be a story about The Great Pneumonia Epidemic of '09.

It all depends on how much you know.

Suppose you'd watched the slow accretion of snow over thousands of years as it was compressed and pushed over the deep rock until the glacier calved its icebergs into the sea, and you watched an iceberg drift out through the chilly waters, and you got to know its cargo of happy polar bears and seals as they looked forward to a brave new life in the other

---

\*Mostly involving big, big beachballs.

hemisphere where they say the ice floes are lined with crunchy penguins, and then *wham*—tragedy loomed in the shape of thousands of tons of unaccountably floating iron and an exciting soundtrack . . .

. . . you'd want to know the *whole* story.

And this one starts with desks.

This is the desk of a professional. It is clear that their job is their life. There are . . . human touches, but they are the human touches that strict usage allows in a chilly world of duty and routine.

Mostly they're on the only piece of real color in this picture of blacks and grays. It's a coffee mug. Someone somewhere wanted to make it a *jolly* mug. It bears a rather unconvincing picture of a teddy bear, and the legend "To The World's Greatest Grandad," and the slight change in the style of lettering on the word "Grandad" makes it clear that this has come from one of those stalls that have *hundreds* of mugs like these, declaring that they're for the world's greatest Grandad/Dad/Mum/Granny/Uncle/Aunt/Blank. Only someone whose life contains very little else, one feels, would treasure a piece of gimcrackery like this.

It currently holds tea, with a slice of lemon.

The bleak desktop also contains a paper knife in the shape of a scythe, and a number of hourglasses.

Death picks up the mug in a skeletal hand . . .

. . . and took a sip, pausing only to look again at the wording he'd seen thousands of times before, and then put it down.

VERY WELL, he said, in tones of funeral bells. SHOW ME.

The last item on the desktop was a mechanical contrivance. "Contrivance" was exactly the right kind of word for it. Most of it was two discs. One was horizontal, and contained a circlet of very small squares of what would prove to be carpet. The other was set vertically, and had a large number of arms, each one of which held a very small slice of buttered toast.