

Mort Study Guide

Mort by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

Mort, by Terry Pratchett, is a satirical comedy about how Death takes young Mort from the fields, teaches him to collect souls, and takes a holiday to experience human pleasures. In Death's absence, Mort prevents an assassination and needs strong magic to repair the rift in history. Death spares his wayward apprentice and returns to work.

Mort, an awkward, well-intentioned, and inquiring young farm boy apprentices to Death and accompanies him to his home in another dimension. There he meets old Albert, Death's reclusive butler, and Ysabell, Death's unattractive, adopted daughter. The first time he accompanies Death on "The Duty"—harvesting souls, Mort tries to interfere and is told that people's fates are in the hands of the gods. He is perplexed to be able to walk through solid walls. Allowed to solo, Mort prevents Princess Keli's assassination and learns that history considers her dead and that the ramifications of his action are dire. Keli enlists the young wizard Cutwell to remind people that she is not dead, but people believe what they know, rather than what they see and hear. Mort wants to confess but falters, and Death sends him out again on The Duty. Mort notices a hazy, sizzling "Dome of Reality" steadily advancing on Keli in Sto Lat. They should accept reality, but cannot. Mort slowly and chillingly takes on Death's attributes and attitude.

Death take a holiday, fishing, dancing, gambling, and drinking, while Keli decides that if people will not accept that she is alive, she can at least die nobly as a monarch. With growing sagacity, Mort assures her there is nothing noble about dying. Cutwell's magic is too weak to prevent the dome's victory, but reading over Cutwell's shoulder in a magic book, Mort recognizes Albert as the Great Magus and convinces Ysabell to help force Albert to provide an efficacious spell. Ysabell accompanies Mort on his last Duty, while Albert dons wizard clothing for the first time in 2,000 years and transports himself to Unseen University. Death, meanwhile, is finding happiness working as an extremely fast short order cook.

At UU, Albert enlists eight wizards to perform with him the "Rite of AshkEnte." This simple incantation to summon and control Death becomes a dramatic event. Mort, his apprenticeship over, has become so Death-like that he is sucked in first. Albert sends him back, and Death is plucked from his kitchen. Albert cannot reach his staff in time to bind Death and again becomes his butler. Death knows the universe is in danger.

A stampeding, sacrificial elephant interrupts Keli's coronation and reality is too constricted to risk using the spell, so Mort whisks Keli off to Death's domain, where he and the angry, betrayed Master fight a titanic duel. Mort fails to press his advantage and sees the last grain of sand slip through the hourglass of his life, when a bit of humor makes Death spare him. Mort becomes Death's son-in-law and the Duke of Sto Helit, helping the new Queen establish the peace that unmodified history demands.



Pages 1-45

Pages 1-45 Summary

Cowled in black, Death keeps track of a roomful of hourglasses, one for every living person on Discworld. Death gazes towards the Ramtops, sees a boy running, and says, YES. Brothers Lezek and Hamesh discuss Lezek's youngest son, Mort, an awkward, well-intentioned, but unpromising youth, and decide he should be apprenticed to a trade. Lezek takes Mort to Sheepridge and tells him to make a good impression. At 11:45 PM, as the only one not chosen, Mort feels cold and ashamed. A great white horse appears, ridden by a tall figure wrapped in black. The rider trips and Mort helps the skeleton to its feet, asks if he is Death, and begs him not to take Lezek. Death asks to apprentice boy and Lezek gives permission. Death cleans up after people get killed by whatever manner. Lezek explains to Mort this may lead to Mort's marrying the boss' daughter and inheriting the business. Mort rides off with Death.

They are flying until they set down in Ankh-Mopork after midnight for some curry. People part for Death but jostle Mort. Death finds three drowned kittens, revives their souls, and explains that creatures' souls keep their "morphogenetic field" after dying. Death explains that people cannot see Death because they do not wish to. Death buys Mort a black robe and has Mort's hair styled. When Mort wakes, the air is dry; the carpets thick, and everything is black or purple with a skull-and-bones motif.

As Mort explores, a girl's voice warns him not to enter one door. Ysabell, Death's adopted daughter, is a few years older, has silver hair and pearly eyes, wears a long dress like tragic heroines, and is pudgy. Ysabell takes Mort to breakfast, which is being cooked by Albert, the butler. Mort goes to Death's study and Death tells him to clean the stables. Mort wheelbarrows the dung to Death's well-tended garden, in which everything is black. Ysabell does not believe Mort is Death's apprentice, since there can only be one Death. Death is pleased with Mort's answer to why Death sent him to the stables. Mort learns that Death does not attend every death on the Disc and then sends Mort to help Albert until that evening, when Mort will accompany Death on his rounds.

That evening, Mort climbs up behind Death on Binky, a flame-breathing horse. Death explains the nature of time, wars, plagues, and then takes Mort to an assassination. Binky lands atop a tower and Death checks King Olerve the Bastard's hourglass. Death points out Olerve and his cousin, the Duke of Sto Helit, who has climbed from fifth in line for the throne to second and is destined to live 35 years. Mort spies a skinny, red-haired girl, not exactly beautiful, and is smitten and sees a bowman fire from a gallery. Mort dives towards the king and Death warns it will not work but understands it is natural. As the bolt strikes, Death swings his sword and a ghostly shape falls away from the king.

Olerve is surprised to see Death so soon and vainly wishes to comfort his daughter. Olerve's morphogenetic field weakens, and he shrinks into a tiny pinpoint of light, which



Death tucks tenderly away in his robe. Death warns Mort against interfering with Fate. Compassion is not proper to their trade and can destroy the whole world.

Pages 1-45 Analysis

The opening pages show Mort, an awkward, well-intentioned boy being apprenticed to Death and taken to his home in another dimension. There he meets Albert, the butler, and Death's adopted daughter, Ysabell. The first time he accompanies Death on "The Duty," Mort tries to interfere and is told that people's fates are in the hands of the gods. He and the unnamed princess lock eyes while he and Ysabell lock horns. That Mort will rend history seems obvious. Hardly a paragraph of narrative lacks a tongue-in-cheek simile or two, and most of the dialog is ironic. Death always speaks in CAPITAL LETTERS and seems quite non-menacing for the Grim Reaper, which is his chosen physical form.



Pages 45-86

Pages 45-86 Summary

Days blur while Mort does chores or browses in the library, whose biographies gradually write themselves until the subjects die. Mort gets an afternoon off and ends up in Ankh-Mopork. He gets lost in the inner city, and is surrounded by thugs. The leader demands Mort's moneybag and threatens his life. Mort makes to throw the money into the river. Mort backs through a stone wall. The thieves argue the impossibility until two of them lie dead. Death decides to let Mort solo. Mort finds himself inside a Klatchian home, seeing father, mother, and six children staring at him while a grandparent gorges. The husband sells Mort the Patrician's champion racehorse, which Mort rides to Sto Lat. Seeing Mort walk repeatedly into a wall, a blacksmith refers him to a wizard, Igneous Cutwell. Mort asks the wizard how he can walk through walls. Cutwell wants money to answer. At dusk Mort finds Death with his assignment and Mort is surprised not to feel squeamish, but the horror is removed by talking with usually-relieved victims afterwards. Death and Mort fly into the mountains to an old witch's home who seems to be expecting them. She admits there are things she will miss, but it is time to move on. After Mort deals the killing blow, she kisses him.

The next hourglass takes them to the abbot of the listeners where they rush to the deathbed of the 88th abbot, who says "You're late." The abbot dies regularly and reincarnates each time in a certain village and always returned to the temple by his bereaved order. Fifty toilet trainings are wearying; fortunately, he now gets a nine-month holiday. Sadly, Mort must rush on. Princess Keli awakens knowing an assassin is nearby. Mort comes through the closed window and kills the assassin. Mort and Keli sit with the expired hourglass between them. Mort warns Keli not to trust the duke and flies off.

Mort slinks into the house and finds Keli's thin biography and groans as he reads that her assassination brings peace in the plains. The next day, Albert notes that the Master wants to see him later. Death is in a good mood after his first evening off in 1,000 years. Albert has been here since King Artorollo died and will not tell Mort his full name, so Mort cannot look up his biography. Mort finds the "stritching" sound of the books writing themselves reassuring: the universe is running smoothly. When he discovers Keli's book missing, he knows he must tell someone.

Pages 45-86 Analysis

On an afternoon off, Mort discovers he can walk through walls when fleeing thugs and buys a stolen horse to find the enchanting princess he has seen just once. Coincidentally, Keli is the third of his customers on his first solo collecting souls. A witch and a monk go peacefully, providing a wealth of information about how spirituality is viewed on the Disc, but when Mort sees Keli menaced by an assassin, he reacts



instantly. Back in the library, Mort sees that history considers Keli dead and the political ramifications positive. What he has done is yet to be seen, but in a complex analogy, the narrator explains that Disc has no seagoing ships and goes on anachronistically to link two of the world's great sea tragedies that occur three years apart (Titanic and Lusitania) to suggest how serious it is. A minor mystery arises about who is reading romantic tragedies in the library, and Arthur's secretiveness suggests he is more than a butler.



Pages 86-122

Pages 86-122 Summary

That the universe considers Keli dead shows up in many annoying ways. Keli is ignored and demands to know where the closest wizard is, who is Cutwell in Wall Street. She reaches Cutwell and is told he is busy, but the woman who answers the door offers her a love potion, then slams the door. Keli pound on the door and the knocker suggests she say please when the door is opened, which gains her admittance. Cutwell does not fit the image of wizards, but dons the pointed hat of his trade to hear Keli out, and he can see her. Keli wants her fortune told. Cutwell objects that it's illegal, but Keli says he can tell her "present." Keli pulls the death card three times, and when Cutwell reads her her palm, he finds no lifeline. Keli is dead. Cutwell explains predestination saying if she's supposed to be dead, that's what the people will see, and Keli should accept it. Keli drags Cutwell to the castle and he becomes her "Royal Recognizer," reminding people that Keli is alive.

Meanwhile, Mort explains to Death that things have not gone as smoothly as hoped. Death says there is no justice. Mort can't bring himself to tell Death about Keli, though saving her has changed history. Death goes fishing, and Mort has The Duty again. Death wants Mort and Ysabell to stop avoiding one another. When Mort mentions marriage, Ysabell is horrified. Mort is not ready to marry, particularly Ysabell. He is offended when she says it is mutual. They insult each other then sit by an black pond Death created, a copy of something Death has seen. She explains her parents were killed and Death rescued her. Mort describes how he upset history. Ysabell is only thinking Mort is going to leave her. Ysabell sobs saying she's been 16 for 35 years; time stands still here.

History is unraveling slowly. Mort's misplaced stroke cut history into two realities. Keli rules with the help of the Royal Recognizer. Beyond the plain, however, she is dead; the duke is king, and the established plan goes forward. Both realities are true. A "historical event horizon" separates them, 20 miles from the city. It is approaching slowly causing a shimmer, bringing reality to Sto Lat. Mort is the first person to notice the "borderland of reality." Near the ground, the air is iridescent behind the slowly moving, hissing wall. Mort and Binky fly into the wall and follow a road toward Sto Helit. Mort hears drunken songs coming from an inn and longs to be an ordinary human being.

Mort enters the Inn, named "The Queen's Head," and the owner addresses him as "lordship." Mort orders drinks on the house. He does not notice everyone is drinking from thimble-sized glasses. Patrons gasp when he takes a good swig. All are amazed Mort is still alive, but suddenly Mort drops the mug and points at the sizzling mist coming through the wall. Noone sees the mist, so Mort rushes out and sees the Inn's name has changed to the "Duke's Head." Reality is healing itself. Logic would tell him it's for the best, had Logic not taken the night off.



Pages 86-122 Analysis

Time and history are examined in this section, as Keli enrolls the wizard Cutwell to remind people that she is not dead. He tells her she must accept what is fixed, but she refuses. When Mort returns to Death's domain, he is determined to tell the truth — it is too monumental to hide — but falters. Death hints more strongly than ever that he wants Mort and Ysabell to marry, but they trade insults and end up in a standoff less antagonistic than earlier. Mort first notices the steadily advancing "borderland of reality" and observes the effects of its passing in an inn, leaving the patrons amazed with his tolerance for scumble before leaving them speechless when he walks through the closed door. He is gaining Death's powers. Like Keli, Mort should accept reality, but cannot. The section contains two long, pseudo-scholarly, humorous footnotes. First, it provides the etymology of pizza and next shows how a nomad's simple statement about settling down grows into an epic poem. The narrator offers a choice aside, explaining how he has adapted a "cinematic trick" for print.



Pages 122-158

Pages 122-158 Summary

Terpsic Mims loves fishing in the Hakrull River and does not object when another angler breaks etiquette and sets up nearby. As the waters boil with fish trying to escape, a large pike strikes Mims' hook and drags him underwater. Mim thinks of getting away from his wife and settles gratefully to the bottom, but is saved. On the way home, he wonders what it means being saved "FOR LATER."

In Sto Lat, pictures of Keli are plastered everywhere, and Mort is amazed to see them. He finds Cutler's knocker hidden under a poser and the knocker explains that Cutwell lives in the palace with his new girlfriend. Mort glows with jealousy as he rides to the palace. Mort rides through a palace wall and puts on Death's humorless smile gets him past guards. Mort climbs to the royal apartments where Cutwell greets him as "the walk-through-walls boy." Mort asks about the posters and Cutwell admits they were his idea. Cutwell panics when Mort mentions the mist dome. Cutwell's theory is that when the dome arrives, the last week in which Keli lives while dead will cease to exist.

Mort glances at one of Cutwell's books and Cutwell says it was written by Alberto Malich the Mage, who founded Unseen University some 2,000 years ago and is said to have been blown into the Dungeon Dimensions attempting the Rite of AshkEnte backwards. Cutwell mourns the loss of a brief life of plenty and asks how far away the wall is, which Mort estimates to be 20 miles away. Cutwell says there is time for the coronation then. Suddenly, Mort has a surge of energy and hope.

Meanwhile, in Ankh-Morpork Death joins a drunken celebration, saying he's never been to a party before. A participant explains how to know if he is having fun. Back at the palace, Mort suggests spiriting Keli away on his horse, but Keli says she rather be a dead queen than a live commoner. Cutwell adds that the dome is centered on Keli. If necessary, Keli intends to show the Disc how a queen can die. Mort says they do it just like everyone else and he prefers not to see it happen.

Death joins a crap game and angers the famed player Hummock M'guk. Players accuse Death of cheating, but he claims he just wants to know why humans enjoy reiterating the laws of chance. The boys close in but freeze in mid-stab amidst purple flickers. Death hands Wa the dice and orders him to throw. If he wins, Wa will stop suggesting that chance governs the affairs of men, and if he loses, he will wish he had won. Death knows that Wa has killed 23 people but says it is not his to forgive. Wa throws three eights and faints. Death departs, tickling the ears of an alley cat, feeling something odd that he enjoys. Back at the palace, Mort takes his leave saying he may have a solution and he'll be back.

In The Mended Drum tavern Death samples every bottle. After 47 drinks, Death fails to see the point, and the barman settles in to small talk. Death has no sorrows to drown



and is surprised the man wants to talk to him. Everyone hates him and he has no friends. As he drinks more, Death begins slurring his words. At 2:45 AM, the landlord suggests a good night's sleep and propel Death to the door.

Mort wakes Ysabell and leads her to the library. Mort needs to find Albert's biography to verify who he is. Ysabell leads Mort to The Stack, where biographies over 500 years old are stored. Mort hears the one book still writing itself; they find a full shelf dedicated to Albert. Having tried life's alleged pleasures, Death neither sees the point nor understands people. He feels he must be "sickening" for something.

Pages 122-158 Analysis

This section watches Death take a holiday. While fishing, Death angers an unhappily-married man by saving him from drowning. Later, he crashes the Patrician's party and learns about having fun. When the party winds down, he finds luck at Cripple Wa's famous floating crap game, and ends the night sampling every bottle on the shelves in The Mended Drum tavern. Just before dawn, the owner puts him out. Meanwhile, Keli is trying vainly to make people realize she is alive, but Cutwell's believes that when the dome arrives, the last week of her life will vanish as history repairs itself. If she must, Keli intends to die nobly as a monarch. With growing sagacity, Mort assures her there is nothing noble about dying. Cutwell's magic is too weak to prevent the dome's victory, but reading over his shoulder in a magic book, Mort recognizes Albert as the great Magus and convinces Ysabell to help enlist his services. Pratchett engages in some choice shtick about "hero talk" as Mort begins to feel his own powers.



Pages 158-197

Pages 158-197 Summary

Mort and Ysabell look at the last volume, feeling like spies. Ysabell reads about Albert pushing the ladder and end the prying and Ysabell drops the book on Albert's head. Albert is snide about Mort needing help. He admits he was the greatest but cannot be buttered up. Mort sags and decides when Death returns, Mort will confess.

Liona Keeble, a job broker, asks Death about his previous position and specific skills. Seeing he has no useful skills or talents, Keeble suggests teaching, but this horrifies Death. Suddenly seeing Death clearly, Keeble panics, but is assured he has years yet. Giggling hysterically, Keeble hands Death a paper and asks that he not say who recommends him for the job.

Ysabell wakes Mort saying she and Albert are crazy with worry, as Death has never been away this long. Albert explains that if the "nodes" are not properly worked out, anything can happen. Nodes stop death (not Death) from coming earlier or later than the end of life. Ysabell confesses that Father has taught her to read nodes. In Ankh-Morpork Death works as a short order cook and when asked how he can be so fast, the cook says, "TIME IS NOT IMPORTANT." Whirling about inside the greasy kitchen, feeding neighborhood cats, and scratching them behind the ears, Death is happy.

Cutwell is pleased that the population is not resisting a coronation; it is just not clear who is to be crowned. Cutwell has ordered bunting strung, broccoli beer pumped through the fountain, folk dancing, and an ox roast. The High Priest may miss Keli's head with the crown even with help. The Chancellor has ordered fireworks, about which Cutwell knows nothing and is now missing his eyebrows. Keli is brushing her hair. It takes great self-control to watch her. Cutwell delivers the dreaded news the dome will arrive before the moment that the Royal Astrologer has decreed for the coronation. As she rustles into silk in her dressing room, Keli asks why Cutwell became a magician; indoor work, no heavy lifting, and learning how the world works, he replies. When he asks about her becoming a princess, she says it is family tradition.

Albert and Ysabell come up with two names whose life timers they must fetch. Mort is speaking, unknowingly, in Death's tone. Albert seizes two nearly-expired hourglasses of an Agatean nobleman and a Klatchian commoner. Ysabell points out that Mort swishes the sword and stalks in Death's manner. Mort is aware but cannot help it. He buries the blade in the doorpost by Albert's ear and orders Alberto Malich to his knees. Albert's pact is with Death, not Mort. Albert explains that with 91 days, three hours, and five minutes to live, he knows Death is on his trail, but that no one dies in Death's kingdom, so serving him is a good plan. Albert boasts he has lived over 2,000 years. Mort says an eternity here would be worse than dying. Mort says that helping him may win him friends in the afterlife, and it cannot hurt to polish his soul a bit.



When Mort tells him his plan, Albert cackles and says nothing short of the Great Spells of old can change Reality. Albert looks in Mort's eyes and sees Death seasoned with vengeance, cruelty, and distaste, and knows Mort will send him back into time, pursue him, and deliver him to the horrors of Dungeon Dimensions. Albert writes down a spell that should slow time in a small area, but a wizard must pronounce it. First, Mort must complete The Duty. Ysabell pulls on her outdoor coat, insisting on going along. Albert decides the Master must be told and uses his staff to draw a glowing circle and shouts a single syllable. Light flashes from the staff and he vanishes.

As Binky flies low over the ocean, Ysabell hands Mort a soggy sandwich. At dusk, they swoop in over characteristically squat pyramids. The current Sun Emperor is a boy, and the top man the Grand Vizier, Nine Turning Mirrors. The boy is questioning things and time has come to poison him. The Vizier flicks a choice morsel of puff eel guts toward the divine Emperor, who sends it back. The Vizier's next serve is volleyed perfectly and he has no choice but to eat and he turns blue and dies. A number of emperors' souls gather, eager to welcome him to the lands of the dead. Mort hurries off to an assignment that gives him a bad feeling.

Pages 158-197 Analysis

Mort forces Albert to confess that he used to be a great magician. Ysabell proves able to read nodes and accompanies Mort on the Duty that must be performed before Albert's spell can be tried. In Bes Pelargic, a murderous Vizier's plot to kill a boy king is thwarted and his previous royal victims gather to welcome him to the next worlds. Albert, meanwhile, dons wizard clothing for the first time in 2,000 years and disappears. Death finds happiness working as a short order cook. Cutwell worries about the advancing dome, abbreviates the coronation rituals in order to beat it, and hopes Mort comes up with a good idea. Albert's interrogation includes a clever ploy: Ysabell reading from Albert's book as a kind of lie detector. He gives in when he sees that Mort is Death with cruelty added. Mort slips into Death's voice unconsciously and his brown eyes glow blue.



Pages 197-243

Pages 197-243 Summary

Albert materializes in Unseen University, at the spot he left 2,000 years before. He hurls a thunderbolt at the statue erected in his memory, turning it to dust, while proclaiming, "I'm back." Albert demands to know where Death is and gives Rincewind half an hour to gather the eight most senior wizards and implements for performing the Rite of the AshkEnte, while he visits the Broken Drum. While Albert argues about his 2,000-year-old bar tab, Binky flies to mysterious Klatch. Oddly, the hourglass is for an ordinary mortal, not a newly-pickled king. Mort and Ysabell explore the dark chamber, which will not be sealed until dawn. Back at Unseen, the senior wizards nervously await Albert's returns. Albert lectures them on the use of power and demanding respect. He intends to restore exercise at dawn, balanced meals, study, and ban alcohol or smoking - after the Rite and taking care of unfinished business.

In the cat-black corridors of the pyramid, they are scared and Ysabell reminds Mort he is not Death, but he replies, "DEATH IS WHOEVER DOES DEATH'S JOB." They come upon a young girl in see-through clothing, who has been poisoned in a canoe. Mort dispatches her and her shade sits up and announces she will be a concubine to King Zetesphut in the next world. Ysabell says she wants to help rescue the princess.

Mort declares his apprenticeship finished. As the sand at his feet forms dust devils and the air crackles and feels greasy, Mort realizes someone is performing the Rite of the AshkEnte. Mort is lifted up into a gale of rushing sand, surrounded by lightning, powerless to resist. When figures at the end of an octarine-lit tunnel beckon, he follows. He slams into Ysabell, who argues that he is not being summoned, but rather Death is being summoned, and reminds him that since threats never work for Father, he can forget trying them. The pain, she says, is all in his head. Mort screams in the rising storm.

The Rite of the AshkEnte summons and binds Death. As Albert orders more power, he sees a pale face appear, but sends Mort back to Tsort. A frying pan falls to the floor in Harga's House of Ribs, and Death pops up in the octagon at UU, swearing at having his fun spoiled. Death sniffs and realizes his foolishness: the apprentice has betrayed him and endangered the universe. Albert's voice sounds now like a trumpet, not a piccolo. He orders Rincewind to throw his staff, so he can break free while Death is vulnerable. Rincewind reacts dimwittedly. Thanking Albert for bringing him to his senses, Death drags him away in an implosion of air. The wizards pick themselves up and contemplate replacing the statue - and locking it safely away.

Mort knows he has to do something but cannot remember what. Mort experiences all of Death's memories from the beginning of life to its end and asks Ysabell not to leave him. It is midnight: too late to reach the other side of the Disc and complete their mission. Thinking about the model in Death's study, Mort determines where Sto Lat is



located, and they fly off on Binky at the "speed of night." In the candlelit hall, Sto Plain dignitaries gather, unsure of why. Cutwell signals the ceremony to begin. Keli is brought up the aisle, beautiful in the hereditary dress. Guards are posted to prevent the Duke of Sto Helit from rearranging the royal succession. Cutwell makes an acolyte force the priest to skip directly to the sacrifice. The hiccuping elephant happily kneels, but the High Priest cannot see it. The knife's sweep catches the elephant's trunk, making it squeal, uproot and pulverize the altar, and charge out for a breath of fresh air. Keli thanks Cutwell for pushing her out of the way and orders the crown brought. Behind them, the Duke orders Cutwell to show his hands. Keli throws herself at her uncle, but Cutwell restrains her. The Duke declares that history will record that a rogue elephant tragically crushes Keli, and he will declare a week of mourning. The witnesses will agree, he laughs. Cutwell does not care if they kill him here, as this is not happening.

As they descend into Sto Lat, they see an elephant racing away. The "dome of reality" squats over the palace. Mort draws his sword, and heads for the Duke, who draws his own sword, but is dropped by a heavy candle stand from behind. Cutwell grins. Everyone vanishes as Mort gives Cutwell the spell, but he dares not use it with so little reality left around them. Keli demands to be crowned so she can die a queen. Ysabell finds the crown, and Keli appoints Cutwell priest of whatever god he names. Cutwell pronounces impressive words in a strange language (a spell for ridding clothes of flees) and hopes for the best. Mort pulls Keli up on Binky against her will and Ysabell climbs on last. Ysabell announces they are heading for her Father's house, whom she believes they have not met. Suddenly, they punch through the interface into a black, starry sky, while it goes on shrinking.

No one is home in Death's house. Ysabell cannot find Albert, who has never been missing, and takes over as hostess. She warns Mort that Father will be angry if he finds the refugees here. They see first Albert and then Death, revolving in his chair. He wants no apology. He is angry. Death demands Ysabell explain herself. She proclaims her love for Mort and is silenced. Death knocks Mort off his feet and lectures him about inviting him in, training him, feeding and clothing him, giving him undreamt of opportunity - and is repaid by seduction, neglect of duty, and causing ripples in Reality that will require centuries to heal. The gods will surely doom his comrades. This is not a good way to start one's first job. Sitting up and holding his cheek, Mort asks Death to let them go, but Death insists they belong to him now. Mort offers to fight Death, but is dismissed.

Mort challenges Death as an equal, which Death accepts. Ysabell knows Father wants Mort to win; he will not let him win, though. Mort's inner voice speaks up, claiming that Mort has an advantage, having been Death while Death has never been he. Albert fetches the hourglasses. Mort draws his sword and Death his scythe. Mort sees that his hourglass is nearly empty. The scythe is not well suited to dueling, but Death moves it with fearsome skill. The onlookers scramble to save hourglasses from breaking, killing innocent people. Death accidentally smashes a glass, killing the Emperor's chief torturer in Bes Pelargic. Mort is growing fatigued and Death notices, calling him to yield. A miss shatters a glass, killing the Duke of Sto Helit. Death backs Mort to a stone pillar, but is distracted by the Duke's demise. The crowd cheers as Mort swings at Death's hourglass, but the blade passes harmlessly through it. Mort demands that Death



address him by name rather than "Boy." Death staggers backwards before the furious onslaught. Mort knows he cannot win and does not want eternity at any rate.

As Death unfolds from his slump, Ysabell calls to him. Mort pins Death to a pillar as he sees his last sand running out. When Death orders him to STRIKE, Mort lowers his sword. Death kicks Mort in the groin and demands what Ysabell wants. She slaps punches him mightily, quotes him about how tinkering with one individual can destroy the world, and points out that Death has meddled with Mort, herself, and their companions. She asks what the gods will demand from Death. He declares that the gods themselves answer to him eventually. As she asks about the gods, justice, and mercy, no one notices that she picks up the sword. When Death orders her to stand aside, Ysabell refuses. Death appears to think, surveys the room, declares that he cannot be forced, whips the sword from Ysabell's hand, and pins her to a pillar. Death says Mort cannot know how sorry he is to kill him, and when Mort replies, "I might," breaks out laughing. Mort sees his final grain of sand drop in slow motion and land, and watches Death turn the hourglass over.

Sto Lat's great hall is again filled with light and music. Cutwell is announced and asks to kiss the bride. Ysabell consents. Mort congratulates him on the fireworks. The newlyweds talk about him being the power behind the throne. Queen Kelirehanna I enters, beaming at them. She addresses Mort by his new title, Sto Helit. Keli takes Ysabell off to meet some nobles, leaving Mort to raid the buffet table. The Master of Ceremonies introduces Death, who says he could not refuse the first invitation he has ever gotten, even if his presence might not be appropriate. Death had thought Mort would marry the princess. He has decided not to interest himself further in human affairs, except officially. Mort wants to know how he goes from the Long Room to a field outside the city, with Reality altered to include them. Uncomfortably, Death admits to talking with the gods, who are sentimentalists. Mort must do his part to right history by helping to unite the kingdoms. Death believes that Mort may end up wishing he had stayed with him. Death pulls out a 3-in. globe, whose surface swirls constantly and hands it to Mort, a wedding present/dowry. The globe seems to respond to Mort's touch. It is a "Pearl of Reality," and the shiny stuff is the "congealed reality" that Mort has created. One day it may seed a new universe after this one explodes. Death pulls out an oblong shape badly wrapped and tied - a personal gift for Mort. It is his leather-bound book with many unfilled pages. Mort shuts it and smiles uneasily. Death says not to bother about the mathematics of an inverted hourglass; Mort has plenty of time. Not feeling himself the grandfatherly type, Death declines to attend christenings. Duty calls, so Death departs. He promises to take Mort up on the offer to substitute if he ever needs a holiday. Because he has no option, Death grins and says he prefers AU REVOIR to goodbye.

Pages 197-243 Analysis

The finale builds as Albert returns to a disappointing Unseen University, determined to summon Death and free himself from bondage. Meanwhile, in Klatch, Mort confronts gods worse than Offler and becomes increasingly Death-like. Ysabell's reaction to the



would-be concubine in the afterlife is mildly feminist, as is her earlier reaction to the suggestion that she help Mort and Albert rather than they helping her, when she has the expertise. Dramatically, the Rite of AshkEnte first seizes Mort, but Ysabell drags him back. Instantly, Death disappears from his day job and appears before the wizards of UU, still wearing his apron. The adjutant, who Albert maltreats, is conveniently slow giving him his staff, enabling Death to reclaim his butler. Keli's coronation is played for unabashed humor, with a High Priest too far gone to follow a shortened ordo or to sacrifice an elephant. The drunken, resentful pachyderm wreaks havoc before escaping, and is seen from the air as the heroes arrive in the nick time. Keli wants to die in Sto Lat as queen, but they whisk her off to Death's domain, which she haughtily critiques. Death and his apprentice fight a classic duel, with wild misses having lethal results on those whose hourglasses are nearby. In the end, Death spares Mort, who becomes his son-in-law and rules Sto Helit, helping the new Queen establish the peace that unmodified history demands.



Characters

Mort

Mort (short for Mortimer) is a scrawny, peasant boy from Ramtops on Discworld. He has red hair, freckles, and limbs that seem to contain extra joints. He is well meaning, but has no mind for agriculture. Learning to read seems to have overheated his brain, making him dangerous because he wants to understand the logic underlying the universe. On his uncle's advice, Mort's father, Lezek, takes him to a job fair where no one shows an interest. At midnight, Death rides up on a great white horse, having seen Mort playing in the fields and deciding he is to be his apprentice. Mort's father, who cannot see or understand Death properly, advises Mort to go along, perhaps marry his daughter, and inheriting his mortuary workshop. No one, including Death, can remember Mort's name, and he automatically provides it whenever they call him boy or lad. Eventually, his resentment at this affront grows to the point of fury at the end of his apprenticeship.

Mort begins work in the stables, shoveling manure and realizing that life is about the basics. Death takes him as an observer on "The Duty"—collecting souls, and warns him that while compassion is understandable, it has no place in this profession. Mort tries to prevent the assassination of a king and meets the eyes of the king's almost-beautiful daughter. Mort watches with fascination how souls dematerialize after a brief, comforting conversation with Death. He is amazed to find he can walk through solid walls. He consults a wizard about this during an afternoon off.

When Death entrusts him to solo, Mort has two clients go easily, but arrives just in time to prevent 15-year-old Princess Keli's assassination. This splits reality into two parts, and Mort begins a quest to prevent the "Dome of Reality" from wiping out Keli. Initially repulsed by Death's perpetually 16-year-old adoptive daughter, Ysabell, Mort teams up with her and the young wizard Igneous Cutwell to put things right. In one of Cutwell's books, Mort recognizes the butler Albert as the great wizard Alberto Malich and forces him to provide a spell that can slow the dome. Ysabell insists on accompanying Mort on his final Duty and brings him around with a punch to the jaw when Malich's Rite of AshkEnte draws Mort rather than Death. They fly to the palace of Sto Lat, arriving too late to use the spell so abduct a protesting Keli to Death's domain.

Accused of rebellion and disloyalty and understanding why Death would want to retire from his eternally lonely post, Mort challenges him to a duel as his equal. Ysabell is convinced that Death wants Mort to win but will not throw the fight. Victorious after a ferocious struggle, Mort fails to seize the moment, is kneed in the groin, and watches his final sand grains run out. Laughing at Mort's comment on understanding Death's sorrow at killing him, Death inverts Mort's hourglass, has a distasteful talk with the gods to arrange the coexistence of the twin realities, and allows Mort to wed Ysabell. At the reception, Death gives the newlyweds the seeds to a new universe when this one destroys itself; additionally, Death gives Mort his (Mort's) personal autobiography book



with the promise that he has many years ahead. Parting, Death prefers "au revoir" to "goodbye."

Death

A self-proclaimed "anthropomorphic personification," Death is treated as a droll caricature of the Grim Reaper, a skeleton shining white and cold to the touch, covered completely in a black robe within whose folds many objects hide. He has tiny blue lights flashing in hollow eye sockets, grins because he is incapable of forming any other expression, and has a weakness for cats, who like wizards are able to see Death, while other mortals pretend he is not there. Mysteriously, Death eats, drinks, sees, hears, and smells without appropriate organs. Death lives in another dimension in a dark, dusty house carrying a skull-and-crossbones motif. It is smaller on the outside than on the inside, where it houses a massive library documenting every life ever lived and miles of shelving hold hourglasses of current lives. Those nearing an end are transferred to his office, where on his desk lies a great leather-bound volume that he studies to keep things running smoothly. Death has created a black garden based on pictures; he lacks true creativity. Slipping between dimensions for "The Duty," Death carries a scythe and/or sword with which to free souls from the body, but personally attends only the most important persons.

Death takes young Mort as an apprentice and, having taken him along on "The Duty" as an observer, decides to take a night off. Oddly, he declares that taking the young Princess Keli is a pity. Although Mort's first solo mission does not go smoothly, Death decides to experiment with human emotions, so indulges in fishing, partying, gambling, and drinking, and finally taking a job as an amazingly-fast short order cook. In Death's absence, Mort spares Keli's life, setting up a parallel reality that threatens the fabric of history. Albert, Death's butler for 2,000 years, panics, reprises his wizardly role, and provides a spell to slow the advance of the "Dome of Reality" that is seeking to wipe out Keli. As Mort and Ysabell perform the night's Duty, Albert transports himself to Unseen University to gather wizards to summon Death.

Death arrives at UU still in his apron, angry at having his pleasant cooking job interrupted. Realizing the gravity of what has happened, he whisks Albert home and confronts Mort and Ysabell, accusing them of rebellion and disloyalty. He agrees to fight a duel with his would be rival. Ysabell is convinced that Death wants Mort to win but will not throw the fight. Being Death for eternity is wearisome. Disarmed and cornered after a ferocious struggle in which a number of hourglasses are destroyed or gravely endangered by wild swings of sword and scythe, Death strikes when Mort fails to seize the moment. He prepares to kill Mort, sorrowfully, as Mort's final sand grains run out in Mort's hourglass, but laughs at a joke, inverts Mort's hourglass, has a distasteful talk with the gods arranging the coexistence of the twin realities, and allows Mort and Ysabell to wed. At the reception, Death gives the newlyweds the seeds to a new universe when this one destroys itself. Death also gives Mort his book, with the promise that Mort has many years ahead. Parting, Death prefers "au revoir" to "goodbye."



Ysabell

A 16-year-old girl, who Death takes in and adopts after her parents are killed at Great Nef, Ysabell has remained 16 for about 35 years. Nearly a "pre-Raphaelite" in appearance - were it not for too many donuts - Ysabell has silver hair, pearly eyes, beetle brows, and a sharp temper. As Death's devoted and haughty daughter, she looks down on Mort when he arrives as an apprentice, and sees her Father's matchmaking attentions faster than the dull country boy, announcing that she would marry anyone but Mort. Ysabell selects lives of tragic young women who have committed suicide for love's sake to read from the massive library, but never reshelves them. The first warming between Ysabell and Mort comes when he takes the blame for those volumes lying around. They walk to the pond together and trade all the insults of which they can think.

When Mort inadvertently splits reality into two parts by saving Princess Keli's life, Ysabell helps him research in the spooky library, turning up Albert's true identity as a wizard. When Albert and Mort order her out of Death's chair before the massive book of "nodes," Ysabell sits in the chair she has always occupied, knitting, while her Father works. When the two males despair, Ysabell says calmly that she can read them, and insists she will not help them - they will help her. Ysabell insists on accompanying Mort on his last mission to harvest souls and, when Mort is swept up by the Rite of AshkEnte, brings him back to reality with a solid punch to the jaw.

Ysabell acts as hostess to Princess Keli and the "Royal Recognizer," Cutwell after their escape from Sto Let. When Mort challenges Death to a duel, Ysabell tells Mort that Death wants Mort to win but will not throw the fight. At a tense moment, Ysabell calls her father's name and distracts him, but Mort fails to press the advantage. Death spares Mort's life, however, and Mort marries Ysabell rather than Keli. Together they become the Duke and Duchess of Sto Helit.

Princess Keli

The third of Mort's assignments during his first solo Task, Keli is the 15-year-old daughter of the just-assassinated King Olerve of Sto Lat, whose murder Mort tries unsuccessfully to avert days earlier. Uncharacteristically, Death says that taking her at such a tender age is a pity. Princess Keli awakens, her royal sense of survival telling her that an assassin is nearby. Suddenly, her window implodes and a hooded figure enters, swings a blade, and cuts the threatening assassin down. Keli sensibly accepts her fate, but Mort wants to find a solution that keeps her alive. Keli orders her maid to have the dead assassin removed and, finding herself ignored as though dead, seeks the services of a wizard. Cutwell, the wizard, uses Caroc cards, Ching Aling, and palm reading, consults reference books, and informs her that to the world she is dead. What she feels does not matter. Keli refuses to dwindle into a ghost and drags the wizard like a reluctant puppy to the castle, naming him the "Royal Recognizer." Mort and Cutwell are both enchanted by Keli's near-beauty.



Cutwell mounts a massive propaganda campaign, pasting Keli's picture on every flat surface in Sto Lat and organizes a gala coronation celebration, which he abbreviates to get in before the "Dome of Reality" arrives and cancels the variant of history in which Keli still exists. Wearing the dress that both her mother and grandmother wore, Keli grows angry and impatient as the ceremony lags, but refuses to flee or die a commoner. By the time Mort arrives with Alberto Malich's magic spell, the dome has shrunk too small to use it. The Duke of Sto Helit plots to kill her and blame it on the elephant stampede, but is again thwarted. Cutwell lifts her, protesting, into Mort's arms for a last-second flight to Death's domain. Always the aristocrat, Keli finds the place small and dreary. In the end, Keli becomes Queen Kelirehanna I, with Cutwell the power behind the throne, and Mort and Ysabell the Duke and Duchess of Sto Helit, pledged to help bring peace to Keli's domains.

Alberto Malich AKA Albert

Stick-thin, moving with painful jerkiness, and wearing reading glasses at the end of his sharp nose, Albert has been for some 2,000 years the manservant and cook to Death. He acts like the house belongs to him, observes the forms, but is not truly subservient, smiles to himself a lot, but says little. Albert becomes Death's butler after being removed from the world while attempting the Rite of AshkEnte backwards. At that time, as Alberto Malich, he is the founding ArchChancellor of Unseen University (UU), Discworld's premier institution for training wizards. Accepting Death's job offer seems intelligent to Alberto, who otherwise has but 91 days, three hours and five minutes left to live. After Alberto's disappearance, the University erects a statue of him, which generations of drunken students gleefully deface. Its inscription, "We Shall Not See His Like Again," proves erroneous when Albert returns to get his brethren's help in forcing Death to appear.

Albert reprises the magic that he has repressed for millennia because Death has disappeared, and Albert does not know the theoretical aspects of calculating nodes well enough to keep order. Mort recognizes Albert's picture in a magic book, confronts him, and forces him to write out a potion that will slow the advance of the "Dome of Reality" that is threatening Princess Keli. Albert realizes that he must find and warn Death. His piccolo voice of submission gives way to a trumpet of authority as he thrills being back in costume. A spell returns him to the precise spot at UU from which he vanished. Disgusted at the state of the institution, Albert destroys the ugly statue, orders the eight most powerful wizards on the faculty gathered, dresses them down, orders a return to the ascetical old ways, and - unsurprisingly - get less than full cooperation in his tussle with Death. As a result, he is returned to the status quo ante.

Igneous Cutwell

A wizard in Sto Lat, Cutwell advertises as "Marster of the Intinit, Illuminartus, Wyzard to Princes, Gardian of the Sacred Portalls." The animate door knocker, a gargoyle that speaks indistinctly around the ring in its mouth, warns Mort to act impressed as he



enters an unkempt room that smells mostly of incense, but also of cabbage and used laundry. Cutwell's crystal ball is cracked; his astrolabe has parts missing; there is a scuffed octogram on the floor, and the obligatory stuffed alligator hangs on the wall. When Cutwell makes a dramatic and pompous entry, Mort finds him surprisingly young, unbearded, and plump. He assumes Mort wants a "love philter," but Mort wants to know how he is suddenly able to walk through walls. As they talk, Cutwell sips from a bottle and only when Mort makes a down payment does he take him seriously. When Mort leaves, Cutwell discovers he has drunk a whole bottle of love potion and dives into a frosty horse trough for relief.

Cutwell's next visitor is Princess Keli, incognito, asking to have her fortune read. Cutwell objects that the late king has outlawed the practice and rumor is that his haughty daughter is worse. Smiling, Keli plays along. Cutwell offers her a choice of methods: Caroc cards and Ching Aling. She tries both and Cutwell reads her lifeline. His conclusion is that in people's minds, she is dead, and what they see and hear does not matter. History is fixed and all changes have already been incorporated. If it is fated that she be dead, she should accept it. Feeling the fierce determination of her ancestors, Keli refuses to dwindle into a ghost and drags the wizard like a reluctant puppy to the castle. Cutwell is now the "Royal Recognizer," reminding people that Keli is alive. Cutwell mounts a mighty propaganda campaign and organizes Keli's coronation as the "Dome of Reality" nears. He lifts her, protesting, into Mort's arms for a last-second escape to Death's domain. When Death makes a deal with the gods to allow two realities to coexist, Cutwell becomes the power behind the throne of Queen Kelirehanna I and is the one subject who does not blindly obey her.

Binky

Death's flame-breathing horse, Binky is larger than normal and pure white; Death elects not to ride skeletal horses. He allows Mort to ride Binky on solo missions collecting souls. On his final mission, Ysabell insists on going along and, having fed Binky many sugar cubes over the years, has Binky's support. Binky staggers briefly over the weight of five as they flee Sto Lat, but recovers once airborne.

Queen Ezeriel

A lusty Klatchian monarch, who bathes in asses' milk and kills herself by sitting on a snake, Ezeriel is a distant relative of Princess Keli, who disapproves of jokes about her smelling like yogurt. Ezeriel is an obvious parody of Cleopatra.

Hamesh

Mort's paternal uncle, Hamesh is a farmer in Ramtops. He convinces his brother, Lezek, to apprentice his ungainly son in a trade, since farming does not appear to suit him.



Ammeline Hamstring

The first of Mort's solo missions, Hamstring is a bent old witch living in the snowy mountains. Her cottage shows that she expects Death. As Mort enters, she is finishing her will. Using Death's tone, Mort says he has not got all night. Hamstring admits there are things she will miss, but it is time to move on. She tells Mort that Death likes priests because they tell people things will be better in the next world, while wizards and witches cause trouble by pointing out things could be good here. When Mort slices the scythe through Hamstring, her morpnic field giggles at being once again young and sexy. As she disappears, she plants an erotic kiss on Mort's cheek and asks if he will be able to let go of this job if he gets it.

High Priest of Blind Io

The doddering cleric in Sto Lat called upon to officiate at Princess Keli's coronation, the High Priest insists on following the full order of services until he is forcefully convinced to jump straight to the sacrifice. He has become so slow that sacrificial animals wander off in boredom or drop litters, so an arthritic elephant is chosen for the occasion. The High Priest manages only to knick its trunk, causing it to rampage.

Liona Keeble

A Morporkian job broker, Keeble interviews Death about his previous position and specific skills, suggests that with no useful skills or talents, he should teach. Keeble suddenly perceives who Death is and goes pale. Death assures Keeble that it is not his time. Giggling hysterically, Keeble finds a paper and hands it to him. Death is amazed that people are paid to do this. Keeble asks that he not say who recommends him.

Lezek

Mort's father, Lezek, specializes in distilling wine from "reannual" plants. Everyone in the family is big and serious except Mort. On advise from his brother, Hamesh, Lezek takes Mort to Sheepridge on Hogswatch Eve to find a master willing to take him as an apprentice. He believes that Death, who he does not see or hear clearly, intends to teach the boy to be a mortician.

Abbott Lobsang

The aged leader of The Sacred Listeners, Lobsang expires as Mort arrives on The Duty and explains to him how, more than 50 times, his spirit has migrated from his dead body to a newly-conceived baby in a nearby village. The monks will eventually find him and make him their leader again. The nine-month periods of incubation are restful and toilet



training a terrible experience, but he mercifully remembers past lives only in the brief interval after each death. This character is possibly a parody of the Dali Lama.

Terpsic and Gwladys Mim

Residents of the island of Krull on Discworld's Rim, the Mims have been happily married for six months out of 20 years. Terpsic enjoys fishing in the Hakrull River, provided he catches nothing, far from the carping Gwladys. Death's dry fly causes fish to flee in panic. When a large pike strikes Mims' hook and drags him underwater, he enjoys thinking of Gwladys as a widow and resents being pulled up and bullied back to life. Later, shivering in bed, he wonders what it means being saved "FOR LATER."

Offler

The six-armed Crocodile God of Klatch, Offler is depicted with a flock of holy birds bringing him news from his worshipers and cleaning his teeth.

King Olerve the Bastard

The ruler of Sto Lat, Olerve is a tall, golden-bearded man, whose assassination Mort tries unsuccessfully to thwart during his first soul harvesting mission with Death. Olerve's cousin, the Duke of Sto Helit, pays for the assassin. Olerve's 15-year-old daughter, Keli, who witnesses the murder, narrowly escapes death nights later and succeeds King Olerve to the throne.

Pilgarlic

The leader of a group of thieves who try to rob Mort in Ankh-Morpork. Pilargic is amazed to see Mort vanish through a stone wall. Mort is even more surprised.

Rincewind

The Assistant Librarian of Unseen University, Rincewind tends the bananas of the Librarian, an "orangoutang," who alone knows where books are kept. Albert gives Rincewind, who becomes his unofficial attaché, half an hour to gather the eight most senior wizards and implements for performing the Rite of the AshkEnte, while he visits the Broken Drum. When Death is summoned, Rincewind procrastinates in giving Albert his staff long enough for Death to whisk Albert back to being his butler.



Lord Rodley of Quirm

The fat Morporkian lord who explains fun to Death while doing the traditional Serpent Dance, Quirm feels unfunny and unpleasantly sober after the encounter.

Sun Emperor and Grand Vizier

An unnamed boy Emperor nominally rules the Agatean Empire on Discworld, but his Grand Vizier, named "Nine Turning Mirrors," is the true power. The Vizier, who has assassinated the Sun Emperor's father and grandfather, plans to poison the boy as Mort arrives on The Duty to take a soul. The boy deftly turns the tables, forcing the Vizier to eat the deadly morsel and prevents the Vizier's reaching the antidote in time. The shades of dead emperors welcome the Vizier into the next world.

Cripple Wa

The sponsor of a famous floating crap game in Ham Alley, Ankh-Morpork, Wa has his thugs menace Death has a run of luck throwing dice. Death freezes them in mid-stab, hands Wa the dice, and orders him to throw. If he wins, Wa will stop suggesting that chance governs the affairs of men, and if he loses, he will wish he had won. Wa throws three eights and faints.



Objects/Places

Ankh-Morpork

The biggest city on Discworld, Ankh-Morpork is a dual city, separated by the shallow, ominous River Ankh. Ankh-Morpork is always busy, zestful, and pungent with temples of all faiths, overflowing shops, lightly-clad, friendly girls, and performers. Surrounded by endless cabbage fields, Ankh-Morpork is located 20 miles further from the Hub than its dull rival, Sto Lat. It has been ruled for ten years by the Patrician, who believes in one vote, one rule - both exclusively his. Various parts of the city are seen in detail. In the squalid inner city, "The Shades," Mort escapes murder by three thugs by backing through a stone wall, thereby discovering a surprising new power. When Death decides to take a holiday and study human behavior, he crashes the Patrician's drunken party, drops in on and disrupts Cripple Wa's famous floating crap game in Ham Alley, drinks until the wee hours at the Mended Drum tavern on Filigree St., and takes a job as short order cook at Harga's House of Ribs by the docks. From there, he is summoned by the magic Rite of AshkEnte to Unseen University, also located in the city, apparently in a less seedy part.

Bes Pelargic

A city in the Agatean Empire on the Counterweight Continent, Bes Pelargic is Mort and Ysabell's destination on The Duty. The Grand Vizier, Nine Turning Mirrors, who has dispatched the boy king's father and grandfather, is about to poison him. After a quick back-and-forth with a morsel of puff eel guts, the Vizier eats it; he is not allowed to run for the antidote and dies. His shade resents not being met by the "Black Celestial Dragon of Fire," but a number of emperors' souls gather, eager to welcome him to the lands of the dead.

Discworld

A flat world that rides on the back of four giant elephants, who in turn stand on the shell of an enormous star turtle, Great A'Tuin. Discworld (often shortened to Disc) is a medieval place, where little kingdoms war, intermarry, and ally. Magical forces cause light and darkness to spread slowly over Disc's surface. Those who wander over the edge are lost.

Dome of Reality

Referred to by many descriptive names, most graphically a dead jellyfish, the "Dome of Reality" is a crackling interface between the predestined history of Discworld, whereby Princess Keli is assassinated and her uncle, the Duke of Sto Helit consolidates power and ushers in an era of peace, and an anti-history created when Mort interferes and



saves her life. The dome is slowly eating up the space affected by Keli's survival and is destined ultimately to eliminate all trace of her. Mort hopes that a powerful, old-fashioned magic spell by Alberto Malich can slow the progression, but in the end has to spirit Keli away to Death's domain. Death has to smooth things over with the gods.

Klatch

Klatch is a remote desert land in Discworld, where the diphthong-rich language is so ancient and sophisticated that it had 15 words for "assassination" before other people have learned to bash in one another's brains with rocks. Klatchians, who prize hospitality above all virtues, worship Offler, a six-legged crocodile god. Mort happens upon a family of unhappy Klatchean émigrés in Ankh-Morpork. He later hears about Queen Ezeriel of Klatch, who dies after sitting on a snake after reigning well for 30 years. Mort and Ysabell fly to Tsort, part of Klatch, renowned for pyramids mortared with the blood of slaves. A procession led by Offler's giant effigy is underway. Mort and Ysabell explore the dark chamber, which will not be sealed until dawn, and Mort realizes that the myth of the effigies of horrid gods coming alive to protect against body snatchers is true. Outside the pyramid, Mort is by mistake seized by the Rite of the AshkEnte.

Krull

An island on Discworld's Rim, Krull is peopled by descendants of those smart enough not to fall over the Edge. Death goes fly-fishing on Krull and rescues a fellow angler, who the panicky fish drag into the Hakrull River.

Lifetimers

The squat hourglasses that line Death's office and endless runs of shelving in back, Lifetimers are assigned one per person living in Discworld. When the sand runs out, Death (or his emissary) goes to claim the soul. Death arbitrarily extends Mort's life by inverting his lifetimer as the last grain runs through.

Listeners

An ancient religious sect living around Cori Celesti, "home of the gods." Listeners live at the end of a funnel-shaped valley that concentrates every sound made on the Disc. Not all the gods recognize the Listeners as a proper religion. The Listeners are trying to work out what the Creator said to create the universe—they do this by listening to the echoes that must be rebounding somewhere. At all times, three monks sit in the central chamber. Exceptional talent is required to become a novice, much less a Holy Listener. People accept arduous treks to make pilgrimage to the hidden valley. Mort is dispatched to the deathbed of the 88th abbot, who has already (over 50 times) been reincarnated at



death into a new embryo that grows into a young boy, who the Listeners inevitably seek out to lead them.

Octarine

The eighth color of the spectrum, octarine is the color of magic and pigment of imagination.

Ramtops

A great mountain range on Discworld said to have peculiar, violent weather because the locals practice the old magic. Ramtops is home to the boy Mort, who Death takes as an apprentice. The hilly country is one of the few places still producing "reannual" plants, whose seeds are sown a year after the harvest.

The Rite of the AshkEnte

A magical ritual that summons and binds Death, the Rite of AshkEnte requires a simple incantation, three bits of wood, and 4cc of mouse blood, but wizards elaborate with candles, incense, circles on the floor, and cauldrons. The eight wizards at Unseen University stand at the points of a great ceremonial octagon, swaying and chanting and touching fingers. They first summon the Death-like Mort out on The Duty, but send him back and seize Death from Harga's House of Ribs, where he is working as a short order cook. Death sniffs and realizes his foolishness: the apprentice has betrayed him and endangered the universe. Then Death takes Albert back to Death's dimension.

Scrumble

A potent drink made of rotten apples and other hotly-debated ingredients, scrumble tastes mostly like a rotting log. It is the drink of choice in the "The Queen's Hed" inn between Sto Lat and Sto Helit. Mort stops there for a bit of human contact after discovering the sizzling, moving mist of the "Dome of Reality" closing in on Princess Keli. To the patrons' amazement, he drinks a third of a pint of Scrumble before seeing the mist and dropping his cup. The spilled liquid eats into flagstones and dissolves metal coins.

Sheepridge

A small town that holds a hiring fair to which Lezek takes his youngest son, Mort, to find a master willing to apprentice him. Sheepridge is four sides to a cobblestone square, lined with shops serving the farming community. Strolling players come once a year to present plays about kings killing one another.



Sto Helit

A royal city built on the Sto plain, Sto Helit is a rival of Sto Lat. Sto Helit's unnamed Duke hires assassins to kill his brother, King Olerve the Bastard and niece, Princess Keli. Through Mort's intervention, Keli survives, but history continues as though she is dead. The Duke of Sto Helit consolidates the kingdoms of the plain and brings peace and prosperity. As a "Dome of Reality" closes in on Keli to rectify the situation, the Duke attends her coronation. His plan to murder her is foiled, and the hourglass of his life is accidentally broken when Death and Mort duel in Death's Long Room. The vacant ducal office is bestowed upon Mort.

Sto Lat

A walled royal city built in the Sto plain around a huge rock left behind when glaciers retreat into the Ramtops. Sto Lat is a deadly boring place to live, particularly by contrast with Ankh-Morpork, 20 miles further away from the hub. Sto Lat was founded five generations back by nomadic cutthroats, whose leader tires of riding and finds the local population easily eliminated. His terse observation later evolves into a three-hour epic poem. A killer on the payroll of his brother, the Duke of Sto Helit, assassinates Sto Lat's King Olerve the Bastard. Mort is sent to collect the soul of Olerve's daughter, the teenage Princess Keli, heiress to the throne. Mort's interference leaves her a non-person in her own palace and city. A "Dome of Reality" relentlessly closes in on her, restoring history to its proper track. Death has to talk with the gods in order to rectify the situation and allow Keli to reign as Queen Kelirehanna I. "Sto Lat" in Polish means "One Hundred Years" and is the title of a song sung at weddings, christenings, birthdays, and other joyous events. Its use as a place name is probably not accidental.

Unseen University

Unseen University (UU) is the premier school of wizardry on Discworld. It is located in the city of Ankh-Morpork, apparently at some distance from its more dangerous and pungent areas. The current faculty consists of lazy old men, a far cry from the standards set at its founding by the great Alberto Malich. Malich disappeared 2,000 years earlier, when a spell goes wrong. Colleagues erect a statue in his memory with the inscription, "We Shall Not See His Like Again." This proves unprophetic when Death's odd behavior forces Albert, his butler, to reprise the Malich role, return, and enlist his brethren's help in summoning Death. Disgusted at the state of the institution, Albert destroys the ugly statue and orders ancient ascetical practices resumed. He disappears again, however, after losing a tussle with Death in the middle of a flaming octagon. The wizards decide to lock away the replacement statue they will commission. The first thing students learn at UU (after the location of lavatories) is that what is in people's minds is more important than what they see and hear.



Themes

Death

Death personified explains to Mort that he merely cleans up after people die in whatever manner. Fate, not Death, decides, for instance, who drowns. Death personified attends only special deaths and unless one understands "point incarnation" and "node focusing," explanation is meaningless. When one dies, the physical body sloughs off as a ghostly shape and the victim's "morphogenetic field" emerges. Death comforts it and, after it weakens and shrinks into a tiny pinpoint of light, tucks it tenderly away inside his robe. Death warns Mort against interfering with Fate, with which the gods alone may tinker, and assures Mort that folks get what they think is coming- paradise or suffering - and emphasizes that there is no justice.

Needing time off, Death sends Mort on solo "Duty." During his travels, Mort meets a bent old witch, whose morphic field is young and sexy before dissipating into nature; he also meets an abbot who has been reincarnated 50 times and is dropped off at his next conception, and a Grand Vizier, who is gathered in by the vengeful souls of the emperors he has murdered. Albert explains that with 91 days, three hours, and five minutes left to live, he accepts Death's offer to be his butler and lives over 2,000 years. Mort remarks that he has merely stretched things out; an eternity in Death's domain is worse than dying. As Death's holiday lengthens, Albert worries that if the "nodes" are not properly worked out, anything can happen, as they stop death (not Death) from coming earlier or later than the end of life. As Mort takes on characteristics of Death (voice, demeanor, and eye color), Albert sees that death can be worse: seasoned with human vengeance and cruelty. Ysabell, too shivers, reminds Mort that he is not Death, but he replies in Death's voice, "DEATH IS WHOEVER DOES DEATH'S JOB." She has to agree.

History

When Mort impetuously disregards Death's strict warning and prevents Princess Keli's assassination, he upsets history, creating not the thrashing of a loosened steel hawser, but the slow unraveling of an old sweater. History changes the people who think they are changing it. Mort's misplaced stroke cuts history into two realities. In Sto Lat, Keli rules, but elsewhere she is dead; the Duke is king, and the established plan goes forward. Both realities are true. A "historical event horizon" separates them and is approaching slowly, shimmering and sizzling, bringing "real reality" back to Sto Lat. The wizard Igneous Cutwell theorizes that when the dome arrives, the last week in which Keli lives, while dead, will cease to exist. The assassin will have done his job and history will be healed. It is predestined. History is fixed, start to finish; facts are beside the point, and all changes have already been incorporated. If it is fated that she be dead, she should accept it. Feeling the fierce determination of her ancestors, Keli



refuses and drags the wizard to the castle to remind people that she is alive and to prepare for her proper coronation.

History is perfectly preserved in The Stack, which is deep beneath Death's domain. All biographies over 500 years old are stored there. Far down, books give way to clay tablets and skins, and everyone is named Ug and Zog. With no more material to write, the books are silent. In Death's Library, by contrast, the "stritching" sound of the books writing themselves is proof that the universe is running smoothly. That the universe considers Keli dead shows up in many annoying ways: everyone in the castle prepares for mourning. Keli feels like a solid, irritated ghost. Her coronation is interrupted, and the Duke declares that history will record that a rogue elephant tragically crushes her. He will declare a week of mourning, and the witnesses will not disagree. With the interface halfway down the hall, Mort whisks Keli away to Death's domain. Death is angry about ripples in Reality that will require centuries to heal. In the end, Death negotiates with the gods to permit the parallel realities to coexist and work the differences out.

Magic

Magic pervades Mort. A magical field makes light travel slowly on Discworld. Unseen University (UU) in Ankh-Morpork is a preeminent institution for training wizards. Fortune telling is banned in Sto Lat, but a wizard manages to make a living selling love potions. Mort first supposes his sudden ability to walk through solid walls is magic, but Death assures him it is anything but (without explaining). He consults a local wizard, Igneous Cutwell, who breaks the stereotypes, being young, unbearded, plump, and attentive only when bribed. His room has the usual accouterments: crystal ball (cracked), astrolabe (parts missing), octogram outlined on the floor (scuffed), and the obligatory stuffed alligator hanging on the wall. Octarine, the eighth color of the spectrum, is the color of magic and pigment of imagination. When Keli visits Cutwell, she also remarks on his age and appearance. He is loath to tell her fortunes because the late king outlawed the practice. Convinced to tell the present, they use Caroc cards, Ching Aling, and a palm reading; all point to Keli being dead.

Mort returns and notices that the writing in one of Cutwell's books slithers, preventing non-magicians from reading it. Mort recognizes the author's picture: Alberto Malich—the Mage is Death's butler, Albert. Cutwell knows that his magic cannot stop reality's interface - even conjuring up fireworks costs him his eyebrows - but Mort forces obtains from Malich a spell that can pronounce. Knowing that Death must be informed, Albert pulls an old robe and staff, sews a passable pointed hat, and, feeling dressed for the first time in millennia, marks an octogram, steps inside, and vanishes. He reappears in UU, where eight wizards assist in the Rite of the AshkEnte. It requires a simple incantation, three bits of wood, and 4cc of mouse blood, but wizards elaborate with candles, incense, circles on the floor, and cauldrons. Mort, who has become Death-like performing Death's job, appears first but is sent back. Death pops up, realizes his apprentice has betrayed him and endangered the universe, and drags Albert back with him. Cutwell cannot safely use the spell in a constricted reality. Binky whisks them all away to Death's domain for a reckoning as the interface continues shrinking.



Style

Point of View

An impersonal, but thoroughly bemused and opinionated, narrator tells the story of Mort in the third person omniscient with frequent extended runs of lively first person dialogue interspersed. The narrator seems to be aware that the twentieth-century earthbound reader has much to learn about flat, magical Discworld and Death's domain, a separate dimension between which Death and select minions can travel instantaneously.

The narrator makes frequent use of asides to the reader in order to provide useful bits of history, metaphysics, religion, magic, politics, and economy. 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 (e.g., skateboards, arctic vehicles, super novae). Paragraphs of narration free of similes, metaphors, or other figures of speech are rare. Most of the characters share the narrator's sharp sense of humor. Even Princess Keli, whose situation is so dire, and thus is not much given to frivolity, allows herself to play along when the wizard talks about the strict new ruler.

Setting

Mort by Terry Pratchett takes place in two locales, Discworld and Death's domain. The two occupy different dimensions; Death and select minions, including Mort, can negotiate between the two instantaneously. Constant reference is made to a world beyond inhabited by the gods and the souls of the departed, but no glimpse of it is given.

Discworld is a flat world that rides in space on the back of four giant elephants, who stand on the shell of an enormous star turtle, Great A'Tuin. Magical forces cause light and darkness to spread slowly over its surface. Nighttime comes when the small golden sun that orbits Discworld hides on its underside. Discworld consists of various continents and oceans. In regions along the Rim, those who are incautious can fall off and be lost forever. Natural selection has guaranteed that the cautious predominate. Life everywhere on Disc is medieval, with transportation by animals and warfare fought with crossbows, swords, and lances. Saltpeter is mentioned in connection with fireworks, but there is no indication that the civilization has "advanced" to gunpowder. Thanks to Death and/or Mort's "Duty" attending souls as they die, diverse ways of life are observed around Disc including palaces, a witch's hut, a monastic community, a burial pyramid, several pubs and eating establishments, dangerous inner-city streets, and private homes.

Death's domain is described as consistently black, cold, and dusty, and the feeling of house and grounds seems more Victorian than medieval. Death has no creativity, but does his best to imitate things he sees in books. A skull-and-bones motif is carried



through the interior consistently. While the house looks small from outside (a princess with critical eye declares it so), inside it is massive, accommodating a dusty library of biographies on everyone who has lived or will live - the earliest written on stones and hides. Additionally, there are hourglasses for all those currently alive. The climax occurs in the Long Room, where missed swings of sword and scythe result in the deaths and near-deaths of those whose glasses are accidentally hit. The diversity of victims helps pull the novel together.

Language and Meaning

In *Mort*, British author Terry Pratchett lampoons stereotypes of the Grim Reaper and long-bearded, serious wizards long ago in days of old. The narrator is a bemused omniscient observer, who frequently pauses to address the reader with particularly useful or interesting details. Few narrative paragraphs lack a colorful simile or two, 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 has yet to discover gunpowder. Occasionally, Pratchett uses footnotes and footnotes-within-footnotes to drive home a particularly significant illustration.

There are a plethora of neologisms, which are generally understood with ease (e.g., "morphogenetic"). Pratchett has a penchant for large words, not all of which are strictly apt (e.g., describing Death's bony fingers as "calcareous"). Puns abound. Some vocabulary and slang are purely British (e.g., "poser" for dilemma), and this is more notable in dialog than in narration. Pratchett situates the reader in each new locale by describing the sights, sounds, and most particularly the smells. He goes into great detail describing why and how light behaves oddly on flat, magical Discworld, how the weather behaves oddly in certain mountains where magic is strong, and how Reality seeks to reassert itself through the creeping doom that closes in on Keli after she is rescued from death. Death's world - another dimension - is consistently black, cold, and dusty. From the outside, the house is small, but is massive inside, accommodating a library of biographies on everyone who has lived or will live and hourglasses for all those currently alive.

Pratchett several times makes the point that young wizards must exist and delights in showing young Cutwell an incompetent slob trying to make a buck. Allowing the custom that wizards be celibate, Pratchett enjoys some fun with sexual themes, but does so most discretely. The various souls that Death and/or Mort harvest allow for comic and bittersweet examinations of various religious and philosophical attitudes towards an afterlife. There are gods of every variety, and Death shows no favorites. He merely delivers souls to whatever they believe they have coming; the gods administer justice as they wish. Describing Keli's coronation just ahead of approaching disaster, Pratchett pulls out the stops and writes slapstick: a proud, but doddering, High Priest hurried through the prayers and unable to sacrifice a drunken elephant. The most consistent element throughout the novel is Mort insisting that his name is Mort.



Structure

There are no chapter breaks in the novel *Mort*. The several story lines blend into one another, generally smoothly, with major transitions being specified by added space after the concluding paragraph. Asides, mock-pedantic lectures, and florid descriptions of backgrounds pepper the novel. In one case, it serves author Terry Pratchett's purpose to call attention to a particularly clever segue, allowing him to comment on the film industry calling a senior technician "Best Boy."

The story first introduces Death watching a boy running in a field, and then shifts to that field and that boy's father and uncle discussing his unpromising future. Mort (in the Romance languages, the root signifying "dead") is taken in as an apprentice by Death, given menial tasks, meets Death's aged butler and adopted unappealing daughter, and is taken along to witness "The Duty." Death claims two souls easily, but Mort is instantly love-struck by the daughter of the third victim and tries, unsuccessfully, to intervene. Death says compassion is natural but warns it is out of place in this line of work and dangerous to the fabric of history.

The major threads now diverge. Mort thinks about the orphaned Princess Keli but is pushed together with Ysabell. He has an afternoon off before being sent out to solo, while Death takes a night off. Again, two appointments go well and the third one is botched, when the victim turns out to be Keli. Mort wants to confess to Death immediately, but lacks the courage, and Death decides to extend his leave to experience the supposed pleasures of human life: fishing, partying, gambling, and drinking. When he finishes these, he is ready for a new job and becomes a short order cook. Mort takes on Death's characteristics chillingly, while Death is inept at being human.

Desperate to save Keli as the dome of reality steadily closes in on her, Mort discovers that the butler is a famed magician of old, Alberto Malich, from whom he learns a magic spell that might slow things. Mort and Ysabell, still at odds, team up on three Duty assignments, while Albert returns to his university, cleans house, and performs the rite that summons Death. Mort, who has taken on Death's attributes and declared his apprenticeship complete, is drawn in first, but is rejected; Death is then snatched from his cozy kitchen, peeved, and takes Albert home.

There the threads converge, for Mort has abducted Keli and her wizard and brought them to Death domain. Back in charge, Death is furious at being betrayed. Mort challenges him as an equal. Unexpectedly, Mort gets the upper hand, but refuses to strike a mortal blow. Death kicks him in the groin to disable him and is ready to finish him off when a comment makes him laugh. When time runs out on Mort's hourglass of life, Death inverts it to give him more time. Mort and Ysabell marry, unexpectedly, and Death shows up briefly at the reception, also attended by Keli and her wizard.



Quotes

"If Father says it's all right,' he said.

They look at Lezek, who was scratching his beard.

'How do you feel about this, Mort?' he said, with the brittle brightness of a fever victim.

'It's not everyone's idea of an occupation. It's not what I had in mind, I admit. But they do say that undertaking is an honored profession. It's your choice.'

'Undertaking?' said Mort. Death nodded, and raised his fingers to his lips in a conspiratorial gesture.

'It's interesting,' said Mort slowly. 'I think I'd like to try it.'

'Where did you say your business was?' said Lezek. 'Is it far?'

'NO FURTHER THAN THE THICKNESS OF A SHADOW, said Death. WHERE THE FIRST PRIMAL CELL WAS, THERE WAS I ALSO. WHERE MAN IS, THERE AM I. WHEN THE LAST LIFE CRAWLS UNDER FREEZING STARS, THERE WILL I BE.'

'Ah, said Lezek, 'you get about a bit, then.' He looked puzzled, like a man struggling to remember something important, and then obviously gave up.

Death patted him on the shoulder in a friendly fashion and turned to Mort.

'HAVE YOU ANY POSSESSIONS, BOY?'" pg. 13.

"AH. THE STABLES.' Death paused, his hand on the spine of the book. 'AND WHY DO YOU THINK I DIRECTED YOU TO THE STABLES? THINK CAREFULLY, NOW.'

Mort hesitated. He had been thinking carefully, in between counting wheelbarrows. He'd wondered if it had been to coordinate his hand and eye, or teach him the habit of obedience, or bring home to him the importance on the human scale, of small tasks, or make him realize that even great men must start at the bottom. None of these explanations seemed exactly right.

'I think...' he began.

'YES?'

'Well, I think it was because you were up to your knees in horseshit, to tell you the truth.'

'ABSOLUTELY CORRECT,' snapped Death. 'CLARITY OF THOUGHT REALISTIC APPROACH. VERY IMPORTANT IN A JOB LIKE OURS.'" pgs. 30-31.

"Ah,' said the stallholder. He leaned forward conspiratorially. 'Looking for a good time, are you? I could fix you up.'

'I'd quite enjoy knowing where I am,' Mort conceded.

The man was taken aback.

'This is Ankh-Mopork,' he said. 'Anyone ought to be able to see that. Smell it, too.'

Mort sniffed. There was a certain something about the air in the city. You got the feeling that it was air that had seen life. You couldn't help noting with every breath that thousands of other people were very close to you and nearly all of them had armpits.

The stallholder regarded Mort critically, noting the pale face, well-cut clothes and strange presence, a sort of coiled spring effect.

'Look, I'll be frank,' he said. 'I could point you in the direction of a great brothel.'



'I've already had lunch,' said Mort, vaguely. 'But you can tell me if we're anywhere near, I think it's called Sto Lat?'" pgs. 48-49.

"There were few ocean-going ships on the Disc. No captain liked to venture out of sight of a coastline. It was a sorry fact that ships which looked from a distance as though they were going over the edge of the world weren't in fact disappearing over the horizon, they were in fact dropping over the edge of the world.

Every generation or so a few enthusiastic explorers doubted this and set out to prove it wrong. Strangely enough, none of them had ever come back to announce the result of their researches.

The following analogy would, therefore, have been meaningless to Mort.

He felt as if he'd been shipwrecked on the Titanic but in the nick of time had been rescued. By the Lusitania.

He felt as though he'd thrown a snowball on the spur of the moment and watched the ensuing avalanche engulf three ski resorts.

He felt history unraveling all around him.

He felt he needed someone to talk to, quickly." pgs. 82-83.

"This was the moment. Mort had thought about it for a long time. There was no sense in concealing it. He'd upset the whole future course of history. Such things tend to draw themselves to people's attention. Best to get it off his chest. Own up like a man. Take his medicine. Cards on table. Beating about bush, none of. Mercy, throw himself on. The piercing blue eyes glittered at him.

He looked back like a nocturnal rabbit trying to outstare the headlights of a sixteen-wheeled artic whose driver is a twelve-hour caffeine freak outrunning the tachometers of hell.

He failed." pg. 102.

"Mort sniffed his drink, and then took a sip. It tasted something like apples, something like autumn mornings, and quite a lot like the bottom of a logpile. Not wishing to appear disrespectful, however, he took a swig.

The crowd watched him, counting under its breath.

Mort felt something was being demanded of him.

'Nice,' he said, 'very refreshing.' He took another sip. 'Bit of an acquired taste,' he added, 'but well worth the effort, I'm sure.'

There were one or two mutters of discontent from the back of the crowd.

'He's been watering the scramble, that's what 'tis.'

'Nay, thou knows what happens if you lets a drop of water touch scramble.'

The landlord tried to ignore this. 'You like it?' he said to Mort, in pretty much the same tone of voice people used when they said to St. George, 'You killed a what?'

'It's quite tangy,' said Mort. 'And sort of nutty.'

'Excuse me,' said the landlord, and gently took the mug out of Mort's hand. He sniffed at it, then wiped his eyes.

'Uuunnyag,' he said. 'It's the right stuff all right.'" pgs. 117-118.



"Somewhere around the middle of the dance was fat Lord Rodley of Quirm, heir to the fabulous Quirm estates, whose current preoccupation was with the thin fingers gripping his waist. Under its bath of alcohol his brain kept trying to attract his attention.

'I say,' he called over his shoulder, as they oscillated for the tenth hilarious time through the enormous kitchen, 'not so tight, please.'

'I AM MOST TERRIBLY SORT.'

'No offense, old chap. Do I know you?' said Lord Rodley, kicking vigorously on the back beat.

'I THINK IT UNLIKELY. TELL ME, PLEASE, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS ACTIVITY?'

'What?' shouted Lord Rodley, above the sound of someone kicking in the door of a glass cabinet amid shrieks of merriment.

'WHAT IS THIS THING THAT WE DO?' Said the voice, with glacial patience.

'Haven't you been to a party before? Mind the glass, by the way.'

'I AM AFRAID I DO NOT GET OUT AS MUCH AS I WOULD LIKE TO. PLEASE EXPLAIN THIS. DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH SEX?'

'Not unless we pull up sharp, old boy, if you know what I mean?' said his lordship, and nudged his unseen fellow guest with his elbow." pg. 138.

"'I'm sure I don't know what's come over the master lately,' mumbled Albert. 'Out of the chair, my girl. Let's have a look at those nodes.'

They opened the ledger.

The looked at it for a long time.

Then Mort said, 'What do all those symbols mean?'

'Sodomy non sapiens,' said Albert under his breath.

'What does that mean?'

'Means I'm buggered if I know.'

'That was wizard talk, wasn't it?' said Mort.

'You shut up about wizard talk. I don't know anything about wizard talk. You apply your brain to this here.'

Mort looked down again at the tracery of lines. It was as if a spider had spun a web on the page, stopping at every junction to make notes. Mort stared until his eyes hurt, waiting for some spark of inspiration. None volunteered.

'Any luck?'

'It's all Klatchian to me,' said Mort. 'I don't even know whether it should be read upside down or sideways.'

'Spiraling from the center outwards,' sniffed Ysabell from her seat in the corner.

Their heads collided as they both peered at the center of the page. They stared at her. She shrugged." pgs. 170-171.

"'You don't frighten me, boy— '

'LOOK INTO MY FACE AND TELL ME THAT.'

Mort snapped his fingers imperiously. Ysabell bent her head over the book again.

Albert looked into the blue glow of those eyes and the last of his defiance drained away,



she read, 'for he saw not just Death but Death with all the human seasonings of vengeance and cruelty and distaste, and with a terrible certainty he knew that this was the last chance and Mort would send him back into Time and hunt him down and take him and deliver him bodily into the dark Dungeon Dimensions where creatures of horror would dot dot dot dot dot,' she finished. 'It's just dots for half a page.' 'That's because the book daren't even mention them,' whispered Albert. He tried to shut his eyes but the pictures in the darkness behind his eyelids were so vivid that he opened them again. Even Mort was better than that." pgs. 187-188.

"Mort shook his head.

'I HAVE NO CHOICE. THERE ARE NO CHOICES.'

She ran forward and grabbed his arm as he turned towards the waiting Binky. He removed her hand gently.

'I HAVE FINISHED MY APPRENTICESHIP.'

'It's all in your own mind!' yelled Ysabell. 'You're whatever you think you are.'

She stopped and looked down. The sand around Mort's feet was beginning to whip up in little spurts and twirling dust devils.

There was a crackle in the air, and a greasy feel. Mort looked uneasy.

'SOMEONE IS PERFORMING THE RITE OF ASH—'

It his like a hammer, a force from out of the sky that blew the sand into a crater. There was a low buzzing and the smell of hot tin." pg. 208.

"'I certainly don't need your help, my lad! I've been sacrificing man and boy - and, mm, women and animals - for seventy years, and when I can't use the, mm, knife you can put me to bed with a shovel!'

And he brought the blade down in a wild sweep which, by sheer luck, gave the elephant a mild flesh wound on the trunk.

The creature awoke from its pleasant reflective stupor and squealed. The acolyte turned in horror to look at two tiny bloodshot eyes squinting down the length of an enraged trunk, and cleared the altar in one standing jump.

The elephant was enraged. Vague confusing recollections flooded its aching head, of fires and shouts and men with nets and cages and spears and too many years hauling heavy tree trunks. It brought its trunk down across the altar stone and somewhat to its own surprise smashed it in two, levered the two parts into the air with its tusks, tried unsuccessfully to uproot a stone pillar and then, feeling the sudden need for a breath of fresh air, started to charge arthritically down the length of the hall." pg. 220.

"Mort saw the dark reaper advance on him again, blade swinging back for the final stroke. He stood over the boy.

'YOU DON'T KNOW HOW SORRY THIS MAKES ME,' he said.

Mort pulled himself on to his elbows.

'I might,' he said.

Death gave him a surprised look for several seconds, and then started to laugh. The sound bounced eerily around the room, ringing off the shelves as Death, still laughing



like an earthquake in a graveyard, held Mort's own glass in front of its owner's eyes. Mort tried to focus. He saw the last grain of sand skid down the glossy surface, teeter on the edge and then drop, tumbling in slow motion, towards the bottom. Candlelight flickered off its tiny silica facets as it spun gently downward. It landed soundlessly, throwing up a tiny crater.

The light in Death's eyes flared until it filled Mort's vision and the sound of his laughter rattled the universe.

And then Death turned the hourglass over." pgs. 237-238.

Topics for Discussion

What is the role of cats in this novel?

How do alligators figure in the novel?

Which allusion to earthly history or literature do you find most aptly developed?

Are the gods mocked in this novel? Does Pratchett show particular animosity towards or preference for any form of religion?

How are light and color used in this novel?

Does Death profit from his time off? Does he understand humanity better afterwards?

How is sexuality handled in this novel?