

Equal Rites Study Guide

Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett, a novel in the Discworld series, tells the story of a young girl, Esk Smith, gifted in magic, fighting obstacles to being trained in all-male Unseen University.

Attended by witch/midwife Granny Weatherwax, Eskarina (Esk) Smith is born and quickly assigned a dying wizard's magical staff (assuming that she is male). In Esk's eighth year, magic begins to bud and Granny becomes her mentor in magic and escort and advocate in traveling to Ankh-Morpork and Unseen University for formal training. During most of their travels, the two are separated with Granny frantic to find her protégé, who leaves a trail of mostly unconscious magic behind her. Esk and Granny are reunited after Esk meets a senior wizard and his protégé and is assured that females may not be wizards or study at Unseen University. Esk and Granny complete the trip to Ankh-Morpork by broomstick. Granny adjusts to city life remarkably well.

Esk does less well, having to enter the University in the company of Master Treatle, the misogynist Vice-Chancellor with whom she clashed on the road. Treatle's protégé, Simon, is hailed for his magic, the true depths of which only Esk perceives, and is admitted, while Esk, failing to demonstrate her abilities, is mocked and sent away. Granny gets her a job on the cleaning staff, which allows Esk to sneak into incomprehensible lectures. Frustrated, Esk decides to learn to read. Ostensibly cleaning the library, she meets Simon, who warns of the dangers that lurk in magic books. The library is thrown into chaos as "Strange Things" from the shadowy Dungeon Dimensions try to break into Discworld through Simon, but Esk's staff knocks him unconscious, blocking them.

Granny and Archchancellor Cutangle spar with magic, Esk "Borrows" the mind of the University's stone walls to confront the Things locked in with Simon's unconscious body, and she is sucked into another dimension, where she battles the Things. Meanwhile, Granny and Cutangle cooperate in finding Esk's cast-off staff in the freezing ocean and bond. Back at the flooded University, Cutangle puts an end to male exclusivity. In the other dimension, Esk realizes that their salvation lies in not performing the magic on which the Things feed. She and Simon return to the University, where they develop a new kind of magic that no one understands but all find worthwhile and comforting, and Granny and Cutangle appear on the cusp of romance as he offers her a teaching Chair.



Equal Rites, pgs. 1-33

Equal Rites, pgs. 1-33 Summary

Discworld is a geological pizza, flying through space on four giant elephants atop a massive star turtle. Magic and sex survive on the planet. A wizard, Drum Billet, comes through a storm to a tiny village, Bad Ass, and asks about the blacksmith's eighth son, who is then being born. Smith recalls that the eighth son of an eighth son can be a wizard and that only dying wizards can pass this legacy to their successor. Billet lets the newborn hold his staff, gasps, seeing that the son is a girl, and dies. Death hurries Billet away. The midwife, Granny Weatherwax, suggests that they burn the staff because female wizards are just not right. The staff, however, resists being chopped up, so they let it be and bury the wizard in the orchard. At dawn, the workshop is cleaner than ever and Smith watches the staff and tries to think.

Nothing happens for seven years, except one apple tree grows better than the others and Eskarina (Esk) likes to climb it. During the winter, Esk's mother worries about Granny and tells Esk to check on her. When Esk backtalks, her father slaps her, which starts a series of odd happenings and frayed nerves. Brothers Cern and Gulta fetch Esk at her tree and walk to the witch's house. There are no human foot prints, but the boys "know" that Granny can turn into animals. Esk doubts that magic works that way. Anyone can do magic, since it is a matter of balance. Esk surprises herself with her own thoughts. Granny's cottage looks deserted, but Esk finds the key in the privy and then Granny upstairs in bed with the window open.

The boys fetch help while Esk stays behind, settling into Granny's rocking chair. A tapping at the window, moving around back, then upstairs, and then into the chimney, makes Esk flee into the wolf-infested woods, while a crow flies irritably upstairs. Granny awakens and finds the wolves' "packmind" too strong to locate Esk's mind. She, Smith and the boys are searching when they hear an explosion and whirring noise, and the wolves are butchered by the flying staff. Granny finds Esk and takes her to the cottage, shrugs off the boys' report of her death, and Gordo allows Esk to spend the night.

When Esk asks why Granny does not use magic to light a fire, she replies that one must know what magic is for and not. A cup of herbal tea puts Esk to sleep and Granny finds an owl, enters its mind, and flies to the Smith's orchard, where she talks with Esk's tree. The tree believes that Granny must take Esk to the University and denies that women cannot be wizards. After the tree's pedantic lecture on witchcraft, Granny returns home, finds the staff waiting, and thrusts it into the fireplace, only to have the utensils destroyed while the staff remains unmarked. Granny hides it, out of harm's way.



Equal Rites, pgs. 1-33 Analysis

Terry Pratchett does not use chapter breaks and *Equal Rites* flows along a single plot line. Therefore, breaks for summary and analysis are arbitrary. The novel's opening pays homage to the dramatic opening of *Star Wars* as Discworld is introduced and some of its unique qualities as a world are described.

The book jumps to the village of Bad Ass and to the blacksmith's forge. A happily dying wizard comes to pass on his staff to the eighth son of an eighth son. A complication is introduced: the son is a daughter. Death, prominent in other Discworld novels, plays a cameo role, speaking in ALL CAPS to the withering spirit of the wizard, convincing him not to risk reincarnation with his karma. The primary theme of the novel is introduced: can a female be a wizard? The Smith family and midwife, Granny Weatherwax, the village witch, decide to wait and see. They bury the wizard in the orchard and from him grows a magic apple tree. Hurt by the staff, they let it be.

When Granny is not seen for a while, the Smith children are sent to check on her, after a day of unsettling events in the household. Granny appears to have died in her bed, so the panicked boys run for help. Eight-year-old Eskarina (Esk) Smith stays dutifully behind until sounds and beady yellow eyes frighten her and she runs out into the wolf-infested woods. Pratchett describes how natural selection normally prevents wolves from eating humans (they have "sharp edges"), but this winter they are desperate. The author builds tension by checking off the recommendations for survival among wolves that are unavailable to Esk.

The wizard's staff, which has been mostly resting in a corner in the forge when not causing occasional mischief, bursts out with sufficient force to shatter thick doors, and hunts down all of the wolves. Granny, who does not have a way with children, takes Esk home, led by Esk's deliverer. Putting the odd girl to bed, Granny decides to have a talk with the magic apple tree, even though this entails a second mind-borrowing in one day. Granny spends much of her time in animals' minds in her youth but now finds it difficult. Granny had, of course, been the crow pecking at windows and peering in, returning from crow meanderings. The tree sees no reason why females cannot be wizards, just because it has never been done before, but Granny is adamant that male and female magic differ fundamentally. This debate continues throughout the book.

Among the things to be looked for going forward are Granny's attachment to goats, her opposition to books for reading purposes, although she does approve of those with thin pages for use in the outhouse, her fear of flying, and the "borrowing" of animals' minds.



Equal Rites, pgs. 33-65

Equal Rites, pgs. 33-65 Summary

After breakfast, they discuss goats' names, what Esk wants to be, marriage, and witching. Granny convinces Gordo that Esk must learn proper magic, now that the wrong magic has found her. Thus, Esk spends the spring with Granny undergoing a practical course that combines chores with learning to prepare various ointments, infusions, and potions—but no magic. For Granny most magic is knowing the right herbs and learning to watch the watch, animals, and people. Granny asks Esk to fetch her witch hat and declares that unless Esk can tell her the secret of witchcraft that it contains, there is no point more instruction. Esk rightly suggests that when people see the hat and cloak, they assume her magic will work. Granny calls this "headology." The best part of "doct'rin" is convincing people that the medicine will work. Esk will understand better when she is older.

Late spring, Granny takes Esk on day-long walks collecting rare plants. Granny especially likes the the highest peaks, where one can see the Rim Ocean. Granny has never cared to explore the cities, but Esk dreams of them. With Esk anxious to learn real magic, Granny suggests "borrowing" an eagle's mind. Granny warns not to upset the owner or try to control it, but to suggest things that are natural to it. Granny is impressed with how easily Esk takes to borrowing but continues instructing her. Eager to control the eagle, Esk waits for Granny's "mindshape" to leave and melts into the eagle's mind. The eagle/Esk flies away and Granny carries Esk's inert body home. Granny leaves the window open and a lantern burning and sleeps little. Noon, dusk, and dawn pass anxiously. Meanwhile, eagle/Esk glories in flight until she begins to tire and loses the ability to hold onto memories. Meanwhile, Granny enters the bees' "hivemind" to get all the drones searching for Esk.

Granny dreads the next step: having the staff find Esk. It is unresponsive until she says "please." It then hovers, waiting for her to climb aboard. Granny does not like flying, but has no choice. It is a white-knuckle flight. They find eagle/Esk on a snow drift. The eagle fights viciously, but Granny subdues it, and the staff offers a sedate ride home. There, with difficulty Granny finds the flicker of Esk's silvery mind and uses the raw power of the staff to unravel them. The room is a cyclone of magic. Granny awakens feeling terrible, but the room is restored and Esk is back in her body. She frees the eagle, which thereafter holds a vague grudge. Esk awakens puzzled at not being able to fly. Granny calms her panic and tells her she has learned a vital lesson about going beyond Borrowing to becoming. Esk talks of strange dreams filled with big creatures and stars.

Granny curses whatever the wizards have done to Esk and hands Esk the staff, far from the normal apprenticeship ritual of the Brotherhood of the Wise and Enlightened. Granny tells Esk her whole story and then grows puzzled. There can be neither female wizards nor male witches, and men's minds are all about power, but the staff means that Esk cannot be just a witch. Granny has Esk hold the staff and light the fireplace. Fire



arcs from Esk's fingertips, flares in the hearth, melts the ironware, and burrows into the hearthstone. Granny tells an exultant Esk that that is but one type of real magic, and Esk must learn to control it. That night, Granny writes a letter of introduction to the Head Wizard at Unseen University.

Next morning, Granny has a stormy meeting with the Smiths while Esk climbs her tree and thinks about wizards. They are rare in Bad Ass, but wise, old, powerful, mysterious, and bearded. All are men. Witches by contrast are very old, suspicious, homely, sometimes bearded, and all women. Cern and Gulta come to tease Esk about doing spells. When Gulta kicks the staff, he turns into a pig and everyone comes running to his scream. When Granny rebukes Esk, Esk claims it just happens. After a one-sided battle of wills with Granny, Esk turns Gulta back, and the Smiths allow her to go to University.

Equal Rites, pgs. 33-65 Analysis

In the second section, Esk apprentices to Granny, learning "headology," the art of making people believe that what one prescribes is necessarily efficacious. It also works when issuing curses; the more elaborate and vicious they are, the more readily does the victim believe that whatever befalls him or her has been caused by the curse—and is better behaved thereafter. Discussion of male and female uses of magic is discussed, with Granny using the useful analogy of cider and applejack (apple-based brandy): one can drink a lot of cider, but a little applejack goes right to the head. Later, Granny says men are all about numbers, power, and "jometry" (geometry), a much-loathed term that returns later.

Another part of Esk's training is performing household and barnyard chores for Granny, probably bearing little benefit to Esk, but much to the old woman. Her concern about keeping up the house returns late in the novel. Esk does, however, become proficient in listing plants by pharmacological use and helps prepare potions whose uses she will only learn later. The village women keep these hush-hush. Only when they reach Ankh-Morpork will it become clear that Granny produces aphrodisiacs and contraceptives, which is quite odd given her prudish nature.

Esk is allowed to try "Borrowing" during a hike into the mountains. Granny has borrowed several times already in the novel, giving the reader a perspective into the difficulties of coming back out of the creature's mind and restoring one's human balance. Esk knows none of this and takes to borrowing with remarkable ease. Granny explains the dangers of frightening the borrowed creature and wants to tell about procedures for exiting the mind, but after Granny has slipped back into her human body, Esk takes full control of the eagle and flies away, ecstatic. Esk enjoys herself until she feels her humanity peeling away.

Granny waits for the eagle/Esk to return, enlists the help of the bees, whose "hivesense" she says is advanced and intimidating, and finally turns to Esk's hidden staff. To her surprise, it does not attack, but invites her to take a seat. Granny dislikes



flying but has no alternative. She sits side-saddle in a lady-like fashion, as usual wearing every piece of clothing she owns. The lump of feathers that they find in the snow is combative, taking a chunk out of Granny's hand when she tries to capture it. Granny is so modest that she hides behind a rock while removing a petticoat to protect her hand during the next foray. Granny eventually wins and takes the bird home. There, it takes the staff's magic for her to untangle the silver strands of Esk's mind from the purple mass of the eagle's. Esk wakes up wondering why she has no feathers and cannot fly. She tells Granny of strange dreams, which vividly recur at the end of the novel.

Granny returns the staff to Esk, tells her story, and show Esk her power by telling her to light the fireplace. Earlier, she had told Esk that she cannot do this magic, because she can work only with living beings. Holding the "pretty stick," Esk unleashes a firestorm that destroys the cast iron implements and burrows into the earth. Granny feels sorry for the dwarfs who work in the mines under Bad Ass. Esk is delighted to have done "real magic," but Granny warns she needs education to control it, and takes her to talk with her parents. While Granny is convincing them with a voice that brooks no opposition, Esk turns her teasing piggish brother into a pig. Granny rebukes her for breaking a basic rule of magic and demands Esk turn him back. Esk insists that it just happens without her effort and that the brother is more fitting as a pig. Her father seems to agree. Nevertheless, Esk turns him back. Seeing this act of magic, the Smiths agree that Esk may go to Unseen University, whether female wizards make sense or are possible or not.



Equal Rites, pgs. 65-95

Equal Rites, pgs. 65-95 Summary

A week later, secretly panicking because she knows little about the Disc and foreseeing troubles ahead, Granny locks her cottage and with Esk catches a cart to Ohulan Cutash, the nearby metropolis. They arrive on market day. Granny is taut, knowing what lewd city folk do to women, but Esk enjoys the noise, color, and smell, a mix of religion and commerce. Granny relaxes when she sees something familiar and heads to a booth that is attracting mostly women customers. Granny says only that they are buying medicines. The voice that asks if they want their fortunes told belongs to old friend Hilta Goatfounder. Hilta closes up and over tea describes opposition to her trade on the Council, but people need the "freedom" that her potions give. Hilta sees in Esk's palm a strange journey and exploration. She says that the University is on the Circle Sea about 500 miles away and that they can leave next day.

Ohulan has a rich night life and, as Hilta leads the way, Esk gets lost, bumping through the crowd and causing strange things to happen. Granny retires for the night. Tiring, Esk stops in The Fiddler's Riddle, run by stupid, lazy Skiller. Skiller laughs at her request for goat milk and is horrified when the beer tap flows with it. Fearing magic, many patrons leave as Skiller serves Esk and asks her to turn the rest back to beer. Instead, Esk turns it into Bad Ass' favorite triple-distilled peach brandy. Skiller loses the ability to speak from one sip and his wife calculates profits on 600 expensive gallons. Mrs. Skiller puts Esk edgily to bed. Granny, meanwhile, is two streets away, lost and frustrated that Esk does not have a clear, simple animal mind. Hilta fetches her banned broom for a stealthy aerial search

Esk lies in bed, tired but unable to sleep until she holds the staff that Mrs. Skiller had wanted badly. Esk dreams of odd things and finally strange creatures with insect eyes. She hears Skiller tiptoe upstairs—and falls with something invisible coiled around his arms. The staff glows. Mrs. Skiller comes next. Esk considers turning the couple into something but knows that will cause a fuss and realizes that magic works for her only when she is not thinking about it. Instead, Esk escapes into the streets and does not here the Skillers fight about losing her. By morning the brandy is quite nasty. Esk wanders to the docks, boards a barge, and falls asleep in bales of wool, under an oilcloth. She does not realize when it sets off downriver.

When she awakens to the sound of barking, Esk borrows the dog's mind to learn there are four aboard this barge and other barges are strung together. She sees that they are passing through colorful cliffs. A bearded man named Amschat B'hal Zoon reveals the stowaway, calms her fears, tells her they are in the Upper Valley of the River Ankh, and says the river must be her privy. Meanwhile, in Ohulan, Granny learns that the Zoon family barges have gone, but cannot confirm that Esk is aboard one. Back at Hilta's, Granny scorns her "parlor tricks" but looks at her crystal ball. Hilta helps her see a birds' eye view of a snakelike river with things floating on it. Magic is condensing out of the air



into the staff and Esk. Granny wishes she knew how wizards work their magic. Esk is at least headed for the University. Granny sets off after her on foot, while the Zoons agree to keep Esk aboard in return for doing chores. Esk has to cover up while the staff does her work. She enjoys the changing scenery, is not exactly homesick, but is tired of living on boat. When the Zoons reach Zemphis, Esk accompanies Amschat ashore to trade, helps him avoid being cheated, raises his suspicion about her magic, and with three silver coins and a necklace, parts company with the Zoons.

Equal Rites, pgs. 65-95 Analysis

Granny and Esk set out for Unseen University, which Granny knows is in Ankh-Morpork, but she does not know where that might be. She had claimed to know in order to preserve her professional reputation. Granny considers anywhere more than ten miles from Bad Ass "forn" (foreign) and has only once visited the metropolis of Ohulan Cutash. Assuming that such cities are rife with crime and want to take advantage of ladies, Granny takes proper precautions to arm herself. Ohulan is described as big enough to have one square and one suburb accommodating those who cannot stand the pressure of urban life.

In Ohulan, they run into Granny's fellow witch, Hilda Goatfounder. The women bear a resemblance to one another in the face, but dress and behave as polar opposites. Hilda knows where Ankh-Morpork is but insists that they spend the night. This allows Esk to wander off in the nightlife and get lost. Before she does, Esk wanders innocently through Hilda's booth, noting the odd names of various products, not catching the sexual overtones and being swept away from them by prudish Granny. Granny also censor's Hilda's remarks. The town Council persecutes her but lightly, since the members need and use her services. They draw the line at her flying on her broomstick, so she has to search for Esk discretely.

Esk's staff wreak havoc as she walks along, causing peas to fly out of every cup in a three-shell confidence game, a monkey to escape from its organ grinder, and a box of marzipan ducks to come happily alive. She is somewhat of an arsonist as she walks along, traceable by reactions to her passage. Granny, however, is tired and retires for the night. Exhausted, Esk enters a bar and asks for milk. The amused bartender peers down at her and she glares up, using Granny's technique for getting one's way. He sells only beer, which his clients joke comes from cats, and Pratchett observes the bar smells too badly for a goat to enter. Esk insists and the bartender sense that something is happening in his barrels. He draws a mug of milk and begs Esk to change the rest back to beer.

Esk does him one better, turning the 600 barrels into the finest brandy that she remembers hearing about in Bad Ass. This sets Mrs. Skiller, who is depicted as the witch in the Brothers Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel." Pratchett draws the analogy out almost tediously. Mrs. Skiller puts Esk to bed and tries to take away her staff, and later both Skillers attempt to grab it. The staff defends itself, and Esk flees to the city streets. The brandy turns to something nasty.



In fairy tale fashion, Esk finds a barge and falls asleep on bales of cotton, hidden from sight. She wakes up to see she is floating down the Ankh River with an extended family of Zoons. They are gypsy people genetically incapable of falsehood. Amschat B'hal Zoon is the latest of a series of official Liars bred for interface with the outside world. The Zoons are too straightforward to give a more euphemistic title. Esk accompanies Amschat ashore for trading and proves a boon, because she distracts traders. She also discovers that she has a talent for distinguishing priceless ultramarines from spiracles, chameleon stones, without chemical testing that destroys the latter. Amschat is impressed but also worried that Esk might be a witch. He sends her off to shop, but she decides it is better permanently to disappear, wondering why everyone gets so upset about magic.



Equal Rites, pgs. 95-120

Equal Rites, pgs. 95-120 Summary

With a philosophic sigh, Esk sets about exploring Zemphis. Not wanting to return to the barge for her staff or have it wreak havoc, Esk wants the world to change how it works so the staff can simply appear in her hand. Anyone trained in wizardry would know this is impossible, because one must obey the laws of physics, passing through the alphabet from A to Z, not jumping directly. Esk is untrained, so she has an advantage. Her efforts to move the staff change Discworld in tiny ways, few noticeable. Reality then rebounds like a sloshing pond causing more changes and tiny whirlpools in the fabric of existence. Esk is just happy to have the staff drop out of thin air. Since it is rather distinctive, Esk disguises it as a broom.

In the bustling square, Esk tugs at the hem of a man counting bales of tobacco to help understanding where she is. He wants to tell her to bother someone else but is mesmerized by the grubby-faced child. He explains how caravans work and she thanks him by pointing out that the bales are infected with worms. Esk wanders off to find a caravan heading for Ankh-Morpork. Trail boss Adab Gander is negotiating with Master Treatle. Wizards are in higher demand than swordsmen in protecting caravans. He agrees to take along Treatle's apprentice, Simon, a gangling, pale boy who stutters and reads constantly. Suddenly, Esk appears asking to go to Ankh-Morpork to make her fortune, but Gander tells her to go home. She gets Gander to point out the proper road and he, feeling guilty about the dangers, calls her back.

Granny is in trouble trying to fly Hilda's erratic broom. It is slow and needs bump-starting. Trying to start it, Granny falls into an occupied bear trap. In a foul mood, she knocks the bear out. The hunters next appear and consider filling the hole in. They turn out to be dwarfs, able to repair magic broomsticks. The dwarfs' hall rings with the sound of hammers, mostly for effect. Granny watches a dwarf look at, poke, and kick the broom, which he cannot believe has flown. It needs to be rebuilt, but she wants it repaired to work properly. Meanwhile, three days out of Zemphis and making good time, Gander is worried. Nasty gnolls are about to kill the entire party, when a blurring force travels through camp slashes them to pieces, depositing their parts in the trees. Esk sleeps through this, suffering bad dreams.

Sitting with stuttering Simon, she learns that Treatle has picked him for his grasp of magic theory and Simon looks forward to using the rich library. Esk quotes Granny on the only good use of books. Esk offers to try Granny's hay fever cures, since magic has not helped Simon. Eventually she gets around to asking if Simon thinks a woman can be a wizard. He finds the idea curious and funny. Treatle, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, declares: of course not. Esk quotes Granny on warlocks and wizards and is surprised when Treatle declares he has great respect for witches and thinks it a noble calling for women. Wizardry—high magic—requires clarity of thought that is beyond women. High magic gives people all they want. Burning blue-white angry, Esk runs



away from the caravan. She wants to be both witch and wizard to show everyone, but senses doors slamming shut.

Wizards' minds give shape to thoughts, while witches work with what exists in the world. Putting flesh on imagination can enrage the Strange Things from the "Dungeon Dimension," that encircle "the universe of time and space," trying to enter this particular Reality. People interested in magic and mysticism attract their attention and the Things probe most strongly during sleep. Esk sees all the hideous dark gods, as she has since her first Borrowing. She is used to vivid nightmares and is not terrified. This time, she sees a tall black castle that seems to be hosting a party, but as she reaches the open gates, they slam shut. She hits the doors with her staff, then aims it and concentrates to make a thin line of fire erupt, but the door absorbs the power. She hears unpleasant laughter. Esk wakes up shivering to find Granny waiting for her to light a fire. Granny comforts her and interprets her dream, which she sees like a beacon as she looks for Esk. The landscape around them is molten. Granny is determined to go to the University

With difficulty they get the broomstick aloft and fly slowly as sunrise threatens to catch up with them. Broomsticks do not fly in sunlight. Esk panics at the thought of crashing, but at the last moment, the broom shudders, tilts, and the landscape flashes by. Esk laughs as they catch up with night and stay in darkness. Granny is afraid of plunging over the edge of the world and wants to resume driving—and to know how Esk has done this. Esk says she sees a picture in her head of how she wants things to be, and simply enters it. Granny has never heard of such powerful and dangerous magic, but guesses wizards might meddle this way. She also considers that books might have something to them. Granny panics as they fly over a big city and lands in an uncrowded area.

Equal Rites, pgs. 95-120 Analysis

This section of the novel opens with Esk exploring the walled city of Zemphis, disguising her staff as a broomstick so as not to attract attention, and learning about caravans, a less expensive and wider-ranging means of transportation than river barges. She approaches a trail boss about joining the caravan, but he will not be responsible for a runaway child. He also will not be responsible for a young girl wandering the road to Ankh-Morpork alone. This brings Esk into contact with a pathetic young boy who is headed to Unseen University under the protection of the University's Vice-Chancellor. Simon, acned, runny-eyed, and badly stuttering, talks about his lifelong desire to be a wizard and is set back when Esk asks if women can be wizards. Master Teatle answers for him: no. As Granny often says, frustratingly, she will understand when she is older. Witchery is a good, honest profession for women, particularly in rural areas. Angry, Esk stomps away, sleeps, and dreams about being unable even with her blazing staff to enter a black door. People laugh at her from above.

Esk awakens to see Granny, who has had her own adventure with a bear and dwarfs who want to rebuild rather than repair Hilda's broomstick. Trying to find Esk's mind as



she flies towards Ankh-Morpork, Granny sees the fire that shoots from Esk's staff as Esk dreams her frustrating dream. Granny is determined to get Esk into Unseen University. The flight appears doomed as the sun rises, for broomsticks cannot fly in daylight. Esk however, powers the broomstick ahead, back into nighttime, and they arrive in the city.

This section contains several philosophical discussions. Master Treatle expounds on the "high magic" used by wizards to give people whatever they want. It is beyond women, who stay within the bounds of nature. Granny has earlier said she can work only with sentient minds. The second deals with "Strange Things" from the "Dungeon Dimension," that encircle "the universe of time and space," trying to enter this particular Reality. Since her first Borrowing, Esk has gotten used to vivid, frightening dreams and is no longer bothered by hideous dark monsters and the gods of the Necrotelicomnicon (Liber Paginarum Fulvarum or Book of the Yellowing Pages). It is a grimoire or manual for invoking the spirits of the dead. Grimoires play an important role in the great battle in the library of Unseen University later in the novel. Pratchatt explains at some length how Things are attracted to people who dabble in magic and mysticism and probe most strongly during sleep.

The third digression from the story line deals with the nature of light on magic-rich Otherworld. It flows gently rather than appearing dramatically as on spherical planets, moving through the trees, being sliced into beautiful ribbons, dancing across plains and inching up mountains. Light begins to overtake Granny and Esk on the broomstick, and almost causes them to crash, but Esk comes to the rescue and whisks them at high speed into the darkness. Esk is not sure how she does it, other than she thinks about how she wants to be and then steps into that picture. Granny gets worried. This is the first time that Esk accepts responsibility for magic rather than claiming the staff does it on its own. It is impressive enough for Granny to rethink some fundamental beliefs. She is almost ready to read books, although she finds them immoral because so many are written by dead people. She does not cotton to necromancy.



Equal Rites, pgs. 120-151

Equal Rites, pgs. 120-151 Summary

The big, black gates of Unseen University appear to be made of solid darkness, requiring "hocuspocus" to enter. By the third day, Granny is surprised to be enjoying herself in Ankh-Morpork. They lodge in The Shades, an area inhabited by disreputable people who dabble in soft magics. Thus, as a real witch, Granny prospers. Besting a pickpocket puts the word out to leave her alone. She also writes to additional letters to the University but receives no reply. Esk longs for the forest but notes that city people are friendly: Mrs. Palm down the street and her daughters have guests all night.

Granny is spared having to comment by the arrival of Treatle's wagon. He recognizes Esk, who introduces Granny and offers to accompany them inside. Granny stomps home, knowing they plan to taunt Esk. Esk finds Simon reading and jotting notes, surprised to see her and that they have arrived. Simon's book makes Esk uncomfortable. She tells Simon that she has never tried to read but is sure she could. Old wizards stroll, young wizards scuttle with books, the air tastes of tin, and Esk feels magic's harnessed power. Simon is equally excited, which makes him stutter worse. Treatle makes Simon wait to see the library and forbids him to talk about it with Esk. Treatle takes Esk and Simon through an impressive pair of doors into a hall full of wizards, boys, and boy's parents. In the old days, students gain admission by some feat of magic; nowadays most are sponsored by a respected wizard after a period of apprenticeship. Competition is stiff, because a degree brings honor and privileges. Those who fail become "magical technologists," conjurers, and lowly thaumaturgists. The women in the hall are mothers and sisters. Some very senior wizards, led by benevolent Archchancellor Cutangle, push through to see Simon, about whom they have heard good things.

Asked for a magic demonstration, Simon makes lights dance around his head. Esk believes that the cloud has always been there, waiting to be seen, and she alone sees the cloud turns into Discworld in full detail. The image expands and focuses on the city, then the University, then the Great Hall, and then Simon. As if the world has turned inside out and said "gloop," reality vanishes and is replaced by fine, cold sand. The people present seem still as statues, while the hungry, shapeless creatures from Esk's dream swarm like flies. When Esk kicks Simon, reality returns and the wizards are clapping, having noticed nothing odd. Simon is admitted on the spot.

Esk asks Cutangle if he is important and declares she wants to be a wizard. He beams at his own importance and laugh from his vast belly. Squinting, Esk declares herself the eighth son of an eighth son who happens to be a daughter. Cutangle finds it fascinating and unprecedented but against the lore. Esk agrees that being a witch is quite good, but wizards seem to have more fun. She claims to be able to do wizard magic, but her attempt to do something magic to the statue of Malich the Wise, the University's founder, fails and Cutangle tells her to go away.



Since the great doors of the University are impenetrable, most visitors use the normal back door. Pleased to see "witchmarks" on the door post, Granny knocks, is recognized by her witch hat, and quickly taken through a gaggle of girls doing the wizards' laundry to a very fat woman in a ginger wig who is examining a resistant stain. Seeing Granny, Mrs. Whitlow dismisses the maid, notches her accent up "several social classes," asks news from the other side, assures Granny that she welcomes witches, invites her to tea, and believes that she can arrange a bundle of clothes for Granny. Granny is only half insulted. Whitlow lives in an overly pink and frilly room below ground.

Whitlow is a born witch who has missed her training and is keen on seeing the future. Granny puts up with safe fortune-telling by talentless amateurs, but is opposed to tinkering with time and space. Looking like a sad puppy, Whitlow asks Granny to read her tea leaves. Granny is not good at this and finds that the University has a mind of its own. Stone can think and those of Unseen University have been absorbing magic for thousands of years. It has a big, friendly personality. Granny uses a form of Borrowing to watch Esk in the Great Hall and covers up her inattention to Whitlow's tea leaves by seeing that she will hire a new young servant girl. There is no problem, as keeping help is difficult with magic leaking down and driving girls crazy. The spirits say the girl has her own broom, Granny adds, and will arrive soon. Suspicious that the spirits would say this, Whitlow tries to stare Granny down but fails. Granny rushes off, promising to return, and reaches the gates just in time to meet Esk, leaving in tears.

Granny tells Esk that magic like fishing takes patience and being laughed at does not hurt. Granny distills and stores an aphrodisiac and wonders at Esk's density about sex, having lived on a farm. Granny announces that there is another way into the University. Esk will be free to roam, invisibly, and not have to bother with lessons. Soon, over tea, Whitlow praises Esk's spotless floors and says that Esk claims that dust is afraid of her broom. In fact, the broom races down corridors, sucking in dust, allowing Esk to daydream. Esk likes her accommodations and the work is not hard, but she is not learning wizardry, and cannot make out the writing she sees. Esk pictures writing as words squeezed between paper and fossilized, and words as just shadows of real things. Big things can be trapped in words but some words are too powerful to be captured in writing. Esk grows confused. Pulsing magic words trying to escape and become real do not look nice.

Esk likes to sit under the funnel-shaped bleachers listening to lecturers drone words, but yesterday Simon takes the lectern looking puppet-like and reads from notes, the wizards in unison helping with his stuttering. A piece of chalk writes on the blackboard behind him. Esk thinks that Simon believes the world exists because people imagine it, that there are lots of worlds separated by the thickness of a shadow so that everything that happens has somewhere for it to happen in. Simon seems to be saying the world is as real as a soap bubble or dream. The wizards get excited about some silly sentences and the chalk flashes like a comet. Simon is fascinated by a world of emptiness. Esk feels the walls grow insubstantial and many unfriendly-looking creatures watch like statues. When a servant lights lamps, they disappear in shadows.



Equal Rites, pgs. 120-151 Analysis

The scene has shifted to Ankh-Morpork and Unseen University. Granny settles happily in The Shades, a seedy neighborhood where she is welcome as a real witch. Less punny in this novel than some, Pratchett observes that she chooses to live among those who sell stolen merchandise because she has heard fences make good neighbors. The lone explanatory footnote in the novel (Pratchett novels are often filled with them) describes how and why the "Guild of Thieves, Cutpurses, Housebreakers and Allied Trades" forms to create an annual quota on crime at a socially acceptable level. Only victims are upset by the rules and criminals are allowed to plan decent career structure, examinations, codes of conduct, etc. Granny meets one personally and witches him into returning her property (and more) and to reform his life. Word goes out in the Guild to avoid her. She likes Ankh-Morpork enough to consider bringing her goats and is sure they can endure the odor.

Master Treatle and Simon show up when Granny and Esk can find no way into Unseen University. Its main entrance, with no knocker (a recurring motif), is impenetrable physically or magically except by knowing wizards. Treatle takes Esk in, and he and Granny both know what is store for her. The Archchancellor Cutangle is introduced. He is destined to play a major role with Granny later in the novel. For now, he is a self-absorbed character who declares the definitive "no" to Esk's plea for admission. His play on words "against the lore" for "against the law" becomes a running motif. Esk alone sees fully the content of the magic that gains Simon instant admission to the school, but she is unable to work magic of her own. Granny tells her it is like fishing: sit still and wait, and finds her another way to get into Unseen University. This is through the unlocked back door and service as one of Mrs. Whitlow's servants. The staff disguised as a broom handles all of the work in exemplary fashion, leaving Esk free to hide beneath bleachers and listen to dumbfounding lessons.

More is made of the sexual divide between wizardry and witchery, and the various levels of wizardry are laid out. Graduates of Unseen University look forward to a career at the top. Those who fail can be magicians (technologists) without the coveted pointy hat and astrological symbols, robes, and staff of authority. Worse, they can be conjurers, or, still worse, thaumaturgists who wash up and collect ingredients for spells. They are not to be confused with "hedge wizards," who perform a very special form of magic and tend to talk to potted plants at parties.

Another new character, Mrs. Whitlow, a self-proclaimed psychic, is a witch who has missed out on training. She speaks in lower-class dialect and lives in a world of pink and chintz that nauseates Granny. Granny's views on fortune-telling are examined. She accepts harmless amateurs doing it but is alarmed when people attempt to modify space and time—something that Esk is doing and will do more spectacularly going forward. Granny is bad at fortune-telling but has a good imagination, which she applies to the anxious Whitlow. Granny catches herself, remembering to turn the cup "widdershins" (counter-clockwise), suggesting the ritual is as demanding as the Japanese tea ceremony.



Granny achieves a first by "Borrowing" the mind of the very stones from which the University is built. Stones have a memory—to wit silicon computer chips—and these have been steeped in magic for millennia. Granny sees Esk's humiliation and hurries off, having predicted that Whitlow will hire a new maid.

Granny distills something she refuses to identify for Mrs. Herapath, and ignores Esk wondering what "Old Mister Once A Fortnight" means. The child is dense for someone having had opportunities on the farm to see how sex works. This is balanced by Esk formulating her own General Theory of comparative anatomy after cleaning the wizards' lavatory. She believes she sees herself waving in the infinity of images produced by facing wall mirrors.

The job, done for her efficiently by the staff, allows Esk to sneak into lectures. Most are boring until Simon delivers a powerful talk to enthusiastic wizards. He has mastered Light Levitation in a remarkably short time, so chalk writes on a blackboard while he lectures. After dark it glows leaving comet trails across empty space. Esk sees her monsters again. Note Esk's fear of writing, which she considers fossilized ideas and realizes can be quite powerful. This contrasts with Simon's of books. This and Simon's theory that there are lots of worlds separated by the thickness of a shadow, each as real as a soap bubble or dream, and primarily emptiness, all come to play in the final pages of the novel.



Equal Rites, pgs. 151-180

Equal Rites, pgs. 151-180 Summary

When the bell rings, Esk resumes sweeping and thinks about learning to read, since wizardry is about words and names, and things are connected. Esk runs into Granny, coming from tea and in a hurry to train someone to help with a big order, since Esk is heading her own way. Whitlow cannot remember the library ever being cleaned but allows Esk to do it. Esk bribes the Head Librarian, an orangutan, with bananas and enters a place where books have a mind of their own. Reality bends around such a concentration of magic. Esk finds no book with happy rabbits and kittens on the cover on shelves that sizzle with magical discharges, while chains clink and pages rustle. Esk opens a book like Simon's, whose letters are ugly creatures doing evil things to one another. She has trouble closing it.

When Simon appears, Esk claims to be sweeping and then, fed up, declares that she wants to learn to read to become a wizard. He warns that books can be aggressive. As Simon threatens to have her removed, Esk sees great gray shapes preparing to Act. The books rustle desperately and some pull loose from their shelves to hang from their chains flapping. Books attack, knocking Simon to the floor, a "meaningful chuckle" sends shivers through Esk, the floor get cold and turns to fine silver sand, and her staff twists like a snake and knocks Simon out. Reality returns. As Simon lies in a pool of blood and the staff looks smug, the Librarian drags her away before the senior wizards arrive. They figure a shelf has hit Simon, carry him to the infirmary, and fault the Librarian for letting a Critical Mass build up.

Three days later, Simon has not awakened. As Treatle and Cutangle watch him, lamenting the waste of his brilliant mind, which has helped them be confused and uncertain about the universe on a much higher plane than before. Two servants come to change the bedding. Once alone, Granny declares that Simon is Wandering, unprecedented in a wizard, and is angry that Esk has thrown the staff into the river for trying to kill Simon. In fact, the staff has saved Esk from the Things that Simon had been calling. Granny reminds her not to draw attention to herself through magic, because magic is a beacon to Shadow creatures who hate those who are alive. They want to claim life and shape and seem to have taken Simon. Esk leads Granny to see Cutangle at dinner in the Great Hall.

As Granny heads for the head table, conversations stop and a lecturer tries to block her. Two threatening college porters fall victim to Granny's hat pin. The students enjoy the free entertainment. The faculty hides behind Cutangle, who calls for silence, engages Granny's newly-silver eyes, and staggers. He streams fire at Granny but she deflects it into the ceiling. With stroboscopic speed, he becomes a snake, a giant reptile, a saber-toothed tiger, and an eagle, and Granny counters by becoming a basket, an icy wind, a tar pit, and a tufted hood. Esk cries out, hearing Them coming, fails to pull Granny to safety, and runs to Simon's room with shadows pursuing her. Students gathered there



report that the door will not open. Trying for herself, Esk orders the student wizards to "Bloody well wizz!" As they offer excuses, she feels the mind of the stones, becomes the University building, and forces the hinges to fly off and the door to billow. Blinding blue light shines inside the room, where indistinct shapes shuffle. Esk's hair looks like a dandelion and magic crackles on her skin as she disappears into the light to the students' horror. The light vanishes leaving Simon and Esk lying asleep.

Esk floats, feeling impersonal and knowing that the Things are around her. She wants to sink into nothingness but is angry—and knows she must stay angry. The Discworld looks like the day she flew as an eagle. She slips below the rim and sees the sun, the waterfall along the edge, and Great A'Tuin. Trying to Borrow this largest mind in the universe, Esk realizes it is far beyond her. Stars swirl like snowflakes and dance, which means that Esk is not in a real place. She knows that she will die if she loses track of the chattering noises. She tries to remember Granny's lessons. Suddenly the universe goes "pop" and vanishes, and Esk falls onto gritty, cold sand.

Esk looks up to see something that looks self-assembled from a chicken, warthog, moth, wolf, and unicorn. She also sees Simon sitting in the center of a circle of hundreds of silent Things. He holds something that emits fuzzy blue light. Other transparent objects lie scattered about. No one notices Esk examine whole worlds encased in a sphere, a ten-sided block, and a prism. The last turns out to be a world-sized snake biting its own tail. Simon giggles, playing with his small glass pyramid containing stars that swirl like snow and settle. Beyond the stars are Discworld and a tiny Great A'Tuin.

Seeing the Things' hungry faces, Esk grabs Simon's pyramid and runs, telling herself it is just a dream. A Thing with the face of a drowned rabbit grabs her in its talon and lifts her toward another horrible dimension. She flails and kicks, landing a blow that causes an explosion of sparks and a pop. The Thing screeches and drops her, and topples. The head rolls away. Things' bodies seem to be held together by wishful thinking. The Disc in the glass pyramid seems undisturbed and Esk wonders how to get back in. Esk hears a gut-freezing laugh, turns, and sees Simon drift toward her with his eyes shut. The open to horrible vistas as he asks if it could be this easy.

The Thing using Simon's shape demands the pyramid without pretending it will let Esk go free. When she claims one cannot be hurt in a dream, the Thing reminds her of psychosomatic illnesses. Feeling the Simon-Thing attack, Esk strikes with the pyramid, gasping at his suffering. The Things see weakness. Restrained by two Things, Simon tells her to keep them from getting the pyramid. They are inside Simon's dream, not Esk's. In the glass Esk sees only numbers, which Simon says it is an idea of the world that he has created. Ideas are real and the Things want to understand the numbers to gain control. The Things threaten to tear Simon to bits and admit that Esk cannot trust them, but she has no other choice.



Equal Rites, pgs. 151-180 Analysis

Esk decides that to better herself she must learn to read and heads to the library to find a nice picture book. Magic libraries are not like others. The first proof is the Head Librarian whom magic has turned into an orangutan. He finds it preferable to being human and refuses to be changed back. A second sign is that books are chained to the shelves. In medieval libraries on Earth this is commonplace to prevent thievery, but at Unseen University it is to prevent their escaping. It appears that as magic builds up to a critical mass (a second reference to nuclear physics in a civilization that has not discovered gunpowder), books can riot and stage a coup or try to escape. The whole building is warped by magic, with stacks lining the ceiling and the floor blending into the wall.

Simon sneaks up on Esk and asks her how she got here. With a brisk nod at the sexual theme, Esk says Granny will not discuss it but she thinks it has something to do with men and women. It goes over Simon's head. She then claims to be sweeping the library, and finally she admits her goals defiantly. Simon relieves her of the volume of demonology that she has been examining and warns that reading can be dangerous, because the books can read the reader too. He starts to tell an example, painfully stuttering, but Esk does not want to hear the end. She says innocently that Granny reads the Almanack daily without harm.

As the library erupts in violence, bringing forth a flourish of bibliographic vocabulary and imagery. Pratchett does to elaborate lengths to describe the laugh that precedes the books' assault on Simon and her staff's swing that knocks him unconscious in a pool of blood. Once he is out cold, Reality returns. The Things return three days later, while Granny and Esk look in on Simon. Granny says that he is Wandering, which is unprecedented in a wizard to her knowledge. Granny slaps Esk for the first time since Esk's birth to make her realize that magic is not to be played with. It provides a beacon for Shadow creatures in search of lives and bodies to take over. They hate humans.

Granny, of course, confronts Archchancellor Cutangle at dinnertime so there is a good audience. The students all appreciate the free entertainment as Granny ignores a junior professor, stabs two bouncers with her hat pin, and stares down Cutangle. As the faculty scatters to avoid Granny, she and their leader bat images back and forth like a game of ping pong, Granny always becoming a way to control or contain what Cutangle offers. Hearing the Things approach, Esk runs to Simon's room.

When the student wizards all find valid excuses for not "wizzing" to open the door, Esk recalls Granny's experience Borrowing the stones, and forces the door to explode off its hinges. Tongue in cheek, Pratchett says that the blue light inside the room would "make Steven Spielberg reach for his copyright lawyer," his second reference to a famous film, this time Close Encounters of the Third Kind. Esk floats off, seeing Discworld again from above and below, without the Star Wars imagery, and tries to Borrow the Star Turtle's mind but in a series of colorful metaphors realizes that she is out of her league.



Esk falls and finds herself and Simon amidst horrible, hungry-looking creatures. She examines several geometric objects containing miniature worlds. One holds a snake eating its own tale, the ancient uroboros of Greek, Egyptian, and Gnostic mysticism, symbolizing inclusiveness or immortality. Simon holds a pyramid that entertains him like a Christmas snow scene in a ball. Seeing the danger, Esk grabs it and flees but is swept up by a monster and is about to fall down its gullet into another dimension when one of her frantic kicks connects and drops the Thing to the ground. Esk hits others and is surprised at how easily they fall, tumbling into one another. Analogies abound: chain of metal clothes hangers, a Greek meal, and a deck chair.

Pratchett takes several paragraphs to describe linguistically and psychologically the laugh that Esk hears before she sees Simon possessed by a Thing. Continuing his mild scatological theme, he cites the Cumhoolie word "squernt," meaning the feeling one gets to find all of the toilet paper used up or, in T'turni, the sound of a sword being unsheathed behind one. Seeing that Esk feels Simon's pain when she is forced to fend him off, the Things seize him as a hostage to force her to turn over their property. Simon, who claims they are in his dream not hers, urges Esk to run, but the Things make clear she has no option but to obey. She knows that she cannot trust them.



Equal Rites, pgs. 180-213

Equal Rites, pgs. 180-213 Summary

Something else is happening, the thickness of a shadow away. Granny and Cutangle, who are still locked in magical combat, are summoned to Simon's room along with doctors. Granny takes Cutangle outside, complements his fighting, watches him roll and light a cigarette, and declares the kids have gone Wandering and the wizards will not get them back. Cutangle knows. Both claim blame. Rolling a cigarette of her own, Granny tells about Esk's birth, staff, and forays into magic. They realize the chances of finding the staff in the rain-swollen river, but set off into the driving storm together. The University is aflood, but they make it to the polluted Ankh. He declares it madness to take out the rowboat they find at the jetty, but Granny shames him aboard. They are swiftly carried along, with Cutangle bailing water. With no indication from all the clothes Granny wears, Cutangle considers her a fine figure of a woman. Oceans scare him, being full of monsters.

As the rain lightens and a fog moves in, Cutangle figures they must be in the bay and is miserable. Granny tastes magic in the air and Cutangle has to admit the fog is tinny and greasy. He has never known a wizard to throw his staff away, so he has no plan for finding it. He is too old for this. Suddenly, the ocean freezes solid and they know the staff is responsible. Freezing, Cutangle mentions growing up in the Ramtops at Brass Neck. That is in the next valley from Bad Ass, and Granny knows his father, Acktur. They consider whether they might have played together too long ago to remember and that there seem to be a lot more old people now. He rarely goes home but has been to places and seen things that would curdle his family's minds. Granny understands what it is like to feel left out. Every time one crosses a river it is different. When Granny asks about her letters, Cutangle admits that he throws them away.

Before she can object, Granny spots the staff lying peacefully in a seething pool of water. It is so cold that water anti-boils. Cutangle warns against touching it and uses magic to levitate it in a cocoon of frozen air. He gets a migraine from the effort. Granny approaches the hovering staff with hot anger, curses it for making them risk their lives at sea, asks why it gets mad at a child for throwing it away rather than rendering loyal service. She lists all of the tortures she will inflict on the staff if Esk is lost, and seizes the staff. With a withering look, Granny convinces Cutangle to ride her broomstick with her. Like any novice, he always leans the wrong way, wants to fly a bit higher to avoid obstacles, and holds on to her at an indelicate place.

Water is rushing out and off the University when they arrive. Inside the Great Hall is flooded thanks to Granny and Cutangle's duel and students are removing tapestries. Treatle wishes he lived in a quiet cave somewhere collecting herbs and thinking significant thoughts. Instead, he is organizing magic repairs by the senior wizards rather than using proper artisans. He is surprised to hear his name called in the empty hall to see Cutangle and Granny drop into a whirlpool. She will not leave until she finds her



hat, which has lost its stiffening and flops rakishly over one eye. Cutangle tries to complement her. When Treatle objects to a woman being here, Cutangle asks where it is prohibited in the written lore. The building tells Granny that they are in the library. Cutangle wonders why he has never heard the building after living in it so long, but admits that he has never really listened. As Cutangle asks to enter first, since it is his library, Granny agrees and asks him to call her Esmeralda.

The library is full of wizards concerned about the books. The pages rustle furiously, upsetting the librarian. They are amazed to see Cutangle alive and flustered at seeing Granny. It is getting so embarrassing that Cutangle makes her an honorary wizard, and she, hissing, makes him an honorary witch. Esk and Simon are lying on a table. Granny lays the staff on Esk's sleeping form, but nothing happens. The carvings grin. Granny declares that the staff uses itself or uses Esk, but Esk cannot use it because she is untrained. Cutangle runs through a series of pros and cons for women being wizards ending with "It might work."

Back in the other dimension, Esk stares at the terrible faces peering at her and suddenly feels her hands tingle. It travels up her arms and the staff appears in her hands. The Things back off, letting Simon free. He urges her to use the staff of the Things while they are frightened. Esk says that if they do not believe in the Things, they do not exist, confusing Simon. They agree it is time to go home. The staff vanishes, the Things howl, and Esk explains that they must not use magic. The staff reappears, Simon grabs it, and hoists it in "the classical revengeful wizard's pose." Esk says that fighting them is like fighting one's reflections. They come closer when one uses magic and feed off it. Not using magic when one is able upsets them. If people stopped using magic, the Things would die. Seeing the Things retreat, Simon decides that this needs much thinking and gets excited about doing experiments. Moving his fingers, Simon looks for the University inside his pyramid.

Cutangle is chain smoking as the staff lifts gently off of Esk and lands on Simon. When Granny tells Cutangle to put out his cigarette, he bans smoking for everyone. The staff blazes like a comet, changing colors, spins, and turns octarine. This magic eighth color blazes out through the library, blurring all other colors and flows into the sky. An observer above would have seen a brief sparkling jewel. The staff bounces on the table in the following blackness. By the light of a single cigarette, Granny sees Esk in the doorway. As ordinary light sidles back into the library, Granny looks at Esk, welcomes her, and kisses her. Esk feels a small pointed hate, bright blue with stars on her head and Cutangle hands her her staff. It no longer has carvings and looks benign. Esk is disappointed to feel no different, but Simon, who has lost his stutter, reminds her that one must have been a wizard to start looking on the other side.

The river is still brown and swollen in late autumn and steam rises as the city dries out. Granny is visiting Cutangle, watching ants using tiny machinery to steal sugar cubes to make repairs under the flagstones. One of them is Drum Billet, giving Life another try. Over scones, Cutangle suggests admitting a few girls experimentally and hiring her to teach herbs and headology. Granny objects that it is a long commute, but Cutangle offers her a new broomstick, a flat, and old clothes (he knows from Whitlow that this is



her soft spot). He gets excited at the thought of Granny in black and red. He adds that students could get extra-mural studies at her cottage during the summer. She likes the idea of repairs and chores. They dine together that night.

Esk and Simon develop a whole new kind of magic that no one understands but all find worthwhile and comforting. The ants complete a sugar pyramid and entomb their mummified dead queen. Unfortunately, it is washed away at the next flood.

Equal Rites, pgs. 180-213 Analysis

The final part of the novel switches between dimensions the separated by the thickness of a shadow. Granny and Cutangle end their magic bout, which Granny would probably have won, make peace, and decide they must find Esk's staff. This is complicated by a massive storm, the sort normally restricted to the mountains. The Ankh River overflow its banks. Cutangle's boatsmanship is restricted to a boyhood row about. Granny assumes that he is an expert and realizing he is not, sets him to water with his boot as they lie dangerously low in the water. They of course have no oars, but they probably would not have helped in the turbulence and later when fog makes it impossible to determine direction. Nanny offers handily to look for moss on the hub side of trees.

Cutangle turns out to be a chain smoker, claiming it calms nerves. Granny tries one and decides she would rather shake. They also discover that they both hail from the Ramtops and may have met as children. Their kibitzing and bonding ends when Granny feels the staff is near. Magic has several times been said to smell like tin and makes the air greasy, but this time it is emphasized. Granny needs wizardry to capture the staff, which she lectures for being naughty and unloyal. This level of levitation is risky for the wizard because of the action/reaction factor that Esk had intuited earlier in the novel.

Flying back to Unseen University, Cutangle is frightened, leaning the wrong way during turns and clings to Granny. There is a precious dialog in which Granny asks him to move his hands. They talk some more and then she asks more forcefully that he move his hands. Later, despite the layers of clothing that Granny wears, Cutangle finds her an impressive woman. She invites him to use her first name and smiles, a rare event.

They arrive to find the Great Hall flooded, thanks to the first deflected bolt of magic, which tears a hole in the tiles. When fellow wizards object to Granny's presence, Cutangle shows his change of heart. He demands to know where the lore forbids women and finally makes her an honorary wizard. Not sure that this is an honor she desires, Granny makes him an honorary witch. They adjourn to the library, the only dry place in the University.

In the other dimension, Esk gets her staff back and sees the effect it has on the Things. Simon is vengeful and wants to strike them down, but Esk has understood that magic attracts Things; if it were not practiced, they would die. Meanwhile, in the library, the staff sprays octarine, the color of magic. When darkness falls, Esk appears. She is not sure how she feels about being instantly named a wizard and being invested with hat



and staff. She feels no different. Simon is more affected by their experience: he has left his stutter behind somewhere.

The novel begins tying up loose ends. Wizard Drum Billet, who hands newborn Esk his staff at the start returns to life as an ant at Unseen University. The ants have built miniature lifts, blocks and tackles, etc., to move sugar cubes from the coffee table to a crack in the wall. Granny and Cutangle over tea discuss her receiving a Chair at the University as it goes gradually coeducational. Granny loves wicker. Cutangle explains what a Chair means in educational circles: a teaching job. He sweetens the package a bit and invites her to dinner. Esk and Simon develop a new form of worthwhile magic. The ants complete their pyramid complete with hieroglyphs for a dead queen. Unfortunately, the next flood washes it away.



Characters

Eskarina (Esk) Smith

The novel's protagonist, Esk is born on the night that Wizard Drum Billet comes to Bad Ass and entrusts his staff to her tiny newborn hand as his last act in life. The eighth son of eighth sons have a potential to become wizards, but this eighth son turns out to be a girl. Esk's father, Gordo, wonders about these things and hides the staff safely away. For seven years, Granny Weatherwax, the local witch and midwife, also watches—for emerging signs of magic.

At seven, Esk is brown haired and gap toothed, showing promise of becoming "attractively interesting" if not beautiful when grown. When she and her brothers check on Granny during the winter, they find her apparently dead. A crow-Granny frightens Esk, sitting with the body awaiting help, she flees into the forest, and is rescued from hungry wolves by the staff. Gordo agrees to let Esk study with Granny. Esk learns about herbs and potions but no magic. Granny teaches her that "headology" is a witch's strongest tool. On a plant-gathering trip to the mountains, Esk first "Borrows" a soaring eagle's mind but shrugs off Granny's caution and takes over the animal completely. Days later and exhausted, Esk finds that she is losing her humanity. Granny rescues her, restores her mind, and realizes that she needs and education. While Granny convinces Esk's parents of this, Esk (or the staff) turns her taunting brother into a pig. When he is restored, Esk and Granny set off for Unseen University in Ankh-Morpork.

Esk and the staff attract stares and wreak havoc as magic follows them on their travels through Ohulan Cutash, where in the Fiddler's Riddle inn she turns beer into milk and milk into brandy and has to flee the owners' attempt to steal her staff. Esk falls asleep in a barge and awakens to find herself drifting downriver with the extended Zoon family. Her staff performs useful housekeeping tasks that Esk must disguise. She leaves the Zoons in the walled city of Zemphis and briefly travels with Master Treatle of the University and his brilliant protégé Simon. Magic continues to flare around Esk as she hears from Treatle that women cannot be wizards. Esk runs away, is found by Granny, and they fly together on a broomstick to Ankh-Morpork.

Esk hears officially from the Archchancellor Cutangle that females are against the lore, but Granny gets her a job on the cleaning staff. With the staff doing the work, Esk is able to sneak in to listen to lectures that she mostly does not understand. She hears the approach of Strange Things from the Dungeon Dimensions. When Esk's staff knocks Simon out to prevent the Things entering Discworld, Esk misunderstands and throws the staff into the raging Ankh River. She and Simon are taken into the other dimension. There Esk realizes from the Things' reaction to her staff that the best approach to them is to refuse to use magic. They return to Unseen University by the power of Simon's dream, Esk receives her wizard's hat and staff but is disappointed to feel no different. Esk and Simon work together to develop a whole new kind of magic that no one understands but all find worthwhile and comforting.



Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax

A witch and a midwife in the village of Bad Ass, Granny brings both protagonist Eskarina (Esk) Smith and her father Gordo into the world and for most of the novel is Esk's guardian in Esk's quest to become Discworld's first female wizard..

Granny has long white hair and a hooked nose but no luck in losing her teeth or growing warts, which lend witches a certain credibility. Instead, she relies on her pointy witch's hat and a "just so" tone of voice, flat and measured, and "headology" to get her way. Granny has no use for reading, but enjoys books with thin pages for use in the privy. She has an "unrivaled knowledge of the properties of Ramtops herbage" and hordes medicines gotten from "Forn Parts" (anywhere more than a day's journey). She is known for potions that the women hint about "with raised eyebrows and lowered voices." Despite this, Granny is extremely modest, wearing everything that she owns at once. She disapproves of silk, because it comes from a caterpillar's bottom, but likes black velvet. Her wardrobe is all-black until she reaches Unseen University and adds a dark red lining to her cape. She realizes that she has skin but does not approve of it. She claims to have been too busy ever to marry. She lives in a cottage that has been added on to so often it is hard to figure what the original building had been. It is surrounded by beds of strange Herbs.

Granny makes great use of "Borrowing" animals' minds, which are far easier to find and penetrate than those of humans. She regularly feeds a crow for whenever she needs to share its head. She cannot work magic on inanimate, mindless things. As she gets older entering animals' minds—and exiting again—gets harder. At Unseen University she becomes the first person ever to Borrow the magic-filled personality of the stone building. Granny is surprised to find that she enjoys living in Ankh-Morpork, in the ancient section called The Shades. She considers getting larger quarters so she can bring her goats. Granny has complex theories about time and space and why they should not be tinkered with by fortune-tellers. Granny is able to stare down a snake, and uses her glare frequently in the anti-woman University.

Granny and Archchancellor Cutangle tangle in a titanic magic duel that she probably would have won had it not been interrupted. Together they go on a quest to find Esk's abandoned staff, discover they have much in common from childhood, and flying back with the staff, Cutangle holds on intimately enough for Granny to invite him to use her first name. As the novel ends, Cutangle is inviting Granny to accept a Chair in the University, teaching herbology and headology. He makes her an honorary wizard.

Simon

A gangling, stuttering would-be wizard apprentice, Simon enters Unseen University at the same time as protagonist Esk Smith makes her first shocking appearance at the all-male school. They meet earlier at Zemphis and travel a short way together in a caravan. Simon reads constantly with "watery eyes like two lightly poached eggs." This is exacerbated by what Treatle believes is an allergy to something undiagnosed that



cannot be treated by magic. Simon is a tall lad with an acne ravaged face who seems to be made of knees, thumbs, and elbows, such that it is a strain for people to watch him walk. He panics at the sight of an "S" or "W" approaching in a sentence. When he starts to stutter, people routinely provide the difficult word and he continues on with his thought, unfazed. Esk believes that with a decent haircut, some lessons in deportment, and freedom from allergies, Simon could be quite handsome.

Entirely self-taught, Simon has always wanted to be a wizard and has been taken under Master Treatle's wing. Treatle sees in him an "exceptional grasp of theory." Simon so looks forward to reading the thousands of books in the University library that he forgets to stutter, talking of "Words that Will change the World." Esk is the only one who sees fully the magic that Simon does upon arrival at Unseen University. It suffices to get him admitted. He quickly picks up difficult skills such as levitation, and is invited to lecture to wizards with greater seniority than himself. No one quite knows what he is saying, but all feel intellectually advanced in their new ignorance.

Simon's magic attracts the attention of the Strange Things from the Dungeon Dimensions. Esk's staff knocks Simon out to prevent their entering Discworld, but Simon and Esk are taken into the other dimension. A Thing takes over Simon but when he resists and begs Esk to flee, he is taken captive. Esk realizes from the Things' reaction to her staff that the best approach to them is to refuse to use magic. They return to Unseen University by the power of Simon's dream. He discovers that he has left his stutter behind and he and Esk work together to develop a whole new kind of magic that no one understands but all find worthwhile and comforting.

Nanny Annapple

A witch over the mountain from Granny Weatherwax, Annapple loses her teeth by age 20 and is covered with warts. This gives her "crone-credibility" that Granny Weatherwax envies.

Drum Billet

The wizard who at the opening of the novel turns over to the village smith in Bad Ass his staff, to be entrusted to his eighth son, who is them being born. Drum Billet dies minutes later and seems to have been talked out of reincarnation by Death. At the end of the novel, however, he returns as an ant living beneath the flagstones of Unseen University in Ankh-Morpork.

Archchancellor Cutangle

The head of Unseen University, Cutangle is a good-hearted wizard, given to laughter, which starts in his extensive stomach region and rises, echoing rib-to-rib until it emerges as a series of "strangled snorts." Cutangle is an 8th Level wizard and 33° mage. With a stomach like a beginners' ski slope, he poses like Henry VIII with an option on Henry IX



and X as well. By contrast, he has matchstick arms. Cutangle begins the novel determined to uphold the lore that only males can be wizards. He tells protagonist Esk Smith to go home when she cannot do magic, but her mentor, the witch Granny Weatherwax, gets her a job on the cleaning staff so she can listen to lectures.

Cutangle and Granny fight a drawn-out battle of magic and then ally to find Esk's discarded staff. It takes place on a stormy night and in their oarless rowboat they discover that they grow up in adjacent valleys in the Ramtop Mountains decades ago. He obviously becomes enamored of Granny and is allowed to call her Esmeralda. After the watery adventure, Cutangle demands to know where in lore it says that woman may not be wizards, makes Granny an honorary wizard, and turns the university coeducational. He is trying as the novel ends to get Granny to accept a teaching job.

Hilta Goatfounder

Granny Weatherwax's old friend, who addresses her as Esme, Hilta runs a booth in Ohulan Cutash that specializes in aphrodisiacs and contraceptives. In contrast to Granny, Hilta dresses in lace and shawls, colorfully, with earrings and so many bangles that she sounds like a "percussion section falling of a roof." She lives over an herbalist's and behind a tannery. The sitting room fits the witch stereotype with tassels, bead curtains, astrological charts, and black cats. Hilta insists on lending Granny her antique broomstick to fly after Esk when she disappears.

The Librarian

Thanks to an accident of magic, the unnamed Librarian at Unseen University has been turned into an orangutan. He finds this life far better than a human one and finds his long arms and prehensile feet ideal in the occupation. Therefore, he resists all attempts to turn him back.

Cern and Gulta Smith

Protagonist Esk Smith's elder brothers still at home, Cern and Gulta assume the right to gently torture their sister, causing her regularly to flee up the large apple tree that they dislike. When Cern and Gulta tease Esk about her budding magic spells and Gulta kicks the staff, he turns into a pig and everyone comes running to his scream. When Granny Weatherwax rebukes Esk, Esk claims it just happens. After a one-sided battle of wills with Granny, Esk turns Gulta back, and the Smiths allow her to go to Unseen University.

Gordo Smith

Protagonist Esk Smith's father, Gordo is the village blacksmith in Bad Ass. He is an eighth son and as the novel opens is expecting the birth of his own eighth son, who will thus have the potential to be a wizard. Gordo accepts Witch Granny Weatherwax's



request to let her train Esk, the female eighth son and then to take her to Unseen University. His wife goes along with whatever he says.

Master Treatle

A tall, skinny wizard whose robes proclaim him an "Ancient and Truly Original Brother of the Silver Star," Treatle serves as Vice-Chancellor of Unseen University. He is encountered on the road, bringing a gifted student, Simon, to the school, when protagonist Esk Smith meets them in Zemphis. Treatle declares it "self-evident" that females cannot be wizards. Treatle is stupid in the way clever people are and self-centered. He has stereotypical long white hair and curly boots, bushy eyebrows, a spangled robe, and a patriarchal beard slightly stained by nicotine from cigars. He speaks in a high-pitched voice. During the great flood, Treatle takes command in the Archchancellor Cutangle's absence, arranging for paintings and tapestries to be carried to dry areas. He believes he will be unfairly blamed for the flooding. When Cutangle returns, obviously changed in his attitude towards women by his rescue mission with Granny Weatherwax, Cutangle continues to insist on obeying the lore.

Mrs. Whitlow

The fat, ginger-wigged, semi-psycho housekeeper at Unseen University, Mrs. Whitlow is a born witch who has missed her training. Meeting Granny Weatherwax, Whitlow elevates her accent several social classes and often has her to tea and a reading of the leaves. Whitlow lives in an excessively pink and frilly room below the University. Four times married, Whitlow is in random pursuit of a fifth husband, which helps Granny rate her as gullible and foolish. Whitlow takes in witches, despite the University administrators' disapproval, and responds to Granny's prediction from the tea leaves by hiring protagonist Esk Smith. Whitlow's quite concerned about messages from the "Hother Sade" (Other Side) arranges nice bundles of used clothes for Granny.

Amschat B'hal Zoon

Taller than protagonist Esk Stone's father Gordo Smith but not as old, Amschat dresses like a gypsy, and is deeply tanned from working in the sun. He discovers Esk sleeping under a tarp on the family barge drifting down the Ankh River. Amschat is most notable for his "200-carat grin." He is the husband of three wives and father of three children and has the honor of being the Zoon's official Liar, representing the genetically honest and direct family before the outside world.



Objects/Places

Ankh-Morpork

One of the leading cities on Discworld, Ankh-Morpork is located on the coast of the Rim Ocean, at the outlet of the Ankh River, which flows from the Ramtop Mountains. Ankh-Morpork is home to Unseen University, which protagonist Esk Smith is intent on making coeducational. She and Granny Weatherwax take up residence in The Shades, "the abode of discredited gods and unlicensed thieves, ladies of the night and peddlers in exotic goods, alchemists of the mind and strolling mummers; in short, all the grease on civilization's axle." Ankh-Morpork smells of incense, grain, spices, beer, and thousands of people contributing to primitive sewers. Major sites include the docks, bridges, souks, casbahs, and streets lined with temples. The city floods during the great storm at the end of the novel, washing out to sea the large population of roaming dogs.

The Apple Tree

One apple tree in the Smith family orchard grows bigger than the others because Wizard Drum Billet is buried beneath it. Protagonist Esk Smith loves to sit in its fork, but her brothers, Cern and Gulta dislike the tree because it is covered in mistletoe, its fruit is either sour or rotten, and it resists being climbed by anyone but Esk. When Granny Weatherwax visits in the mind of an owl, the apple tree delivers a long monologue on the theoretical nature of magic and recommends she take Esk to University to be trained as a wizard.

Bad Ass

A tiny, isolated village in the Ramtop Mountains on Discworld, Bad Ass is home to protagonist Esk Smith, Discworld's first female wizard and to Granny Weatherwax, the witch who follows her to Ankh-Morpork and facilitates her acceptance at Unseen University. The people of Bad Ass deal with long winter snows and bad roads by marking every tenth tree within two miles of the village to help those lost in blizzards to find their way home.

Discworld

Riding on the back of four gigantic, meteor-pocked elephants who in turn stand on the shell of a 10,000-mile long "astrochelonian" or star turtle, Great A'Tuin, Discworld has all of the physical characteristics of a spherical planet, but is flat. Magical forces cause light and darkness to spread slowly over Disc's surface. Those who wander over the edge are lost. Light travels slowly through Disc's magical field, so dawn is not a sudden affair, but a gentle, loving sloshing of light. At its center is Cori Celesti, the mountain where the gods live. Most of the action in the novel takes place on the Disc, particularly in the



Ramtops Mountains, along the Ankh River, and in the city of Ankh-Morpork, home to Unseen University.

Dungeon Dimensions

The Dungeon Dimensions are a little-known place the thickness of a shadow away from the dimension in which Discworld exists. It is inhabited by the Strange Things that are attracted to magic as to a beacon, seeking life and bodies to assume. The Things hate those who are alive. Protagonist Esk Smith and gifted student wizard Simon are pulled into the Dungeon Dimensions where Esk puts up a mighty fight and realizes that if those gifted in magic refuse to use magic, they can defeat the Things.

The Fiddler's Riddle

An inn in Ohulan Cutash, the Fiddler's Riddle is where protagonist Esk Smith encounters the Skillers, a married couple who try to steal her staff when it turns beer into milk and milk into 600 gallons of costly peach brandy. When Esk escapes, the staff turns the brandy into something nasty.

Octarine

The eight color of the spectrum, octarine is the color of magic and pigment of imagination. Some magical substances begin with the preface "oct-" meaning eight, a magic number (e.g., octairon, a black substance used for the main doors of Unseen University that nothing can penetrate).

Ohulan Cutash

A village 15 miles from Bad Ass, Ohulan Cutash is the local metropolis that people—other than disapproving Granny Weatherwax—visit once or twice a year for fun. It has one square and one suburb. Heading for Unseen University in Ankh-Morpork, Granny and protagonist Esk Smith arrive in Ohulan Cutash on market day. There they meet the witch Hilda Goatfounder, who does a brisk business in aphrodisiacs and contraceptives. Ohulan has a rich night life into which Esk gets lost, inadvertently causes trouble with her magic, particularly in the Fiddler's Riddle inn. Running away from the inn, Esk falls asleep in a barge and awakens to find herself drifting downriver.

Ramtops

A great, jagged mountain range on Discworld, Ramtops is home to peculiar, violent weather because the locals practice the old magic. Granny Weatherwax and Archchancellor Cutangle discover that they grow up in adjoining valleys in the Ramtops



and may have known one another as children. This helps thaw their originally frosty relations.

Unseen University

Founded by Malich the Wise, Unseen University is the premier school of wizardry on Discworld. Located in the city of Ankh-Morpork, it is guarded by a magic dark door with no knocker. Entering, one sees a wide courtyard surrounded by lawns and rambling buildings that appear to be an assortment of architectural details huddling together for warmth. It is bigger inside than outside and much of it is unseen. For millennia the stones of Unseen University have been saturated by magic until they have a friendly personality of their own. The Archchancellor is Lord Cutangle and the Librarian is an unnamed orangutan.

Beneath the university is a maze of cellars, cold rooms, kitchens, sculleries, bakeries, and breweries run by Mrs. Whitlow, the somewhat psychic housekeeper. She lives in a chintzy room there, often having Granny Weatherwax to tea and a reading of the tea leaves. When she takes a job in housekeeping, protagonist Esk Smith lets her magic staff do the work while she secretly listens to lectures. The Great Hall, used for meals, and Library provide the action-packed confrontation between Granny, a witch, and Cutangle, a wizard. As the bout goes forward, "Strange Things" from the "Dungeon Dimension" arrive, stealing Esk and reuniting her in another dimension with Simon. The two manage to get back after harrowing adventures and Granny and Cutangle working together to find Esk's abandoned staff.

Zemphis

A walled city on the upper Ankh River, Zemphis is where protagonist Esk Smith slips away from the extended Zoon family with whom she has stowed away at Ohulan Cutash. It is smaller than Ohulan, consisting of an enormous square filled with traffic and a riot of color, noise, and smells. Everyone works hard at making money. It is a place where caravans split, mingle, and merge, and Esk joins the one headed for Ankh-Morpork and Unseen University.



Social Sensitivity

Terry Pratchett turns his attention to the issue of discrimination against women in *Equal Rites*. The novel recounts the struggle of young Esk to be admitted to Unseen University as the first female student of wizardry. Pratchett echoes many of the familiar arguments against the exclusion of females and the smugness of the male hierarchy. His own maleness and his comic approach could cause some to wonder how seriously he takes the problem of sexism, but the message, while not original, is consistent throughout. *Equal Rites* is a particularly valuable document because fantasy has often been a reactionary genre in its treatment of female characters. Women in fantasy have tended to be depicted as scantilyclad trophies and playthings, which is unfortunate in view of the importance of fantasy literature in developing the minds of many young readers. *Equal Rites* will never be hailed as a landmark in the literature of gender equity, but Pratchett's comedy will certainly do no harm, and perhaps some good.

Techniques

Pratchett puts his own stamp on the much-used plot by means of his Discworld machinery and his gift for comedy. On a planet where magic works, Esk can turn her brother into a pig — literally. She can get into more trouble than any Earth child; she can wreck a whole landscape when she has a tantrum. Granny Weatherwax can keep up with her only because she can do magic too, although her mishaps when she has to ride a broom — a trick she normally despises — are among the funniest moments in the book. Fantasy can be a fresh and extraordinary way of exploring ordinary themes, and Pratchett is a master of fantasy. Without the Discworld trappings, the plot and characters would be very familiar, and the comedy would still be first-rate.

The comic effects are greatly enhanced, however, by the absurdity of the Discworld, which permits a cartoonish exaggeration of the physical humor.



Themes

Equal Opportunity

Equal Rites examines the quest for equal opportunity for males and females to practice magic on magical Discworld. At the start of the novel, the situation is a rigidly enforced "separate but equal." Males and females both accept the myth and create stereotypes that reinforce it. It is taken for granted that males deal with numbers and hard facts and try to manipulate time and space, while women deal with Reality as it presents itself. Male have more fun being wizards, while women offer practical applications in midwifery and healing potions.

Wizardry is a strict caste. Only the eighth son of eighth sons has the possibility of joining the ranks, primarily by attaching to an experienced wizard as his protégé. Those who make the grade can be sponsored to Unseen University. Those who graduate become full wizards with all the prestige that attends the position, while those who fail must accept lesser jobs in the magic field. Others, particularly women, need not apply. The caste is not self-perpetuating because wizards are expected to be celibate.

Protagonist Eskarina (Esk) Smith would be the eighth son of an eighth son but fate makes her a female. Before this is determined, a dying wizard entrusts to her his magic staff, creating an unprecedented dilemma: which part of the "lore" takes precedence? Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax, the witch/midwife who delivers Esk sees this and watches the girl for seven years before signs of magic bud in her, and then arranges to take her in and train her in witch's magic. Esk shows unusual aptitude and an unwavering interest in learning "hard" or "real" magic. The staff, long hidden, performs wonders on her behalf, and Granny concedes that she ought to be properly trained at Unseen University. The conservative administration, however, insists it cannot bend the lore, and she is forced to study on the sly.

Esk's being pulled into the "Dungeon Dimensions" and successful fight with "Strange Things" convinces Archchancellor Cutangle to invest her with pointed hat and staff. The rest of the faculty resists, powerlessly. Esk is frustrated, feeling no difference, and the change is complicated by the fact that Cutangle has begun to have romantic feelings for Granny, whom he makes an honorary wizard (to her dismay). At any rate, the University is put on track to become provisionally coeducational and Granny is offered a teaching post.

Sex

Sex is present in Equal Rites largely for titillation. Author Terry Pratchett announces at the outset that the novel is about magic and sex, but specifies that it will not be the "tumbling" kind unless the characters get out of his control. They never do.



Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax, a witch/midwife, is portrayed as a strict prude who covers the flesh of which she does not approve in every article of clothing (all black) that she owns. She produces and sells potions to promote sexual stimulation and birth control, which makes her popular in the backwater village of Bad Ass and even more so when she reaches the city of Ankh-Morpork. In Ohulan Cutash, Granny's old friend, Hilda Goatfounder, also does a brisk business in aphrodisiacs and contraceptives, which are so necessary and popular that the town fathers, who disapprove of witchcraft, leave her alone.

By contrast, eight/nine-year old protagonist, Eskarina (Esk) Smith is so naïve about sexuality that she wonders why men visiting a nearby house all night are so inconsiderate of the residents. Granny, her guardian, does not know how to tell her the facts of life. Granny is amazed that having grown up around domesticated animals and seven brothers has not picked up the obvious. At one point, when Simon ask how she got her (meaning the library), Esk declares she is not sure but believes it has to do somehow with men and women. Cleaning the wizards' urinals helps her an unspecified "General Theory of comparative anatomy." At one point, she senses that a cleaned-up version of young Simon might be handsome.

On a search for Esk's discarded magic staff, the celibate Archchancellor of Unseen University and Granny are thrown together in a rowboat, discover a common childhood in the mountains and begin to bond. After he holds onto Granny in an unspecified but obvious inappropriate place during a flight on her broomstick, Granny allows him to call her by her first name. At the end of the novel, Archchancellor Cutangle declares an end to the lore of male exclusivity in the University, offers her a teaching job, and takes her to dinner.

The Mind

Witches like Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax are able to "Borrow" minds to travel and see things far away through their eyes. Animal minds are far easier to Borrow than human ones because they are sharper. Humans tend to do too many things at once and to think and speak on too many levels, worrying about what others think about them. Animals would never attempt to walk and chew gum at the same time. They divide Reality into things that really matter, things to eat, things to have sex with, things to run away from, and rocks. Granny refuses to give demeaning names to her goats, but knows that they name themselves according to their function in the herd. Bees have a particularly sharp hive-intelligence and the Librarian of Unseen University, having been changed into an orangutan, refuses to be turned back into a human. It is an inferior state.

Borrowing minds must be done gently and suggestions must coincide with the species' natural instincts. Granny tells her young protégé, Eskarina (Esk) Smith, this, but impetuous Esk seizes full control of a soaring eagle's mind. At first it is exhilarating, but soon Esk grows tired and panics, feeling her humanity being sloughed off. Separating the silver strands of Esk's brain from the purple mass of the eagle's is a difficult task and



Esk is left disoriented when she awakens a human. Granny, who in her youth spends whole nights Borrowing minds, is now careful to limit herself to cases of necessity and suffers after effects.

At Unseen University, Granny becomes the first person ever to discover that stone has a mind and personality, and she Borrows the entire structure. She tells Esk about this and, needing to break into a locked room, repeats the feat, blowing the hinges off the door. This leads to her encounter with the "Strange Things" in the "Dungeon Dimensions." These disembodied and lifeless entities hate humans for being alive and seek to take them over. Magic attracts them, leading Esk to deduce that not practicing magic is the means of defeating them. Even wizards must control their minds and urge to use power.

Significant Topics

The theme of equal rights for women, as introduced by the punning title, is the most obvious of several closely related themes of the novel.

Pratchett puts all the clichés of patriarchy into the mouths of the pompous wizards of Unseen University, lampooning in the process the elaborate hierarchy of higher education. In the different ways appropriate to their different ages and experiences, Esk and Granny Weatherwax challenge the assumptions of the power structure. Although they are represented as being in fact superior to their male counterparts, they are willing to settle for equality — but nothing less.

Pratchett has more in mind than a literary version of the widespread posters and bumper stickers about women's secret superiority. The moderation of the female characters' demands is grounded in the wisdom of Granny Weatherwax. Her magic depends on harmony, not domination. She serves her community as midwife and healer, and she maintains a close and cooperative relationship with the natural world. One of Esk's crucial lessons comes when she tries to take over the body of an eagle; she nearly dies, and learns from Granny that her mistake was in trying to seize the bird's mind instead of gently entering and sharing it. Wizards try to remake the world to suit their purposes and reflect what is inside their heads; Granny Weatherwax practices and teaches a magic that does not distort reality. She is far too wise to desire to dominate, but also too wise to let herself be dominated.

In her education, young Esk becomes the first to combine male and female magic, to be both wizard and witch. The power conferred by the staff left to her by a dying wizard is dangerous, difficult to control; her training in witchery helps her to achieve a balance in herself that ultimately averts catastrophe. The male and female practitioners of magic have been separate too much and too long; Esk represents the possibility of a new synthesis, better than the discrete and often hostile female and male magics of the Discworld before her time.

Style

Point of View

An anonymous, impersonal, but thoroughly bemused and opinionated narrator tells the story of *Equal Rites* in the third person omniscient, mixing in frequent and extended runs of lively first person dialog. The narrator seems to be aware that the twentieth-century (the novel is published in 1987) earthbound reader has much to learn about flat, magical Discworld, and thus provides useful bits of history, metaphysics, religion, magic, politics, economics, and weather. He explains things that differ from life on Earth and comments on the medieval elements of life on Discworld using the cultural references of twentieth-century life. Many are drawn from nuclear physics, e.g., talking about magic in terms of "Critical Mass" and the explosion that inevitably follows. Most of the characters share the narrator's biting sense of humor and irony, providing for continuity throughout the story.

Tongue in cheek, Pratchett declares on the dedication page that "this book is not wacky. Only dumb redheads in Fifties' sitcoms are wacky." He adds: "No, it's not zany, either." In fact, it is both, and these comments catch the style and spirit of this novel and the entire Discworld series. *Equal Rites* deals with magic and sex, Pratchett declares at the outset. Although he narrates it from a formally neutral point of view, it is clear that Pratchett is pulling for his young, female protagonist, Eskarina (Esk) Smith, to be admitted to the all-male fraternity of wizards. This is opposed by a traditionalist female character, Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax, a witch who sees a fundamental difference in how males and females practice magic and cedes the "high magic" to wizards, and by the all-male faculty of Unseen University. In the end, the University becomes coeducational.

Pratchett titillates with innuendo and odd scenes about sex, centering on Granny as a prude who mixes love potions and contraceptives and Esk as a farm girl who has somehow maintained incredible naiveté. Pratchett restrains his usual level of scatology.

Setting

Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett primarily takes place on Discworld, a flat world that rides through space on the back of four giant elephants who in turn stand on the shell of an enormous star turtle, Great A'Tuin. Magical forces on the Disc cause light and darkness to spread slowly over its surface rather than appear and disappear quickly as on a spherical planet. Nighttime comes when the small golden sun that orbits Discworld (not vice versa) hides beneath it. Protagonist Eskarina (Esk) Smith sees this when her spirit is removed from her body and flown into the "Dungeon Dimensions" in the last third of the novel. She also flies high above Discworld to see its various continents, archipelagos, and island chains, of which she has only heard before. She sees from above how along the Rim, oceans turn to waterfalls. When her witch mentor,



Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax, finds herself at sea with Archchancellor Cutangle, the danger of being swept into space—and of being devoured by dread denizens of the deep—are mythical concerns that seem frighteningly close.

Life everywhere on Discworld is medieval, with transportation animal- or water-powered. The story line involves only a few locations on Discworld: the village of Bad Ass in the Ramstop Mountains, where Esk is born and begins her training in magic, the nearby tiny "metropolis" of Ohulan Cutash, a barge drifting down the Ankh River with the extended Zoon family, the walled city of Zemphis, where caravans gather and separate, and the major port city of Ankh-Morpork. There, most of the action is concentrate in and under Unseen University, Discworld's premier center for training wizards.

Esk and her friend Simon are also whisked "the thickness of a shadow away" to Dungeon Dimensions, the shadowy, illusory home of the "Strange Things" that are attracted to magic as to a beacon. Failing to seize them bodily, the Things take Esk and Simon's spirits in Simon's dream. In the Dungeon Dimensions Esk realizes that if those gifted in magic refuse to use magic, they can defeat the Things. Thus, they return to Discworld and the University.

Language and Meaning

In *Equal Rites*, British author Terry Pratchett lampoons stereotypes of the long-bearded, serious male wizard by having a girl apply to the elite club. The narrator is a bemused omniscient observer. Few narrative paragraphs lack colorful similes and more extended analogies abound. Pratchett draws his figures of speech from late-twentieth-century life and anachronistically applies them to a medieval society that relies on animal power and river barges, but most often walks on its own two feet. Only once does Pratchett use a footnote to explain a complex point. Often he inserts long expositions that while entertaining and sometimes charming have little connection with the story line.

The novel is full of neologisms, which are generally understood with ease. The magical Discworld abounds in elements that are prefixed by "oct-" designating the special magical number eight (e.g., "octarine" a color and "octiron" an impenetrable building material). Pratchett has a penchant for large words and exercises it particularly well in scenes set in the library run amok. Puns are too common to count. The title is typical, playing off "rite" and "right" in reference to Esk's quest for admission to an all-male university. Another favorite is the interplay of "lore" and "law" as senior wizards try to shore up their exclusive privileges. Some vocabulary and slang are purely British (e.g., "bodge" for botch or "cutpurse" for pickpocket), and this is more notable in dialog than in narration. Oddly, American spelling is used throughout.

Pratchett situates the reader in each new locale by describing the sights, sounds, and particularly the smells. Goats seem to be the standard by which odors are measured. Pratchett develops in fair detail theories of why and how light behaves oddly on flat, magical Discworld, how the weather behaves oddly in mountains where magic is strong, how males and females differ in their approach and aptitude for magic, how various



dimensions of Reality interact and are kept separate, and even various ways of depicting on paper how a particularly scary laugh sounds. He is the master of witty sidebars.

Structure

There are no chapter breaks in the novel *Equal Rites* and a single, linear story line. Major transitions, such as they are, are specified by added space after the paragraph concluding of an episode. There are minimal flashbacks to characters' childhoods or the background of Unseen University, and the origins and nature of the "Dungeon Dimensions" is intentionally left nebulous.

Equal Rites jumps rapidly from protagonist Eskarina (Esk) Smith's birth, which is attended by witch/midwife Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax and followed by a dying wizard imparting to Esk his magical staff (assuming that she is a male, the eighth son of an eighth son), to Esk's eighth year, when magic begins to bud in her. Granny becomes her mentor in magic and escort, chaperon, and advocate in traveling to the big city of Ankh-Morpork and Unseen University, where they have determined Esk must study formally. During most of their travels, the two are separated with Granny frantic to find her protégé. Narratives of their separate travels are interwoven with little confusion.

Esk and Granny arrive at Unseen University, where Esk is summarily rejected as a student, but Granny gets her a job on the cleaning staff, allowing her to sneak into lectures. Frustrated, Esk decides to learn to read and discovers the dangers that lurk in magic books. The library is thrown into chaos as "Strange Things" try to break into Discworld through Simon, but Esk's staff knocks him unconscious, blocking them. After discarding the disobedient staff, Esk finds her way into the dimension of time and space into which Simon has gone and battles the Things.

The novel toggles between dimensions. Granny and Cutangle cooperate in searching for Esk's cast-off staff and bond. Back at the University, Cutangle ends male. Esk's staff passes between dimensions, but Esk realizes their salvation lies in not performing the magic on which the Things feed. She and Simon return safely and develop a whole new kind of magic that no one understands but all find worthwhile and comforting. Granny and the celibate Cutangle appear on the cusp of romance as he offers her a Chair.



Quotes

"The wizard held up his staff. It was man-high and nearly as thick as his wrist, and covered with carvings that seemed to change as the smith looked at them, exactly as if they didn't want him to see what they were.

" 'The child must hold it,' said Drum Billet. The smith nodded, and fumbled in the blanket until he located a tiny pink hand. He guided it gently to the wood. It gripped it tightly.

" 'But—' said the midwife.

" 'It's all right, Granny, I know what I'm about. She's a witch, sir, don't mind her. Right,' said the smith. 'Now what?'

"The wizard was silent.

" 'What do we do n—' the smith began, and stopped. He leaned down to look at the old wizard's face. Billet was smiling, but it was anyone's guess what the joke was.

"The smith pushed the baby back into the arms of the frantic midwife. Then as respectfully as possible, he unpried the thin, pale fingers from the staff.

"It had a strange, greasy feel, like static electricity. The wood itself was almost black, but the carvings were slightly lighter, and hurt the eyes if you tried to make out precisely what they were supposed to be.

" 'Are you pleased with yourself?' said the midwife.

" 'Eh? Oh Yes. As a matter of face, yes. Why?'

"She twitched aside the fold of the blanket. The smith looked down, and swallowed.

" 'No,' he whispered. 'He said—'

" 'And what would he know about it?' sneered Granny.

" 'But he said it would be a son!'

" 'Doesn't look like a son to me, laddie.'

"The smith flopped down on his stool, his head in his hands.

" 'What have I done?' he moaned.

" 'You've given the world its first female wizard,' said the midwife." Equal Rites, pgs. 6-7.

"Granny bit her lip. She was never quite certain about children, thinking of them—when she thought about them at all—as coming somewhere between animals and people. She understood babies. You put milk in one end and kept the other end as clean as possible. Adults were even easier because they did the feeding and cleaning themselves. But in between was a world of experience that she had never really inquired about. As far as she was aware, you just tried to stop them catching anything fatal and hoped that it would all turn out all right." Equal Rites, pg. 24.

" 'Father says you're a witch,' said Esk, chancing her arm.

" 'I am that.'

"Esk nodded. In the Ramtops witches were accorded a status similar to that which other cultures gave to nuns, or tax collectors, or cesspit cleaners. That is to say, they were respected, sometimes admired, generally applauded for doing a job which logically had to be done, but people never felt quite comfortable in the same room with them.

"Granny said, 'Would you like to learn the witching?'



" 'Magic, you mean?' asked Esk, her eyes lighting up.

" 'Yes magic. But not firework magic. Real magic.'

" 'Can you fly?'

" 'There's better things than flying.'

" 'And I can learn them?'

" 'If your parents say yes.'

"Esk sighed. 'My father won't.'

" 'Then I shall have a word with him,' said Granny." Equal Rites, pgs. 34-35

"But as the golden light flowed slowly across the Discworld like the first freshing of the tide over mudflats the eagle circled higher into the dome of heaven, beating the air down with slow and powerful wingbeats.

"The whole of the world was spread out beneath Esk—all the continents, all the oceans, all the islands, all the rivers and especially the great ring of the Rim Ocean.

"There was nothing else up here, not even sound.

"Esk gloried in the feel of it, willing her flagging muscles into greater effort. But something was wrong. Her thoughts seemed to be chasing around beyond her control and disappearing. Pain and exhilaration and weariness poured into her mind, but it was as if other things were spilling out at the same time. Memories dwindled away on the wind. As fast as she could latch on to a thought it evaporated, leaving nothing behind.

"She was losing chunks of herself, and she couldn't remember what she was losing.

She panicked, burrowing back to the things she was sure of...

"I am Esk, and I have stolen the body of an eagle and the feel of wind in feathers, the hunger, the search of the not-sky below...

"She tried again. I am Esk and seeking the windpath, the pain of muscle, the cut of the air, the cold of it...

"I am Esk high over air-damp-wet-white, above everything, the sky is thin...

"I am I am." Equal Rites, pgs. 47-48

"Inside, the stall was a mass of velvet shadows and the herbal scent was thick enough to bottle. Granny poked a few bundles of dry leaves with an expert finger. Esk pulled away from her and tried to read the scrawled labels on the bottles in front of her. She was expert at most of Granny's preparations, but she didn't recognize anything here. The names were quite amusing, like Tiger Oil, Maiden's Prayer and Husband's Helper, and one or two of the stoppers smelled like Granny's scullery after she had done some of her secret distillations." Equal Rites, pg. 67.

"Mrs Skiller was quicker on the uptake than her husband. She bent down and smiled at Esk, who was too tired to squint back. It wasn't a particularly good smile, because Mrs. Skiller didn't get much practice.

" 'How did you get here, little girl?' she said, in a voice that suggested gingerbread cottages and the slamming of big stove doors.

" 'I got lost from Granny.'

" 'And where's Granny now, dear?' Clang went the oven doors again; it was going to be



a tough night for all wanderers in metaphorical forests.

" 'Just somewhere, I expect.'

" 'Would you like to go to sleep in a big feather bed, all nice and warm?'

"Esk looked at her gratefully, even while vaguely realizing that the woman had a face just like an eager ferret, and nodded.

"You're right. It's going to take more than a passing woodchopper to sort this out." Equal Rites, pg. 77.

"One side effect of using magic is that one tends to have realistic and disturbing dreams. There is a reason for this, but even thinking about it is enough to give a wizard nightmares.

"The fact is that the minds of wizards can give thoughts a shape. Witches normally work with what actually exists in the world, but a wizard can, if he's good enough, put flesh on his imagination. This wouldn't cause any trouble if it wasn't for the fact that the little circle of candlelight loosely called 'the universe of time and space' is adrift in something much more unpleasant and unpredictable. Strange Things circle and grunt outside the flimsy stockades of normality; there are weird hootings and howlings in the deep crevices at the edge of Time. There are things so horrible that even the dark is afraid of them.

"Most people don't know this and this is just as well because the world could not really operate if everyone stayed in bed with the blankets over their head, which is what would happen if people knew what horrors lay a shadow's width away." Equal Rites, pg. 112.

"There seemed to be a whole world under the University. It was a maze of cellars, coldrooms, stillrooms, kitchens and sculleries, and every inhabitant was either carrying something, pumping something, pushing something or just standing around and shouting. Granny caught glimpses of rooms full of ice, and others glowing with the heat from red-hot cooking stoves, wall-sized. Bakeries smelled of new bread and taprooms smelled of old beer. Everything smelled of sweat and wood-smoke.

"The housekeeper led her up an old spiral staircase and unlocked the door with one of the large number of keys that hung from her belt.

"The room inside was pink and frilly. There were frills on things that no one in their right mind would frill. It was like being inside candyfloss.

" 'Very nice,' said Granny. And, because she felt it was expected of her, 'Tasteful.' She looked around for something unfrilly to sit on, and gave up.

" 'Whatever am Aye thinking of?' the old housekeeper trilled. 'Aye'm Mrs. Whitlow but I expect you know, of course. And Aye have the honor to be addressing—?'

" 'Eh? Oh, Granny Weatherwax,' said Granny. The frills were getting to her. They gave pink a bad name.

" 'Ay'm psychic myself, of course,' said Mrs. Whitlow. Equal Rites, pgs. 137-138.

"The truth was that the presence of so much magic distorted the space around it. Down in the stacks the very denim, or possibly flannelette, of the universe was tortured into very peculiar shapes. The millions of trapped words, unable to escape, bent reality



around them.

"It seemed logical to Esk that among all these books should be one that told you how to read all the others. She wasn't sure how to find it, but deep in her soul she felt it would probably have pictures of cheerful rabbits and happy kittens on the cover.

"The library certainly wasn't silent. There was the occasional zip and sizzle of a magical discharge, and an ocarina spark would flash from shelf to shelf. Chains clinked, faintly. And, of course, there was the faint rustle of thousands of pages in their leather-bound prisons." *Equal Rites*, pg. 154.

"The Archchancellor backed into a pillar, and the shock made him recover. He shook his head irritably, cupped a hand and sent a stream of white fire streaking toward the witch.

"Without dropping her iridescent stare Granny raised a hand and deflected the flames toward the roof. There was an explosion and a shower of tile fragments.

"Her eyes widened.

"Cutangle vanished. Where he had been standing a huge snake coiled, poised to strike.

"Granny vanished. Where she had been standing was a large wicker basket.

"The snake became a giant reptile from the mists of time.

"The basket became the snow wind of the Ice Giants, coating the struggling monster with ice.

"The reptile became a saber-toothed tiger, crouched to spring.

"The gale became a bubbling tar pit.

"The tiger managed to become an eagle, stooping.

"The tar pits became a tufted hood.

"Then the images began to flicker as shape replaced shape. Stroboscope shadows danced around the hall. A magical wind sprang up, thick and greasy, striking ocarina sparks from beards and fingers. In the middle of it all Esk, peering through streaming eyes, could just make out the two figures of Granny and Cutangle, glossy statues in the midst of the hurtling images." *Equal Rites*, pgs. 167-168.

" 'This is the first time I have ever ridden on a broomstick,' said Cutangle.

" 'Really.'

" 'I thought you just had to get on them and they flew,' said the wizard. 'I didn't know you had to do all that running up and down and shouting at them.'

" 'It's a knack,' said Granny.

" 'I thought they went faster,' Cutangle continued, 'and, to be frank, higher.'

" 'What do you mean, higher?' asked Granny, trying to compensate for the wizard's weight on the pillion as they turned back upriver. Like pillion passengers since the dawn of time, he persisted in leaning the wrong way.

" 'Well, more sort of above the trees,' said Cutangle, ducking as a dripping branch swept his hat away.

" 'There's nothing wrong with this broomstick that you losing a few stone wouldn't cure,' snapped Granny. 'Or would you rather get off and walk?'

" 'Apart from the fact that half the time my feet are touching the ground anyway,' said Cutangle, 'I wouldn't want to embarrass you. If someone has asked me to list all the perils of flying, you know, it would never have occurred to me to include having one's



legs whipped to death by tall bracken.'

" 'Are you smoking?' said Granny, staring grimly ahead. 'Something's burning.'

" 'It was just to calm my nerves what with all this headlong plunging through the air, madam.'

" 'Well, put it out this minute. And hold on.'

"The broomstick lurched upward and increased its speed to that of a geriatric jogger.

" 'Mr. Wizard.'

" 'Hallo?'

" 'When I said hold on—'

" 'Yes?'

" 'I didn't mean there.'

"There was a pause.

" 'Oh. Yes. I see. I'm terribly sorry.'

" 'That's all right.'

" 'My memory isn't what it was ... I assure you ... no offense meant.'

" 'None taken.'

"They flew in silence for a moment.

" 'Nevertheless,' said Granny thoughtfully, 'I think that, on the whole, I would prefer you to move your hands.'" Equal Rites, pgs. 194-195

"Then he saw the staff. It was—

"The only way Cutangle could describe the effect was that it seemed to be going very fast while staying in exactly the same place.

"Streamers of gas flared away from it and vanished, if they were gas. It blazed like a comet designed by an inept special effects man. Colored sparks leapt out and disappeared somewhere.

"It was also changing color, starting with a dull red and then climbing through the spectrum until it was a painful violet. Snakes of white fire coruscated along its length.

"(There should be a word for words that sound like things would sound like if they made a noise, he thought. The word 'glisten' does indeed gleam oilily, and if there was ever a word that sounded exactly the way sparks look as they creep across burned paper, or the way the lights of cities would creep across the world if the whole of human civilization was crammed into one night, then you couldn't do better than 'coruscate'.)

"He knew what would happen next." Equal Rites, pg. 207.



Key Questions

Equal Rites can be approached from various angles. Some will find plenty to say about Pratchett's version of the battle of the sexes, and Esk's confrontation with institutionalized discrimination. Others may prefer to focus on her learning process, and to examine the psychological insights under the veneer of humor and fantasy. The satire on higher education in the depiction of Unseen University offers several promising topics. The obscure menace which is thwarted by the combined efforts of the four main characters provides a puzzle for the solving. As always in Pratchett's works, there are many starting points, and there is plenty of room for debate.

1. Does Pratchett succeed in writing a "feminist" book? Does he seem to have set out to do so? Does he avoid the usual errors of male authors who use female protagonists?

2. What is wrong with Unseen University, apart from its sexism? Pratchett never attended a university himself; does he seem to doubt the value of such institutions?

3. Those who practice magic in the book abstain entirely from sexual relations. What effect does celibacy have on them? Do they regard the sacrifice as well made?

4. By making Esk eight years old at the time of the main events of the story, Pratchett seems to bypass some of the problems of sexuality. Are there any signs of significant prepubescent sexuality in Esk's dreams and conflicts?

5. What is the nature of the menace so narrowly defeated by Esk, Simon, Granny Weatherwax, and Cutangle? In what ways is this crisis emblematic of the psychological problems of the characters?

6. Esk is remarkable among Pratchett's protagonists for her illiteracy; often his main character shares the author's own love for reading. What purposes does it serve to portray her as entirely ignorant of books?

7. Granny Weatherwax differs from storybook witches in her lack of warts and her reluctance to get on a broom.

Is this humor for humor's sake, or is there some additional reason for deviating from the stereotype of the witch?

8. Archchancellor Cutangle rediscovers his boyhood in his adventures with Granny Weatherwax. How are his reflections on those long-lost days related to Esk's current experiences of childhood?

9. As in earlier works in the Discworld series, magic seems in Equal Rites to have some of the properties of nuclear energy, notably in Simon's radical theories about how it works. What else does magic represent in the novel?



Topics for Discussion

Goats are found throughout *Equal Rites*. List three context and discuss the significance of your favorite one.

What is "Borrowing" in witchcraft and what does it entail? What are its advantages and drawbacks?

What is "headology" and how is it practiced?

How do Granny Weatherwax and Hilda Goatfounder compare and contrast? What is Hilda's role in the novel?

What is Amschat B'hal Zoon's role in the novel?

How does Archchancellor Cutangle evolve in the course of the novel?

How does Drum Billet serve to tie the novel together? Is his second appearance adequately prepared in the first?

Literary Precedents

Equal Rites belongs to one of the most venerable traditions in storytelling: The theme of a child leaving home to seek his or her destiny, and overcoming all obstacles in the process.

Pratchett pays homage here to models as diverse as Grimm's fairy tales and Mark Twain's novels of boyish adventure along the Mississippi. Those familiar with fantasy as a genre will note the many allusions to characters and incidents in the established classics of such authors as J. R. R. Tolkien and Mervyn Peake. By making his protagonist a female trying to break through the barriers set up by a male power structure, Pratchett introduces feminist themes that are prominent in much of the best fantasy literature by women writers.

Related Titles

In *Sourcery* (1988), Pratchett reprises the figure of the child wizard, this time as a boy with immense powers driven to attempt world conquest by the demonic spirit of his father, which resides in his staff. Granny Weatherwax returns in two of the most delightful Discworld novels, *Wyrd Sisters* (1988) and *Witches Abroad* (1991).



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