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Witches Abroad

A NOVEL OF DISCWORLD®

Terry Pratchett

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Pratchett**

**Witches
Abroad**

A Novel of Discworld®



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Dedicated to all those people—and why
not?—who, after the publication of
Wyrd Sisters, deluged the author with
their version of the words of
“The Hedgehog Song.”
Deary deary me...

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This is the Discworld, which travels through space on the back of four elephants which themselves stand on the shell of Great A'Tuin, the sky turtle.

Once upon a time such a universe was considered unusual and, possibly, impossible.

But then...it used to be so simple, once upon a time.

Because the universe was full of ignorance all around and the scientist panned through it like a prospector crouched over a mountain stream, looking for the gold of knowledge among the gravel of unreason, the sand of uncertainty and the little whiskery eight-legged swimming things of superstition.

Occasionally he would straighten up and say things like "Hurrah, I've discovered Boyle's Third Law." And everyone knew where they stood. But the trouble was that ignorance became more interesting, especially big fascinating ignorance about huge and important things like matter and creation, and people stopped patiently building their little houses of rational sticks in the chaos of the universe and started getting interested in the chaos itself—partly because it was a lot easier to be an ex-

pert on chaos, but mostly because it made really good patterns that you could put on a t-shirt.

And instead of getting on with proper science ^{*} scientists suddenly went around saying how impossible it was to know anything, and that there wasn't really anything you could call reality to know anything about, and how all this was tremendously exciting, and incidentally did you know there were possibly all these little universes all over the place but no one can see them because they are all curved in on themselves? Incidentally, don't you think this is a rather good t-shirt?

Compared to all this, a large turtle with a world on its back is practically mundane. At least it doesn't pretend it doesn't exist, and no one on the Discworld ever tried to *prove* it didn't exist in case they turned out to be right and found themselves suddenly floating in empty space. This is because the Discworld exists right on the edge of reality. The least little things can break through to the other side. So, on the Discworld, people take things seriously.

Like stories.

Because stories are important.

People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it's the other way around.

Stories exist independently of their players. If you know that, the knowledge is power.

Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have

^{*} Like finding that bloody butterfly whose flapping wings cause all these storms we've been having lately and getting it to stop.

evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling...stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness.

And their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper.

This is called the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, *takes a shape*. It picks up all the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been.

This is why history keeps on repeating all the time.

So a thousand heroes have stolen fire from the gods. A thousand wolves have eaten grandmother, a thousand princesses have been kissed. A million unknowing actors have moved, unknowing, through the pathways of story.

It is now *impossible* for the third and youngest son of any king, if he should embark on a quest which has so far claimed his older brothers, *not* to succeed.

Stories don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself.*

* And people are wrong about urban myths. Logic and reason say that these are fictional creations, retold again and again by people who are hungry for evidence of weird coincidence, natural justice and so on. They aren't. *They keep on happening all the time, everywhere*, as the stories bounce back and forth across the universe. At any one time hundreds of dead grandmothers

It takes a special kind of person to fight back, and become the bicarbonate of history.

Once upon a time...

Gray hands gripped the hammer and swung it, striking the post so hard that it sank a foot into the soft earth.

Two more blows and it was fixed immovably.

From the trees around the clearing the snakes and birds watched silently. In the swamp the alligators drifted like patches of bad-assed water.

Gray hands took up the crosspiece and fixed it in place, tying it with creepers, pulling them so tight that they creaked.

She watched him. And then she took up a fragment of mirror and tied it to the top of the post.

"The coat," she said.

He took up the coat and fitted it over the crosspiece. The pole wasn't long enough, so that the last few inches of sleeve draped emptily.

"And the hat," she said.

It was tall, and round, and black. It glistened.

The piece of mirror gleamed between the darkness of the hat and the coat.

"Will it work?" he said.*

"Yes," she said. "Even mirrors have their reflection. We got to fight mirrors with mirrors." She

* are being whisked away on the roof-racks of stolen cars and loyal alsatians are choking on the fingers of midnight burglars. And they're not confined to any one world. Hundreds of female Mercurian *jivpts* turn four tiny eyes on their rescuers and say, "My brood-husband will be livid—it was *his* travel module." Urban myths are alive.