

the turtle moves: a Discworld fanzine

I love Discworld.

I love it a lot, to the point where I'd go A.E. Pessimist on anyone who's nasty about it. I love it for its humour, for its characters, for its worldbuilding. I love the horrible puns and ridiculous names and the insane magic, and Ankh-Morpork and Lancre and XXX and the whole damned Disc.

But most of all, I love it because it makes me think. It teaches me things, and one of the harshest lesson I've ever had to learn happened in *I Shall Wear Midnight*.

It's supposed to be a kid's book, but the second chapter is about as horrifying as it gets (that's another thing to love: Pratchett does not talk down to kids). A thirteen-year old girl in the village got pregnant and her father punished her by beating her hard enough for her to miscarry. But the village has heard about it, and they decide they have to take action. So the "rough music" starts:

"The rough music was never organized. It seemed to occur to everybody at once. It played when a village thought that a man had beaten his wife too hard, or his dog too savagely, or if a married man and a married woman forgot that they were married to somebody else. There were other, darker crimes against the music too, but they weren't talked about openly. Sometimes people could stop the music by mending their ways; quite often they packed up and moved away before the third night."

And I read that and I thought, *yes. Good. Show the bastard.* It felt justified.

And then, one chapter later, comes the slap:

"Once upon a time, the rough music had come for the old

woman and her cat, oh yes it had, and the people walking to its drumming had dragged her out into the snow and pulled down the rickety cottage and burned her books because they had pictures of stars in them. And why? Because the Baron's son had gone missing and Mrs Snapperly had no family and no teeth and, to be honest, cackled a bit as well. And that made her a witch, and the people of the Chalk didn't trust witches, so she was pulled out into the snow, and while the fire ate up the thatch of the cottage, page after page of stars crackled and crinkled into the night sky while the men stoned the cat to death."

Wham. I had to swallow. The mob that came for the abusive father is the same mob that lynched a harmless old lady a few years back, because things were bad and they needed someone to blame.

And that's what runs through the entire series. Watch yourself. Think. Anger isn't bad, anger can be good - '*Don't be afraid, be angry*,' Susan says - but don't let it rule you. That's why Vimes has an inner policeman patrolling his mind, that's why Tiffany Aching puts aside her anger for later, when she can use it.

It's the part of the returning messages. *Take personal responsibility. You can't do bad guy things and call yourself good guys. Watch your own thoughts. Don't think about other people like they're things. Make rules, and keep them.*

Some people call it preachy, consider him to heavy-handed. And alright, sometimes he isn't exactly subtle about it, but, as tvtropes says, *some anvils need to be dropped*. And to be honest, Pratchett's message isn't one I've come across anywhere else. Drop away. Drive the point home with a sledgehammer, 'cause dammit, this is a lesson that *needs* to be learned.

Care. Look straight at yourself, and the world around you. And everything matters.



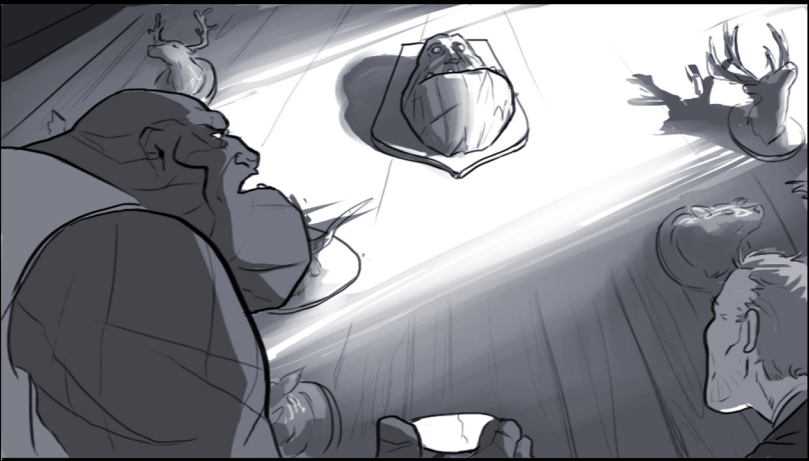
Should've bunged it away, but it's all I got to remember
my old granny by. She kept fings in it.



- It's a bit of human skull, isn't it.
- Yep.



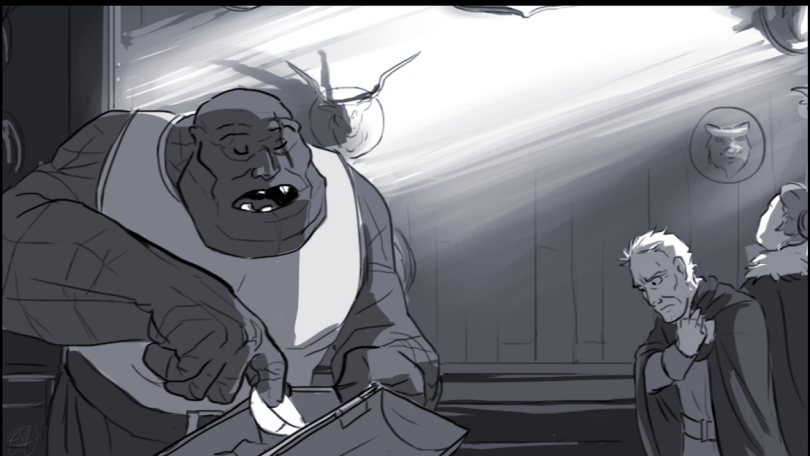
Whose?



Anyone ask dat troll dere his name?



Tings were diff'rent in dem days.



Now you don't chop our heads off an' we don't make drums outa your skin.
Everyt'ing is hunky-dory. Dat's all we have to know.

Queering Discworld

One of the (many, many) reasons that I love Pratchett is that he's so good about gender equality. I mean, pretty much the entire witch series fails the reverse Bechdel test, and the female characters are just as awesome and flawed as the male, and the only thing you could say is that there are significantly more beautiful women than beautiful men, but that's it.

But where all are the queer people? No queer people aside from the occasional throwaway joke or side character, and it made me sad. (Compare to Neil Gaiman, who has *queer people everywhere!*)

And then I read *Unseen Academicals* and I rejoiced. Because, sure, you can look at it from a heteronormative point of view, with Bengo Macarona as a gay man who doesn't realize that Madame Sharn is female, Pepe as a straight man who's attracted to female Dwarfs but pretends to be the stereotypically-gay-hairdresser-type, and Madame Sharn as a female heterosexual Dwarf, but that doesn't really fit (traditional heterosexual characters do not have sex with people with beards). Or you might use terms like genderqueer and xenophile, but whatever labels you use, they're going to come up short, precisely because every Dwarf in Discworld is cheerfully subverting our ideas of gender.

What the book suggests, to me, is that any attempts to start categorizing are doomed to fail from the start. It's a complicated mess, just like real life. And Pratchett's attitude to sexuality and gender in general seems to be 'what they do in private is their business', without any sort of judgement about what's *right* or *normal*, and I love that.

Or to quote Ridcully: "*People make such a fuss. Anyway, in my opinion there's not enough love in the world.*"



**BEING an incomplete list of the documents found in the
COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS office of THE ANKH MORPORK
TIMES, after the disappearance of Mr. TIMOTHY BAUER.**

Ed. NOTE: The Complaints and Comments department was created to deal with letters so trivial or so asinine that not even the Times would print them. Mr. Bauer was head of the C&C for three and a half months, beating the previous tenure record by almost eleven weeks. He is believed to have escaped to the farthest reaches of UBERWALD, where even the bravest postman might hesitate to follow. Mr. Bauer left behind him many answered and unanswered letters - they are nearly impossible to differentiate, as Mr. Bauer was terrible at filing.

- ◆ A letter from Mrs. EVADNE CAKE, complaining that a visit from the Times' head photographer next week would result in bloodspots on her carpet, and what was the Times going to do about it?

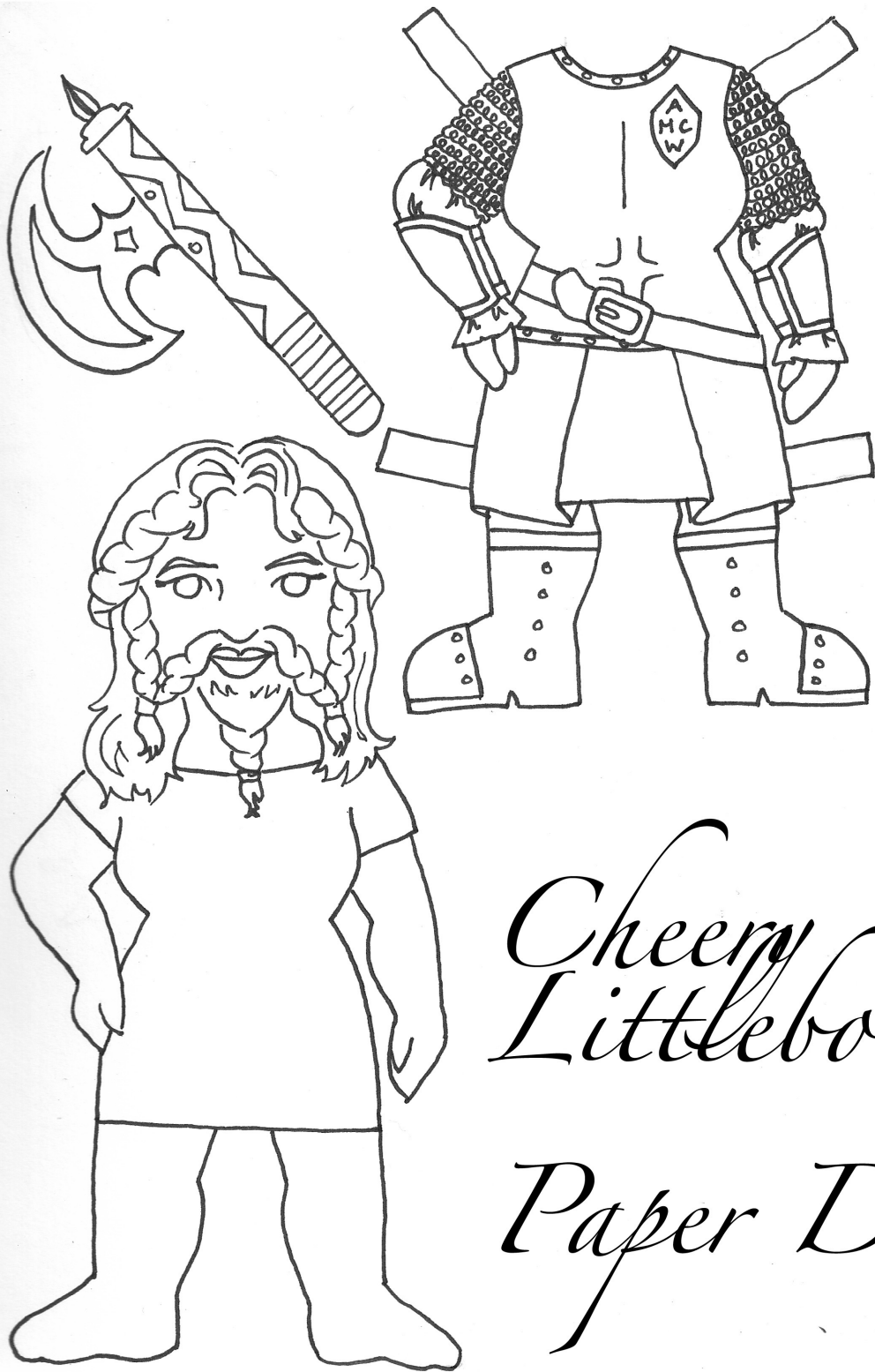
- ◆ Approximately forty letters from the PALACE, all regarding crossword clues and construction. An excerpt: "-while the Circle Sea is indeed practically landlocked and might be better conceived of as a large lake, its common designation as a sea makes it improper to term Leshp an 'Occasional Eyot' as the Puzzler does in 9 Across-"

- ◆ A second letter from Mrs. Cake, complaining that the Times' suggestion of hiring a carpet cleaner was impractical, as the stains would not occur for five more days.

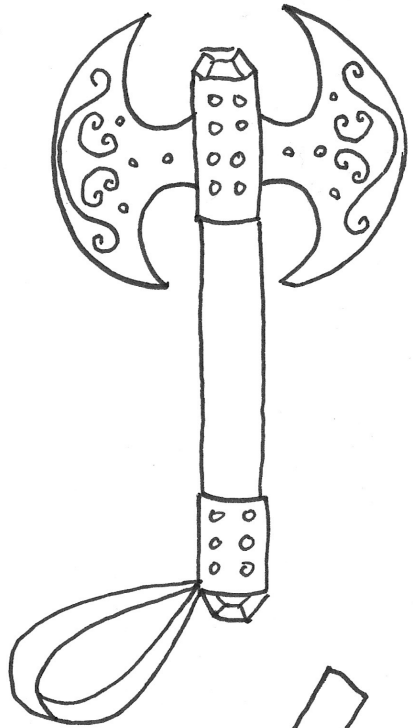
- ◆ A letter of complaint from Corporal NOBBY NOBBS and Sergeant FRED COLON of the Watch, concerning a recent political cartoon which claimed to feature caricatures of Watch officers as a fool and a monkey. Cpl. Nobbs and Sgt. Colon allege that in fact the cartoon consisted of extremely realistic portraits of their own persons.

- ◆ A third letter from Mrs. Cake, informing Mr. Bauer that he was on no account to prevent Mr. CHRIEK from coming to her house, as it would give her a terrible headache.

- ◆ Letters of complaint from several prominent businessmen and public figures, alleging that Ms Cripslock had published what they had *said*, rather than what they had *meant*.
- ◆ A fourth letter from Mrs. Cake, arguing that Mr. Bauer's suggestion that she 'put down a sheet or something' would make her sitting room look tacky.
- ◆ A stack of form response letters, much unused, with the text: "Dear Sir, Madam, or Otherwise- We have read your letter, and would like to profusely apologize. We have seen the error of our ways, and will henceforth refrain from such behavior or statements. Yours, William de Worde, Editor, Ankh-Morpork Times."
- ◆ A second stack of form response letters, much depleted, with the text: "Dear Sir, Madam, or Otherwise- We have read your letter, and we are not sorry. Please stop writing to us."
- ◆ A copy of the latter form letter, with the text altered as follows: "Dear ~~Sir, Madam, or Otherwise-~~Mrs. Cake- We have read your letter, and we are ~~not~~ VERY sorry. Please stop writing to us."
- ◆ A fifth letter from Mrs. Cake, informing Mr. Bauer that Mr. Chriek had been and gone and she would like the address of that carpet cleaner now. In addition, she would like to complain that the article written about her Medium business would contain several mistakes, and would the Times publish a retraction first?
- ◆ A letter of resignation from Mr. Bauer, found buried under several stacks of letters about humorously shaped vegetables.



*Cheery
Littlebot
Paper Doll*



*Tom
alls*



The Only Hat Worth Wearing

On Tiffany Aching and why stories matter

The core of the Discworld revolves around stories. It may contain mark upon mark of footnotes strung along in hot pursuit of a punchline and amazingly shameless puns, but it is equally devoted to both examining and being the place where the falling angel meets the rising ape. And while all Discworld novels examine this to some extent, there are few places where the focus on the clockwork of stories is as evident as in the Witches novels, among which number the Tiffany Aching quartet.

Tiffany's books offer a different perspective of witch subculture than is usually afforded in the books where Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg take centre stage. Firstly, being cut off from the Ramtops geographically, Tiffany's entrance into the company of other witches is accompanied by observations from the outside, which is a witch's perspective that has hitherto been largely absent from the Witches books. Secondly, while the structure of each of the quartet is sparked off by an event that is out of the ordinary for everyday witchcraft, as are all the adult novels, the bildungsroman aspect of Tiffany's gradual maturity into a full-fledged witch is the continuity that glues the four books into a quartet and also maintains scrutiny of the everyday life of a witch.

Despite her initial status as an outsider to Ramtops witch culture, Tiffany pinpoints the moment that she became a witch as a moment before she met Miss Tick or came into contact with the Nac Mac Feegle. It is the day when she stood over the charred remains of Mrs Snapperley's cottage – before Tiffany understood what it meant to be a witch and even before she had a name for what she had become. If it is not exposure to that specific culture that decides a witch, what does? As pointed out in *I Shall Wear Midnight*, Tiffany does not come by witchcraft naturally but by a matter of choice, putting paid to the idea that it was her destiny to become a witch. By the beginning of *The Wee Free Men*, Tiffany Aching is already poised to occupy the protagonist-shaped hole in the next story that comes along so that she might make it her own.

Because Tiffany saw, from the moment she stood over the remains of Mrs Snapperley's cottage, that stories were powerful. They might not be real, but they could kill people and the evidence lay before her. In that moment, Tiffany stepped into the role of a critic. This remains with her throughout the books – she questions fairytales, romance novels, local myths, adults, teachers. This trait informs her appreciation for precise vocabulary and her love of words. And all through her daily life as a witch – in the

midst of snipping off toenails, redirecting debilitating pain, bargaining with Death – the principle that stories have power and stories can be unfair remains with her.

Tiffany's solution to the imbalance is to wrest story under her own control. In response to the widespread belief that old, strange, lonely women are witches, let Sarah Aching's granddaughter become a witch in challenge to that. Let flowers grow on the grave of Mrs Snapperley, for everyone knows flowers don't grow on witches' graves. Like a witch's hat, where the only one worth wearing is one you make for yourself, your own story must be of your own devising, for the stories that roam abroad are inexact in ways that hurt and must, by Tiffany's reckoning, invite active response.

From that position, Tiffany Aching wrenched her way into Fairyland and into the Wintersmith's dance, and no matter her reasons or the results of her meddling, her own narrative was never subsumed by the weight of either myth nor dragged into all-out tragedy. From that position, Tiffany enacted her own brand of witchcraft, which stems from a well of deep empathy set in place by the example of her father and her grandmother, to stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves, those who cannot help themselves nor move for themselves – though she is rightfully challenged on her handling of this in Amber's case, where Tiffany put her own view of Amber's situation ahead of Amber's own conviction that the story of a happy family is not always created by having a mother and a father and their daughter under the same roof. As Tiffany learnt that she must take control of her own story, so here does she learn that she cannot take control of another's story and must let Amber conduct her own affairs as best suits her, even if it does not suit the story that everyone else thought would be best for her.

From that position, Tiffany looked upon the present and decided that it could be changed for the better, 'so that when it becomes the past it will turn out to be a past worth having' (*I Shall Wear Midnight*).

The core of the Tiffany Aching quartet is a call to examine the stories that come to us, whether through books, word of mouth, or general societal osmosis with all attendant faults and prejudices that filter through society at large. It is a call to discard clumsy stereotypes and shape what remains into a story that isn't dependent on a story dictated by others. It is a call to, in fact, create your own story for your own self; your own future, not someone else's. That, like a witch's hat, is the only story worth living.



Let's Talk About Socks: Gender Performativity in Terry Pratchett's Monstrous Regiment

Amazing as Terry Pratchett is generally, he's always been kind of short on LGBT inclusion – there's any number of characters that *could* be background gays, but when it comes to named characters and canon sexuality, he seemed a bit flummoxed for quite a while. Aside from Nobby Nobbs' awkward comic relief cross-dressing, the closest thing for a long time was the fact that we were allowed to assume Dwarfs (all of whom wore chainmail and grew beards, regardless of sex), did whatever they did and nobody Mentioned Gender, so really any given dwarf couple were Schrodinger's Queers. They also got the closet metaphor (and some interesting commentary on Femme politics) with the whole "coming out as female" thing. But at the same time, Trolls, whose genders were usually clear, managed to fail the Bechdel Test *as a species*.

And then came *Monstrous Regiment*, the book which increased genderqueer visibility in fantasy fiction by approximately 300%, as well as introducing the Disc's first proper lesbian couple and quite possibly failing the Reverse Bechdel Test.

The trope of a girl dressing up as a boy to join a traditionally male military institution is old stuff by now, the most salient example in my reading being Tamora Pierce's *Lioness* series, in which a girl named Alanna takes her male twin's place in knight training. It's a fairly polar trope, really – on the one hand, you get what is usually a fairly badass woman doing badass things and being as good as or usually better than any number of boys (who are not, after all, protagonists) – but at the same time, it means your main character can quite easily be the only female character of note, and as a tomboy in a gender-segregated society she's not likely to have great relationships with other women who fit into their assigned social roles, perpetuating the Not Like Other Girls trope that puts real divides between real women.

Now, Tamora Pierce is one of the better writers in that regard – she gives Alanna a mother figure shortly, and eventually some lady friends who are badass in more feminine ways show up, and then the *Protector of the Small* series is all about the female solidarity. But, going back to the topic at hand, I can't help feeling certain there's more than one trans guy out there who identified with Alanna like mad

around the time she hit puberty, and then later felt awkward and disappointed when she Accepted Her Femininity with the aid of conveniently gender-essentialist deities. (Note: Pierce's LGBTQ inclusion increases dramatically in her more recent stuff. This seems to be a pattern among progressive writers of a certain age or, I suppose, writing career timeline as correlated with increased cultural queer visibility; I'm crossing my fingers for Isobelle Carmody.) (Also Note: I'm still waiting for the book where someone gives the finger to some gender-essentialist deities. This sort of happens in *Sandman: A Doll's House*, but it's not the A-plot and it doesn't end well... a non-depressing equivalent is sorely needed.)

Back to *Monstrous Regiment*. The first and most obvious area where Pratchett is playing gleefully with the trope at hand, as he does, is the multiplication factor. In basically every other instance of this trope, the girl is all alone. This is normally on account of being the Chosen One, whether in-story or just by virtue of protagonistism. The first conceit of this novel is the idea that, hey, given circumstances that would force one girl to cross-dress and enlist, why not two? And given two, why not more? And this is where we get into proper spoiler territory, why not *half the entire damn army*? Now, Pratchett is obviously having a bit of fun with this idea (EVEN THE HORSE. EVEN THE GODDAMN HORSE) but it's an incredibly freeing sort of concept. A secondary theme of this book (which Pratchett obviously likes, it's in a few of them) is the idea that Everyone Is Their Own Protagonist – “while you were watching other people, other people were watching you.” This isn't just “well, statistically speaking, it'd be a bit weird if there was just one” – this is a statement against point of view character exceptionalism, which is why it works so well doing double time as a statement against Not Like Other Girls exceptionalism. It turns out other girls are not like other girls either. And it turns out other people are the heroes of other stories.

It's also a rather neat jab at the whole idea that if you just get more women into positions of power, it'll make things better for everyone – or even just for women – as opposed to needing a revamp of the entire system that's fucking people over in the first place. “Better than the men at acting like men,” Jackrum says to the high command. And this is neatly foreshadowed by the gender performativity fiasco earlier on, when the girls copy male mannerisms so thoroughly that Blouse, the only MAAB in the squad, is convinced enough to think that they'd be incapable of pretending to be women, and in fact the only reason they're not caught out immediately when they *do* pretend to be women is by virtue of turning out to

actually have female bits – because when they’re presenting as male, they’re *trying*, they’re actively invoking social expectations and gender performance, but when they present as women they’re just being themselves, and their selves aren’t nearly as Female as Lieutenant Blouse in drag.

And the capstone on this novel’s theme of gender performance and construction is Sergeant Jackrum. Technically, the social context of Borogravia is such that the actual external difference between a trans man and a woman disguised as a man is practically indiscernible – the technology level means they’re indistinguishable by the bodily modification standard (although now that I think about it, there’s no reason Igors couldn’t perform sex changes, and that’s going in my headcanon now), and there does not appear to be a space in the language for self-identification. So any number of characters could in fact be trans men or non-binary (I really can’t manage to turn Maladict into Maladicta in my head), but Jackrum is the one that really surprises you on your first read-through. Jackrum is the one who fulfils the highly masculine Sergeant stereotype to the bone, who nobody suspects but Polly, and who gets the choice to face his happy ending as a man. I quite liked the pronoun use in that section – throughout the book, Pratchett uses male pronouns for characters Point of View Polly hasn’t found out are female and female pronouns after Polly knows. When Jackrum tells her his origin story, he becomes she for a few paragraphs, but at the end Polly leaves him quite pointedly a him.

After all of that, I still love the book basically for the same reasons I love the whole series – Pratchett’s comedic genius and keen eye for human nature. I cackled when the men in the Keep panicked about Shufti being pregnant, and when Otto did his camera-flash crumble-to-dust-and-reanimate dance, and when Maladict got beans from the sky, and at the running joke about naming food or clothing after generals, and at PrinceMarmadukePiotrAlbertHans-JosephBernhardtWillhelmsberg. But it’s no coincidence that the Discworld books that get read and re-read are the ones with a backbone, the ones that can make you cry as well as laugh. The ones with little details like Angua’s compromise re: outing people with her werewolf nose, and Polly’s secondhand ornithology, and General Froc’s dance with the Duchess. The only books that come close to rivalling this one on that score are *Night Watch* and *I Shall Wear Midnight*. But only *Monstrous Regiment* has Sergeant Jackrum.

MONSTROUS

RÉGIMENT

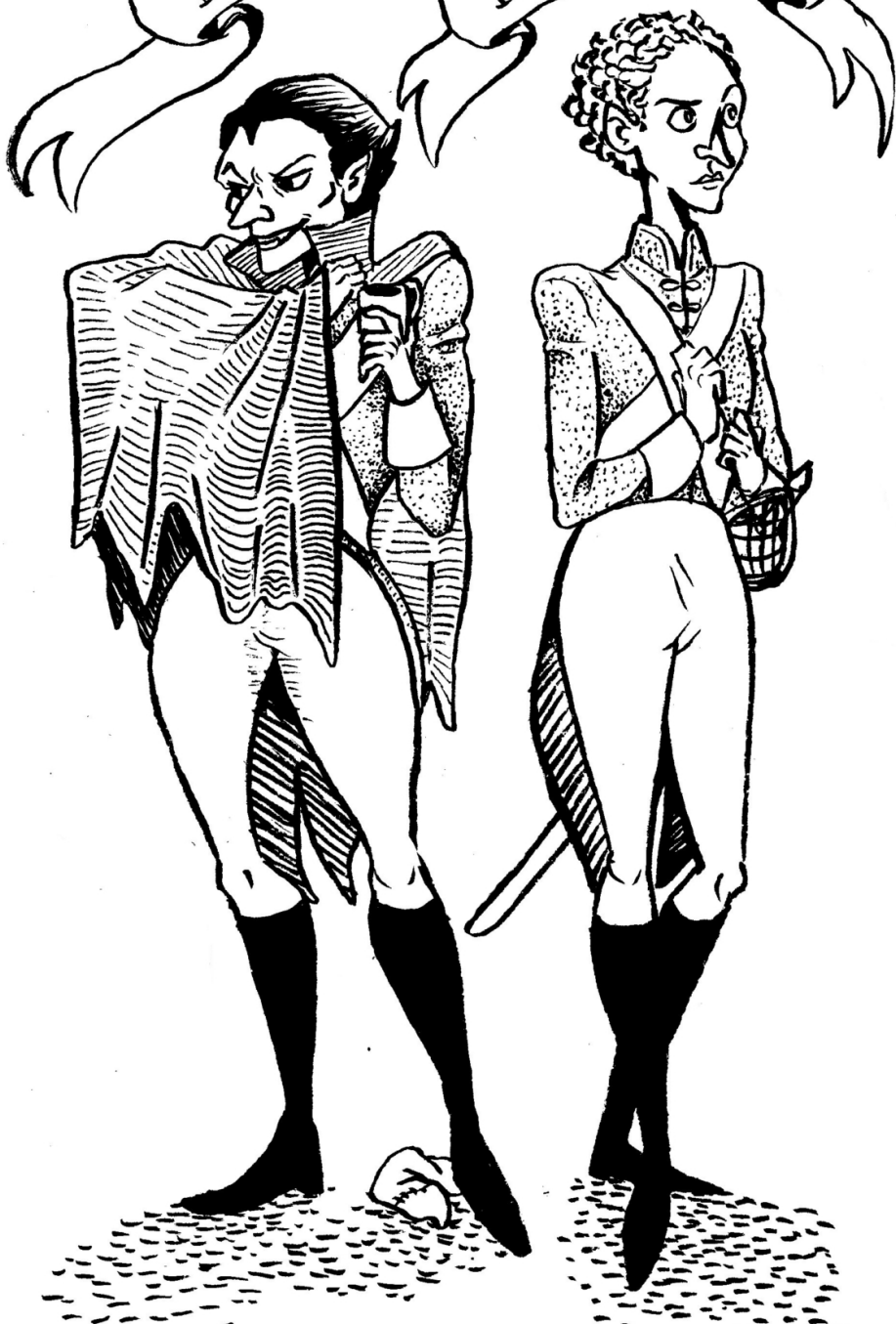


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