

Reaper Man Study Guide

Reaper Man by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

In *Reaper Man*, Death develops a personality and begins a mortal life as farmhand Bill Door, starting a backlash of unnatural events including an undead wizard, poltergeist activity, and animated objects. Worst of all, a dangerous hive mall is hatched from "city eggs." Ultimately, the mall is fought and destroyed. Through forging friendships in the mortal realm, Bill Door determines to fight Death, and he defeats the new Death and again takes on the role.

As the novel begins, Death, the grim reaper, is fired for having developed a personality. In exchange for his loyal service, Death is given a small measure of mortal lifetime and allowed to keep his horse Binky. Meanwhile, Windle Poons, a 130-year-old wizard, dies and returns as a zombie when Death does not reap his soul. His former wizard colleagues make several attempts to banish or destroy Windle. Frustrated, the wizards of the Unseen University, with Windle's full cooperation, bury the undead wizard at a crossroads. Alone in his coffin, Windle finds an ad for "The Fresh Start Club," a support group for undead. Hopeful, Windle digs his way out.

Death travels to Discworld to live as "Bill Door", working as a farmhand for an old woman named Miss Renata Flitworth. Meanwhile, with Death off the job, a build-up of life-force causes the city of Ankh-Morpork to experience strange poltergeist activity, as objects take on a life of their own. The various guilds of Ankh-Morpork are collectively unable to explain the strange spiritual activity.

The wizards attempt to conjure Death, but instead only see a gray robed figure who apologizes for the recent inconveniences. Elsewhere, Windle Poons arrives at The Fresh Start Club, finding sympathy in their ranks. Bill Door, meanwhile, proves an adept farmhand and quickly makes friends. Miss Flitworth realizes that Bill is Death. Bill Door explains that he was Death, but is no longer and will soon die himself. Hearing that Bill's replacement is likely to be terrible, Miss Flitworth encourages Bill to fight for his life. Bill resolves to fight Death when it comes for him.

Among the odd events, strange snowglobes have been appearing and, thanks to a street peddler named Throat, soon circulate across the city. Windle visits Mrs. Cake, a spiritual medium, where he learns that the snowglobes are "city eggs." The wizards of the Unseen University soon find themselves inundated with what the "city eggs" hatch into: animated trolleys. They follow the trolleys back to a large pyramid made of sticky orange marble, a newborn hive mall. Meanwhile, Bill Door faces the new incarnation of Death, managing to dispatch the entity with the help of Miss Flitworth. In doing so, Bill Door again becomes Death. Later, Windle and the Fresh Start Club rescue the wizards from the depths of the hive mall, disabling the hive queen in the process.

Everyone escapes the hive mall. The wizards annihilate the construct with a series of devastating spells. Death, at long last, reaps the soul of Windle Poons. Afterward, he comes for the life of Miss Flitworth, first showing her a night on the town and

momentarily reuniting her with the ghost of her long lost love. Death allows a small piece of himself, the Death-Of-Rats, to exist independently of his persona.



Pages 1-35

Pages 1-35 Summary

In *Reaper Man*, Death develops a personality and begins a mortal life as farmhand Bill Door, starting a backlash of unnatural events including an undead wizard, poltergeist activity, and animated objects. Worst of all, a dangerous hive mall is hatched from "city eggs." Ultimately, the mall is fought and destroyed. Through forging friendships in the mortal realm, Bill Door determines to fight Death, and he defeats the new Death and again takes on the role.

As the novel begins, the narrator tells of the annual Morris dance, which celebrates life and renewal and alludes to a second, secret dance of equal importance whose time has not yet come. Several indistinct gray figures, the Auditors of Reality, discuss the fact that Discworld's incarnation of Death has developed a personality. They find this unacceptable. One auditor mistakenly refers to himself as "I" and is immolated in flame for exhibiting a personality. The supreme god Azrael oversees the meeting, overcome with cosmic boredom. An auditor appears before Death and explains to the grim reaper that he is, effectively immediately, retired. Death is confused, but accepts that there is no appeal. He notes that he now possesses his own lifetimer, a device which measures the remaining days of his existence. Death is, himself, scheduled to die. Death explains the situation to his loyal human assistant, Albert, and departs on his horse Binky (whom the auditors have allowed him to keep), to spend the remaining time of his life on Discworld.

The narrator compares two experiences of life. First, he considers the life of mayflies, who live one day, never eating. Then, he considers counting pines, a tree which lives thousands of years and cannot experience units of time of less than a day. Seasons come and go in a moment. Both species possess stories for explaining life, death and the afterlife.

Windle Poons, a 130-year-old wizard who is more than a bit senile, is worried that his colleagues have forgotten that today is the day he is destined to die. He is relieved, however, when his fellow wizards surprise him with a going away party. Windle enjoys himself thoroughly, paying no mind to his diet since his eating will be without consequence. Though it is customary for Death to appear in person for a wizard's passing, the reaper's table remains mysteriously unoccupied.

As the Bursar attends to Windle, Archchancellor Ridcully gives a speech on the old wizard's behalf. Time wears on. Windle enjoys himself, but the Bursar begins to wonder what's keeping Death. Windle offers his own rambling, addled speech. Afterward, conversation flags. Everyone is impatient to have the matter settled. As Windle's departure time approaches, the wizards bid him farewell. The moment comes and goes, but Windle, much to everyone's annoyance, is still alive. Windle, seemingly oblivious, professes an interest in having a meat pie, then suddenly dies. Death, in defiance of wizardly custom, never shows.



The spirit of Windle Poons waits to be collected by Death, but Death does not appear. Frustrated and disappointed, the spirit of Windle Poons returns to its body, taking control through sheer force of will, consciously rallying his body's various systems. He wakes in a chapel, his mind clear of dementia and his body possessed of undead super-strength. Windle crashes through the door of the dining room, interrupting an assortment of dining wizards. The wizards are surprised and alarmed to see Windle up and around. Windle and the Bursar discuss Windle's apparent undeath. The Archchancellor is shocked to learn that Death never came to collect Windle's soul, necessitating Windle's undeath. Windle demands to know what the wizards intend to do about the situation. The wizards are dumbfounded. Windle, though becoming increasingly adept at piloting his own corpse, feels cheated. This is not the afterlife he was expecting.

Pages 1-35 Analysis

Already Pratchett establishes theme of Life and Death. The Morris dance represents life. Though it is not yet explicitly stated, the implication is that the "other" dance represents death. Since this "other" dance hasn't a name and is performed in secret, the implication is that death is considered both unknowable and unpleasant. Dancing the Morris dance, however, obligates one to dance the "other" dance as well. Everything which lives must eventually die.

Next, Pratchett introduces the theme of Man versus Machine. The "machine" in this case, represented by the Auditors of Reality, is bureaucratic. Reality governs not only such things as life and death, but also matters of individual personality. An auditor is punished for his transgression, indicating that even reality's overseers are subject to the laws they represent. Though Death is loyal, dedicated and efficient, he is also an individual, or "man." The system's only manner of engaging individualism is to purge it.

Pratchett compares the mayfly to the counting pines to show that one's life is not best measured in time but in experiences. Both species live and die and have a lifetime worth of experiences between. The mayflies life is no less valuable than the counting pine, even though it lives for a significantly shorter period of time. Windle Poons, however, is someone who has lived a long life for a human, but has spent most of his life as a cloistered academic. His life has been long in years, but arguably short in quality.

Windle's going away party is lukewarm at best. There is a general sense that this is a compulsory gathering. The other wizards are here as colleagues, not as friends. No one is particularly interested in Windle or in what he has to say. No one is sad to see Windle go. Instead, they watch the time and wait for the proceedings to end (i.e., for Windle to die.) Windle's life seems to have made little impact on the Unseen University. This notion is further reinforced when Windle returns from the dead. No one is particularly glad to see him back.



Pages 36-70

Pages 36-70 Summary

The wizards discuss the matter of Windle's undeath. They would prefer that Windle were dead. The narrator digresses for a moment to foreshadow: Somewhere in a cellar, a dark cupboard is filling with mysterious objects. Meanwhile, an embittered Windle Poons smashes a hole in the university wall and walks the streets of Ankh-Morpork. The wizards of the Unseen University reason that, since the city isn't in turmoil, Windle returning to life must be an isolated incident. Death, clearly, is still happening. Elsewhere, Windle Poons arrives at the Brass Bridge, where the lazy and unwitting Sergeant Colon, fearful to argue with a wizard, helps Windle up on to the bridge's parapet. Windle jumps into the murky water of the Ankh River only to emerge several minutes later, completely soaked. Frustrated at his failed suicide attempt, Windle Poons departs.

Sergeant Colon is approached by a local hoodlum known as Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler, or Throat for short. Throat reports that several mysterious objects have suddenly appeared in the cellar where he normally keeps his merchandise. Later, in the cellar, the sergeant examines the objects in question. They are snowglobes. Sergeant Colon decrees that the ownership of the merchandise defaults to Throat. He then immediately purchases one for himself.

Windle, contemplating other ways to kill himself, wanders into the Shades, an old, dangerous neighborhood of Ankh-Morpork. It doesn't take him long to run afoul of the Shades' unsavory denizens. Windle Poons uses his undead visage, together with a bit of acting, to scare off a group of would be muggers, suffering an irrelevant knife wound in the process. Walking among the Shades, Windle, who had always lead a sheltered life, is amazed by the wonders he sees. His undead senses are alive with the sensations of the living. Unfortunately Windle frightens all who see him. No one will have anything to do with him. Disappointed, Windle decides that he might as well return to the university.

Back at the Unseen University, Windle is again ambushed, this time by his wizardly colleagues. The wizards, calling him "fiend" and "creature of the night", grab his limbs. Ridcully shoves a clove of garlic into Windle's face. Windle correctly identifies the substance, but isn't the slightest bit affected by it. Windle thanks the wizards for their effort, but then—with no effort at all—shoves past them. Windle goes to his old bedroom and lies on his bed.

The wizards aren't done with Windle Poons. They rush into Windle's room, grab his limbs and proceed to present a series of holy artifacts. As with the garlic, Windle identifies each of them in turn. None of the supposedly holy items have any effect on the undead Windle Poons. The Archchancellor scolds Windle for his lack of cooperation, then he and the other wizards depart in defeat. Alone in his room, Windle watches as



several screws unscrew themselves from their sockets and begin flying around the room under their own power. He finds it odd, but figures it's someone else's problem.

The wizards decide that Windle needs to be buried at a crossroads. They borrow a shovel from the gardener and carry Windle Poons out to the street. Soon the wizards have excavated the middle of an intersection, creating havoc among the citizenry by stopping traffic in all directions. Sergeant Colon, seeking to get to the bottom of the disturbance, speaks to the wizards. Archchancellor Ridcully explains that they intend to bury their colleague. Perplexed, and unwilling to interfere in the affairs of wizards, the sergeant stands down. After a short ritual, Windle Poons is buried.

Alone in his coffin and quite bored, Windle strikes a match. To his surprise, there is an advertisement inside the coffin for "The Fresh Start Club," a support group for dead people. Encouraged, Windle begins to dig his way out of the grave.

Pages 36-70 Analysis

When it comes to the fact of his undeath, Windle is no more pleased than his colleagues. He is angry, feeling as though he has been cheated out of his promised afterlife. Clearly, Windle had hopes of going on to something better than the life he's known for the last 130 years. Windle, it would appear, sees little chance for fulfillment in the world of the living. This suggests, perhaps, that his long life on Discworld was something less than satisfying. At this point, Windle has had his fill of life.

Seeing the Shades for the first time, Windle is momentarily filled with a sense of hope and possibility. It soon becomes apparent, however, that his new undead form is ill suited to appreciating the many pleasures that life has to offer. Though he is still in the world, Windle is not of the world. Indeed, it would seem that his life has passed him by. It's too late to be the man he might have been. The world will reject him.

The wizards' treatment of Windle is dehumanizing. They scarcely regard him as a sentient being, let alone a friend or former colleague. Every "solution" they devise is something enacted upon Windle rather than undertaken with his consent or cooperation. What's more, the wizards seem to be solely focused on destroying or banishing what they see as an undead abomination. There is, as of yet, no real human consideration in the way they address the "problem" of Windle Poons.

The wizards' ultimate solution to the Windle Poons problem is simply to bury him. This represents a tested solution applied outside of its appropriate context. Normally one would indeed bury the dead, but Windle clearly isn't "dead." Rather than address special circumstances, the wizards instead fall back on the same set of rote responses that has thus far proven fruitless. Here again is the Man versus Machine theme. The machine, in this case, is culture. Ankh-Morpork society offers no accommodation for the undead.



Pages 71-104

Pages 71-104 Summary

Death, now on Discworld, answers a "help wanted" posting at a farmhouse. The resident, an old woman named Miss Renata Flitworth, is surprised that someone answered the ad, just as she's surprised that this mysterious man owns an expensive thoroughbred. Flustered and socially awkward, Death gives his name as "Bill Door." In exchange for Bill's services, Miss Flitworth offers sixpence a week and a barn to sleep in. Bill Door agrees, assuring the old woman that he does indeed know his way around a scythe.

The snowglobes prove very popular. Throat quickly runs through his stock. Meanwhile, the wizards of the Unseen University, who have just sat down to a meal, begin to notice objects moving, even exploding, of their own accord. Suddenly, large black bolts fall from the ceiling. The massive chandelier above them unscrews itself from the ceiling. The wizards barely escape being crushed by the unfixed fixture as it crashes to the ground.

A squad of the Patrician's palace guard arrives at the Unseen University. The captain of the guard explains to Archchancellor Ridcully that the sudden poltergeist activity is not limited to the university. He reports that the Patrician has barricaded himself in his room. The captain requests that wizards come with him. The narrator explains that, in the absence of death, "life" is building up in the world, imbuing even inanimate objects with a kind of life. He also points out that the innocuous-seeming snowglobes are still in play.

The narrator describes the complex, sometimes adversarial, relationship between the Unseen University and the Patrician, Ankh-Morpork's mayoral dictator. Presently, the wizards make their way down city streets, witnessing all manner of spectacles as once-inanimate objects take on a life of their own. One of the wizards, the Senior Wrangler, uses a magical device to measure the ambient magical energy. It detects nothing amiss. Whatever the problem is, the wizards reason, it must not be magical in nature. Elsewhere, the medium Evadne Cake also runs afoul of the poltergeist activity when most of her ceiling caves in on her. Though unhurt, Cake is quickly attended to by her beautiful, presently-in-werewolf-form daughter Ludmilla. Cake cryptically complains to Ludmilla that they "all shouted at once."

Windle finally digs himself out of his grave, unearthing himself in the garden of the Unseen University. Modo, the gardener, is scarcely surprised to see Windle returned from the dead. Windle stops to ask Modo for directions, and then departs. Modo returns to his weeding, his thoughts turning to his compost heaps. He marvels at how something so full of dead things, like compost, can yield such life.

The wizards finally arrive at the Patrician's palace to find that an assortment of priests, representing the various gods of Discworld, already present. The two factions hurl



imprecations at one another while Archchancellor Ridcully and the Chief Priest (who are apparently brothers) struggle to maintain civility between the two of them. The two leaders exchange information, but neither man has any idea what's going on. Efforts to quell factional squabbling are unsuccessful. The Patrician himself soon appears, asking to speak to the Archchancellor and Chief Priest in the oblong office.

A meeting of Ankh-Morpork guild leaders convenes. To the patrician's dismay, no one understands what is going on. Meanwhile, Mrs. Cake, trying to get to the bottom of things, contacts her spirit-friend One-Man-Bucket. It seems that the astral plane is suddenly very crowded, and One-Man-Bucket is none too pleased about it. Mrs. Cake breaks a vase so that One-Man-Bucket can weaponize its spirit for the astral-brawl in which he finds himself. Unable to take the constant clamor of spirits, Mrs. Cake shuts down the connection. Considering her tumultuous history with the priests (mediumship being frowned upon), Mrs. Cake reasons that she should go to the wizards for help.

Pages 71-104 Analysis

Pratchett begins an important contrast here. Death, forced into retirement, must abandon his post as Discworld's death persona. As a result, lifeforce builds up in the world and chaos ensues. Clearly, the Auditors of Reality, in seeking to enforce the letter of the non-personality law, fired death without adequate consideration for what his loss would mean to the world. Meanwhile, on behalf of Miss Flitworth, Death (in the form of Bill Door) continually applies the same impeccable work ethic to a farm that he once applied to all of Discworld. In this way, the metaphor of death-as-reaper is made literal.

The mortal world is thrown into turmoil. As mortals, their first instinct is to look to one another for solutions. They cannot guess that their problems originate from beyond the realm of human interaction. Instead, they begin with the assumption that problem is empirically knowable. This is a responsible approach, since factors beyond the world cannot be measured, but it fails to locate the problem. To understand the problem, mortals must look beyond the mortal world.

Wizards and priests both have their areas of study, but neither is directly applicable in this case; the problem is neither magical nor divine. Both factions, however, are insular, determined to understand the world only in the context of their own understanding. Rather than expand their consideration to include alternative explanations, they instead focus on the perceived failure of the opposing faction. This approach focuses solely on blame and shame, with no possibility of yielding positive results.

Mrs. Cake destroys a vase so that the object's spirit will be available to One-Man-Bucket in the astral plane. One-Man-Bucket then uses the spirit-vase as a weapon against his fellow spirits. This establishes the idea that objects have a kind of soul, and that such soul-objects are tangible to spirits and ghosts. Later in the story, Bob Door hires the smithy to destroy his scythe in the hopes of having access to it once he dies and becomes a ghost. It is Bob's hope to use the spirit-scythe against the new incarnation of Death.



Pages 105-140

Pages 105-140 Summary

Bill Door, formerly known as Death, lies in the darkness of a hayloft, anxiously eyeing the vanishing sand in his lifetimer. He wonders what it will be like to experience sleep. Suddenly, it seems as if six hours have vanished in a moment. While he had been waiting to experience sleep, Bill reasons, something had stolen six hours of his lifetime. Bill Door joins Miss Flitworth for a porridge breakfast. Afterward, Bill Door demonstrates his scything technique. Miss Flitworth is amused to see that, while Bill cuts very quickly, he nevertheless cuts one grass blade at a time. Bill quickly proves himself a fast, efficient and conscientious farmhand.

Bill Door acquaints himself with the people of the town, joining them in various games of chance and skill. At first Bill's preternatural skill and accuracy is off-putting, but Bill soon wins several friends by intentionally throwing games. The worse he plays, the more that people like him, soon calling him "Good Old Bill." During a particular tense moment, however, a small child looks at Bill and notes that he is a "skellington with clothes on." Bill otherwise gets along well enough, though he has trouble grasping common idioms and turns of phrase, and continually worries about the sand vanishing from his lifetimer.

Back at the Unseen University, the wizards discuss how to address the problem at hand, bandying around a number of ridiculous ideas. They finally decide to undertake a spell to summon Death himself. Mrs. Cake shows up at the university, but Ridcully gives her the brush off, thus enraging Cake. Later, in the study, the wizards undertake the ritual to conjure Death. The effort is not entirely successful. Instead of Death, an empty gray robe appears. The robe reports that Death has retired, apologizing for the recent lapse in standards and promising that, after a short transitional period, a new candidate will ascend to the role of Death. With the gray robe gone, the wizards finally put the pieces together, realizing at last that Discworld's problems are caused by Death's absence.

The narrator explains that belief creates things. The persona of Death was created from people's understanding of death. One created, Death evolved with life. Now, in the absence of one overriding Death, numerous smaller deaths have arisen to reap the souls of other creatures. Humanity's death is taking longer to evolve.

Windle Poons arrives at the meeting of the "Fresh Start Club." He is greeted by fellow zombie, Reg Shoe, who goes on to explicate the troubles and complaints brewing in Windle's still heart. Reg introduces Windle to the rest of the club, including vampire Arthur Winkings and his wife Doreen, Schleppele, a bogeyman who prefers to stay hidden, and the bashful banshee Ixolite, who'd rather pass notes than wail as most Banshees. Reg Shoe also presents Lupine, who is not undead at all, but a sort of reverse werewolf. Ixolite gives Windle a note, thus forecasting his impending death.



Reg, filled with righteous indignation, speaks as to the injustices visited upon the dead. The living can say what they like about the dead. The living can take property from the dead. Reg feels that most dead people are apathetic, unwilling to stand up for their rights.

Later, Lupine and Windle make their way home together. They discuss the ins and outs of the club, Lupine providing further information about the members. The two are nearly accosted by a mugger, but Lupine's wolf senses provide advance warning. Lupine preempts the assault and scares the fellow off. Lupine explains to Windle that he is not a man who becomes a wolf, but a wolf who becomes a man. When the full moon passes, he will return to his wolf form. The two bid one another good night and part ways.

Windle has resolved to move out of his university quarters, and for this, he decides, he will need money. Windle returns to his room at the university and pries up a loose floorboard. He pulls out a bag of coins, money he'd been saving for his old age. He also finds two snowglobes and a mysteriously broken sphere beside a bent metal wheel. Windle has no recollection of having such souvenirs.

Pages 105-140 Analysis

Although Death has become Bill Door, his ethics are unchanged. He cuts grass with the same discipline that he once reaped souls. Bill Door is defined by his work ethic. He finishes tasks quickly, efficiently and without complaint. When the rooster does not crow properly, Bill Door, without prompting, takes it upon himself to correct this problem. Bill does not merely "help out" around the farm. He assumes full responsibility for its operation. Bill can accept nothing less.

Though as old as life itself, Bill Door is still very much a child. He know very little of human interaction. He doesn't understand common idioms or expressions, let alone the full range of human emotions. He relates to humans much like a sociopath might, modulating his behavior to incite favorable responses. The one human emotion that Bill Door unequivocally masters is mortal fear. Bill Door learns to fear the very thing he once embodied: death.

The wizards' communion with "Death" is reminiscent of a computerized error message. Instead of the expected result, the wizards instead find themselves speaking to an Auditor of Reality, effectively looking behind the curtain of existence to see the grinding cogs of the multiverse. This underscores the severity of the problem. Discworld's cosmological machinery has failed. In attempting to solve the perceived problem of Death's personality, the Auditors of Reality have created an objectively far worse problem. The Auditors have broken the world.

This section explicitly presents the undead as a neglected underclass. Reg Shoe, in particular, uses the language of a civil rights leader, speaking out against the injustices suffered by his people. There is, however, something of the ridiculous about Reg Shoe.



He has expanded his crusade to include not only the undead, but the dead as well. Reg Shoe is not only an advocate for undeath, but a denier of death itself. In light of the novel's theme and the lesson of Morris dance, Reg Shoe's position is indefensible. There is a very real sense that, eventually, even Reg Shoe will come to an end.

In this section, Windle and Lupine have time to bond, even overcoming an obstacle in the form of an ill-advised mugger. Lupine opens up to Windle, hinting as to the inner conflict he endures as a manwolf. This glimpse of pain gives Windle insight into Lupine's needs, prompting him to play matchmaker between Lupine and Ludmilla. This demonstrates that Windle, perhaps more so than when he was alive, is a human being. He feels empathy for Lupine and wishes him well.



Pages 141-170

Pages 141-170 Summary

Windle Poons soon discovers that Schleppel has followed him home. Though he cannot see the creature, he soon discovers that Schleppel is hiding behind the door. When Windle looks behind the door, the bogeyman quickly moves, sight unseen, to the space beneath the bed. With Windle's permission, Schleppel returns to his position behind the door. Observing several more screws leaving their fixtures, Windle asks Schleppel if he knows what's going on. Schleppel explains that the problem is due to a buildup of life force.

Miss Flitworth knocks on the barn door to invite Bill indoors for the evening. The narrator describes Miss Flitworth as worried and pleading, but Bill finds himself unable to read the old woman's expression. Bill is soon having tea in a parlor overflowing with ornaments and knick-knacks, bringing to his mind thoughts of a king's tomb. Miss Flitworth is a bit taken aback when Bill is able to accurately describe her father, but then assumes that Bill must have been a smuggler as her father was.

Miss Flitworth tells Bill of Rufus, her long lost fiancé, who vanished the day before they were to be wed. Bill, sensing the subtext of Miss Flitworth's concern, suggests that Rufus probably died in the mountains (rather than having simply abandoned her.) Bill Door asks for permission to stop Miss Flitworth's clock, complaining that the noise is bothersome. Renata is confused, but consents. They then sit in silence for two hours, after which Bill returns to the barn to sleep.

Bill sees a gray robed figure floating in the darkness of the barn. It holds what remains of Bill's lifetimer. The glass is shattered, the sands freed. It tells him that there has been a mistake. Bill is relieved. As he dons his reaper's attire, Bill ponders how it is that people can live knowing that death awaits them. How do they not despair? Bill, as Death, mounts Binky, feeling only a hint of regret. Suddenly - without realizing how he got there - Death finds himself in his study, a backlog of lifetimers on his desk.

Miss Flitworth stirs from her sleep, awoken by a sound. She lights a candle and goes out to the barn to investigate. Bill Door is groggy and confused. Renata explains that she heard someone call out her name. Later, over porridge, Bill questions Miss Flitworth about the nature of dreams, hoping that dreams foretell the future. She asks Bill what's bothering him. Bill admits that he is afraid of death, adding after some prompting that he holds no belief in an afterlife.

Bill is disturbed to discover that Miss Flitworth is cooking up poisoned food for the rats. He is further horrified when his employer asks him to kill and pluck a chicken. Bill can't understand why one would want to kill something that one has fed and cared for. He does as he is told, however, and later helps spread the rat poison, all the while feeling



like a murderer. In the wake of so many rat deaths, something is born beneath the barn, something uniquely rat-like, and something with purpose.

Later, after amusing townsfolk with his intentionally abysmal skills of archery, a little girl accuses him of being a walking skeleton. Bill explains that, unlike other skeletons which come from inside something else, he is a living skeleton. He is amused by the child's chattering until a parent finally comes to collect her. That night, in the barn, Bill is visited by the Death-Of-Rats, a small piece of his former self incarnated for the reaping of rat souls. They part on amiable terms.

Miss Flitworth jostles Bill from sleep. The inn is on fire, the little girl is trapped within. Bill is hesitant to get involved. The fire is not theirs, he reasons, and it's best not to tinker with the fate of an individual. Hearing his reluctance, Miss Flitworth slaps him. Bill Door comes to his senses, and resolves to do something.

Intent on researching the "life force" problem, Windle Poons discovers that he is banned from the library on account of being dead. Schleppel, who is still following Windle about, suggests that Mrs. Cake might provide assistance. Moments later, Windle crosses the University garden with Schleppel, who is now hiding behind a large disconnected door, pushing along behind. Windle notes that the gardener is using a curious wire basket instead of a wheelbarrow. Lupine, now in wolf form, joins the group.

Pages 141-170 Analysis

Miss Flitworth is clearly lonely. Her many possessions, and two chests of gold, do little to fill the void left by Rufus's absence. It is telling that she hasn't opened the parlor since her father's death - she hasn't had any friends to sit with. Bill Door is astute in comparing the parlor to a tomb. Miss Flitworth has sealed herself off from much of the world, going through the motions of her life. Neighbors may think well of her, but none seem to be so familiar as to be on a first name basis with her.

Though mortal, Bill Door is not human. He's traded his cowl for overalls, but he remains a walking skeleton. This places him, much like many of the characters in *Reaper Man*, between two worlds, belonging to neither. Bill, however, possesses knowledge beyond that of mere mortals. He knows when people are going to die. He even knows when he himself is going to die. Much like *Discworld* itself, Bill Door was broken by the Auditors. He is a mortal forced to carry a weight that no mortal should have to bear.

Bill's dream reveals that he is tortured by hope. He wants to be spared his fate, to be allowed to return to his former existence. Strangely, however, there is a strong implication here that Bill, in the midst of this dream, cries out for Miss Flitworth. This suggests that Bill sees his only path to salvation paved with loneliness. Bill Door may indeed have a friend, but Death cannot. Bill doesn't want to lose Miss Flitworth.

As Death, Bill was innocent. Death does not participate in life. Death merely reaps the awaiting souls of those who have died. Now, as a mortal, Bill Door is an active participant in the process. Life feeds on life. For one creature to live, another must die.

One must eat, therefore one must kill. This is an important lesson in Bill Door's rapid ascent into maturity.



Pages 171-210

Pages 171-210 Summary

The brandy casks within the burning inn cause it to explode. Bill Door emerges from the flames carrying the little girl, who is unscathed but unconscious. Everyone is amazed. Bill Door makes several demands. Everyone must leave. Someone must fetch the apothecary. There must be no magic. No one must remove anything from the girl. Bill explains to Miss Flitworth that the girl is living on borrowed time.

Later, Miss Flitworth finds Bill sharpening a scythe and, putting her hand on his arm, suddenly realizes that it is actually bone. She sees Bill for who he is: Death. Bill explains that the small timer that the girl grasps is lifetime that he has lent the girl. Bill confesses that he is destined to die and is afraid to do so. He intends to fight back, and so he must sharpen his scythe. He warns that the new Death will be terrible indeed. Miss Flitworth encourages Bill to fight for his life.

Bill sharpens his blade on a series of successively finer textures: silk, cobweb, and finally the first rays of dawn. Bill is finally satisfied with the results. A gray form briefly appears. Miss Flitworth sees it too. Bill explains that it was one of the Auditors, which Renata takes to mean "revenoo," tax people. Bill announces that something will happen soon, likely that very night. He also reveals that living on "borrowed time" is a fairly common occurrence. Renata suggests that, in the meanwhile, Bill should take the harvest in.

Windle and company visit Mrs. Cake. Lupine, though presently in wolf form, is immediately smitten by Ludmilla. Windle convinces Mrs. Cake to shut off her 10-second precognition to avoid the confusion of having her answer questions before they are asked. Hearing the reason for their visit, Mrs. Cake complains that she tried to enlist the aid of the university, but was given the brush off. She explains that there is an imbalance in life force between the present world and the astral. Life force is building up like electricity before a storm. Windle Poons notes Mrs. Cake has a snowglobe. An idea comes to him.

Back at the Unseen University, the gardener Modo makes two interesting discoveries: a second wire basket has appeared, and one of his compost heaps has begun to move. Meanwhile, inside, the wizards are interrupted from their discussion of "how to fight the ghosts" by a blood curdling scream. Ridcully springs into action and promptly stumbles over a wire basket. He curses bitterly. Somehow his swear words come alive as small flying creatures.

Outside, the wizards encounter a living compost heap, from which they rescue the gardener Modo. They flee the corrosive heap. It gives chase through the university. Finally, Archchancellor Ridcully, reasoning that the heap is largely carbon, thinks to throw a bottle of Wow-Wow sauce into it. The heap explodes. The wizards are quite



pleased with themselves. Modo reminds them that there are other heaps outside. The wizards, now overflowing with testosterone, begin psyching themselves up for battle.

Bill Door, with the help from a few Miss Flitworth's tenants, reaps corn with his scythe. He now realizes that each cornstalk, like each person, is unique. Bill asks one of the townsfolk the name of the blacksmith, reporting that he has some work for him. He is given the name Ned Simnel. Later, Bill introduces himself to the blacksmith. The smith, delighted to have an audience, shows off his invention, which calls the combination harvester, going into painful detail regarding its operation. Bill Door is vehemently opposed to Ned's suggestion that Miss Flitworth should invest in the device.

Pages 171-210 Analysis

Bill briefly adheres to the principles of his former persona. He's reluctant to interfere in the life of an individual. Bill Door, however, is a participant. If he can take life, he can also give life. In deciding to act, Bill's personhood becomes strong enough that his deathly disguise begins to fade. Miss Flitworth is not afraid of Death personified. She knows Bill Door and she trusts the person that she knows him to be. Bill Door is her friend, even if he is also Death.

The sharpening of the scythe symbolizes Bill Door's preparation for his confrontation with the new Death. His entire plan hinges on his ability to prepare and position his weapon. Plot-wise, the scythe serves as Bill's most significant setback. After the story builds up the importance of the weapon, Ned Simnel fails to hold up his end of the bargain. The scythe is therefore unavailable during Bill's confrontation with the new Death. All of his careful preparation is for naught.

Despite having spoken to one of the Auditors of Reality, the wizards of the Unseen University continue to address the symptoms of the problem without demonstrating that they understand the overarching issue. Instead of reaching out to Mrs. Cake for astral assistance, they instead talk of "fighting the ghosts," suggesting that their ability to engage problems is limited to destructive methods. This will prove increasingly true as the story continues.

Ned Simnel would have the combination harvester replace Bill Door in much the same way that the Auditors of Reality would see Death replaced by a new incarnation. The combination harvester is, much like the new Death, a mere embodiment of purpose, a mere machine. In this section, Bill Door learns the workings of the combination harvester. Machines being predictable things, Bill Door is later able to apply what he learns from Ned Simnel to overcome the harvester.



Pages 211-245

Pages 211-245 Summary

Bill Door hires Ned Simnel to destroy his scythe, insisting that the job must be done before nightfall. Once Bill Door is out of sight, Ned attempts to hit the scythe with his spanner, only to have his tool cut in two before it even impacts the blade.

Elsewhere, Mrs. Cake prepares a séance and is soon in contact with One-Man-Bucket. One-Man-Bucket is reluctant to share what he knows, but is willing to answer a series of yes-no questions. Windle quickly determines, with One-Man-Bucket's help, that the snowglobes are actually eggs which hatch into something bearing wheels. One-Man-Bucket suggests that they are, in fact, "city eggs."

Archchancellor Ridcully, arming himself with a staff, notes the appearance of yet another wire-basket trolley, but doesn't think much of it. Now ready for battle, the wizards are disappointed to discover that the other compost heaps still inactive. The wizards begin discussing the sudden appearance of trolleys and how they seem to be showing up in the strangest places, when suddenly they encounter a trolley seemingly moving under its own power. After a short struggle, the trolley escapes with the Bursar fallen into its basket.

Meanwhile, One-Man-Bucket explains that eggs hatch into a "mobile stage," which in turn create one or more cities. Seeing that he has exhausted One-Man-Bucket's knowledge, Windle Poons decides to continue his investigation elsewhere. He asks Mrs. Cake if Ludmilla might join him. Mr. Cake is skeptical, fearing for her daughter's health and safety, but Ludmilla argues that Lupine, who seems a very obedient "dog," will protect her. Mrs. Cake agrees. Lupine is quite pleased.

Windle Poons uses his superhuman zombie strength to break into the library of the Unseen University. The librarian, who happens to be a muscle-bound 300-pound orangutan, is unable to stop or even slow the inexorable progress of one Windle Poons. The quadrupedal presence of Lupine frightens the ape into standing down. They all spy a wired trolley full of books. Windle Poons realizes that these trolleys must be the mobile stage that One-Man-Bucket warned them about. When the trolley tries to make a break for it, Lupine is injured. The librarian, enraged by the attempted book theft, rips the trolley's wheels off.

The wizards pursue the Bursar-laden trolley, the Dean finally felling it with an ill-advised fireball. Archchancellor Ridcully, incensed by the Dean's carelessness, lets out a string of swears that spawn more of the strange, flying "curse word" creatures. Ridcully's colleagues suggest that he lay off the swears, offering several unsatisfying alternatives. The wizards soon discover a great many people also chasing trolleys, each one laden with different cargo.



Meanwhile, amid numerous jeers from the townsfolk, Ned wheels his combination harvester out for its maiden run. Everyone is amazed at how quickly it reaps corn. Not one to ignore a challenge, Bill Door takes up his scythe and races to best the machine's productivity. Sometime later, an exhausted Bill is carried back to Miss Flitworth's farmhouse. For the first time in his life, Bill feels both sick and exhausted, but proudly announces that the harvest is finished. Renata warns that a storm is coming.

Bill and Miss Flitworth discuss his plan. The girl rests soundly, but the lifetimer is fading quickly. Renata is unsure that Ned will go through with destroying the scythe, but Bill contends that only Ned has a hot enough furnace. There's no other choice but to trust him. Bill and Renata briefly discuss the ethics of Bill's plan only to be interrupted by the sound of thunder. Renata, worried that the harvest might be ruined, races outside. Bill, unwilling to see his hard work be for naught, joins her.

The wizards are confounded by the sheer volume of trolleys, which now number in the hundreds. The Dean glories in using his magic to destroy trolleys, but they continue unabated, coming on in ever increasing numbers.

Pages 211-245 Analysis

Because Bill Door is possessed of a strong work ethic, he is inclined to believe that others are as well. Ned Simnel, however, being the creator of the combination harvester (itself a parallel to the new Death) is cut from the same cloth as the Auditors of Reality. He chooses to interpret his contract with Bill in such a way as to compromise the very service that he agreed to perform. In the same way, the Auditors of Reality chose to enforce the laws of reality in such a way as to compromise reality itself, thus undermining the purpose of the very laws they enforce.

Convergence has begun. Windle Poons has uncovered the secret of the snowglobes and has some inkling of what they might represent. The wizards are no closer to understanding in the issue, but are presently swept up by events. The contrast between Windle and his former colleagues is stark. Windle is inquisitive, curious and thoughtful. The wizards of the Unseen University are bumbling at best and dangerously destructive at worst. Windle suspects that undeath has done wonders for his mental facilities.

Bill Door is defeated by the combination harvester. Although this is the first time in Bill's existence that he has known pain or defeat, he is not overly discouraged. Defeat or no, Bill takes pride in the fact that the harvest was completed. When the harvest is threatened by a coming storm, Bill shakes off his exhaustion, ignoring his dwindling lifetime, to assist Miss Flitworth in saving the crops.

Although Bill Door knows his life is drawing to a close, he does not succumb to fear. Instead, true to his blue collar nature, he throws himself into his work. In doing this, Bill demonstrates how all people engage the fact of their own mortality: They fill their lives with meaningful pursuits. Bill Door distracts himself from the eventuality of his death by focusing on things that matter to him most.



Pages 246-277

Pages 246-277 Summary

At the university library, Windle continues to research the "lives of cities," but with little result. He ponders what it means for a city to be "alive" and reasons that, if it is alive, then there must exist predators which prey upon cities. By his logic, such a predator would grow within the city itself and then break out to absorb the city's essence. He finally decides it would be more of a parasite. With this in mind, Windle departs.

The wizards run for their lives just ahead of a silver tidal wave of trolleys. Soon finding themselves surrounded, they ready their spells for a final stand. It's no use. No matter how many trolleys they obliterate, there are still more trolleys. Finally, their spells expended, and with the trolleys closing in, the wizards try desperately to think of an idea.

Meanwhile, Miss Flitworth and Bill Door scramble to collect their harvest in the midst of a hailstorm. Bill is briefly gripped by terror when he mistakes the tarp-covered combination harvester for the new incarnation of Death. Seeing the machine, Bill steals the tarp to cover the remaining harvest.

Miss Flitworth and Bill Door finally see it: the new incarnation of Death. He sits on a skeletal horse atop a nearby hill. Bill is disgusted by the new Death's blatant posing, seeing no use for such drama. He begins to lose heart, thinking himself foolish for wanting to live forever. Renata encourages him. Bill regrets not having prepared more, but Renata reminds him that he had the harvest to worry about.

Miss Flitworth and Bill Door retreat to the town to be nearer his scythe. Bill explains that he is safe until the last of his time runs out. He predicts that his drama-loving successor will wait until midnight. Miss Flitworth is about to share her first name with Bill, only to discover that Bill already knows it: Renata. Bill explains that her name is engraved on her lifetimer; Bill knows everyone's name as well as when they're going to die. Renata thinks it unfair that the information isn't common knowledge, but Bill Door explains that if people knew when they were going to die, they would probably never even live.

Miss Flitworth and Bill Door wait together in the town square. Miss Flitworth thanks Bill Door for his help and apologizes for delaying him with the harvest. Bill insists that the harvest is important. The clock strikes midnight. Renata asks Bill if he has any last words. Bill replies "I don't want to go." Death appears astride a horse. Renata stands between Death and the little girl. Bill Door flanks Death, demanding that he drop his scythe.

Meanwhile, shopping carts are piling up into a type of pyramid. A type of spore erupts from the top of the pyramid, showering leaflets over the gathering crowd of curious Ankh-Morpork citizens. Windle Poons, Ludmilla and Lupine investigate the leaflets.



They all bear the same "organic" writing seen on the underside of the snowglobes. They announce "sales" and "reduced prices." Tuneless, music begins playing from somewhere inside the pyramid. The mass of people, seemingly hypnotized, begins moving in the direction of the music. Elsewhere, Schleppel, Count Arthur and Reg Shoe also hear the music.

Windle and company arrive at the base of the pyramid, where they find a large crowd of people just standing around waiting. Windle spies a wizard's hat on the ground. They are soon joined by the vampires Arthur and Doreen. Introductions are made all around. Everyone agrees that the music is very annoying. Arthur demonstrates that he can transform into a bat. Together they discuss the possibility of entering the pyramid.

Ludmilla notes that the pyramid, beneath the pile of trolleys, seems to be made of warm, orange marble. Windle observes that there are no cracks or seams. Everything seems to be made from one solid piece of slightly sticky orange marble. Windle wonders how, if it is alive, it could be made of rectangles. Isn't life generally rounder than this?

The group enters the pyramid. They find the inside pleasant, spacious and decorated with healthy-seeming plants. They descend a moving stairwell. Ludmilla notes that several alcoves, each fronted with glass, have the look of shops. Suddenly, the group is attacked by soldier trolleys. These baskets are larger than the earlier breeds, and are golden in color. Windle Poons rips the wheels of one, but more are on the way. Spotting Reg Shoe in the distance, Windle calls for assistance. Ludmilla wonders aloud if these "ants" have a queen.

Pages 246-277 Analysis

Rather than rushing off as the wizards do, Windle takes time to consider the problem. He wants to understand what he's up against in the hopes that such understanding will yield insight into how to solve the problem. This approach is analogous to how Bill Door defeats the combination harvester. In knowing how the harvester works, Bill is able to foul the mechanism of its operation.

In Reaper Man, the "harvest" represents duty, both to oneself and to one's fellow man. Since the combination harvester is a machine, it cannot take responsibility for its own work. A machine can't have a work ethic and can't be held accountable. Ned Simnel, the harvester's creator, says "corn is corn," indicating that he does not appreciate the care that Bill Door brings to his work. Bill Door steals the tarp from the combination harvester because, to Bill, the harvest is of paramount importance. The harvester is just an object.

Bill Door initially mistakes the combination harvester for the new incarnation of Death. This is intentional on the part of the author. The new Death, much like the harvester, is little more than purpose made manifest. New Death will say to Bill Door "the reaper does not listen to the harvest." This echoes Ned Simnel's earlier sentiment of "corn is

corn." The new Death does not respect the duty entrusted to him. He behaves as a machine.

Using what he has learned of new Death, Bill Door accurately predicts the moment of its arrival. Such predictability, again, speaks of mechanistic thinking on the part of new Death. Meanwhile, the rest of the characters converge at the mall hive. The hive has been growing systematically throughout the story, passing through comprehensible, predictable stages of development. The hive itself is another machine.

The mall hive serves as commentary against a consumer culture. Pratchett describes its many advertisements as "pictures of writing." In other words, the hive isn't trying to communicate. It doesn't even understand what it is "saying." Rather, the mall is merely mimicking sights and sounds that will lure people into its depths. This is intended as a parallel for real-world corporations, whose colorful ads compel consumers to spend money by exploiting people's hopes and fears.



Pages 278-316

Pages 278-316 Summary

Bill's lifetimer is empty. He is a ghost now. Having distracted the new Death from the child, Bill flees into the smithy, passing directly through the wall. Death-Of-Rats, who sits on a beam above, motions Bill to the location of the scythe. Unfortunately, Bill Door isn't able to pick up the weapon because Ned never destroyed it, and thus its astral remains are not available for Bill to wield. Bill flees the smithy and reunites with Miss Flitworth. At Bill's insistence, Miss Flitworth mounts Binky and flees with the child.

Bill squares off against Death. They exchange words as Bill continues to dodge and weave. Bill is appalled by the new Death's lack of professionalism, particularly by the fact that the Death now wears a crown, a symptom of ambition. Just as Death is about to lay its finishing blow, Bill's lifetimer once again flows with sand. Renata Flitworth appears, her lifetimer hovering before her. She has lent Bill some of her lifetime. Corporeal once more, Bill lays hold of his old, worn farming scythe. With one swing he dispatches the new Death, declaring that there will be no crown. In so doing, Bill becomes Death once more. Several gray forms begin to appear.

Meanwhile, in the hive mall, the swarm of trolleys begins to herd Windle and company downstairs. There they discover the wizards from the Unseen University, who are behaving as if they are in a trance. The trolleys quickly move to close off all exits. The group decides that something must be controlling the trolleys. Arthur spies something round and black on the ceiling. Arthur switches into a bat and Windle, using his zombie super strength, hurls Arthur at the black disc on the ceiling. Arthur grabs on tight, switches back to his "human" form and falls, still grasping the disc, into the awaiting arms of Windle and Reg.

Sticky, pink tubing erupts from the new hole in the ceiling. The music stops. The floor trembles. Steam erupts. The trolleys begin moving aimlessly, without direction. The wizards come to their senses. The members of the Fresh Start Club place the still woozy wizards into now-stunned trolleys, pushing them to safety. Windle Poons stays behind, struggling against pink tubing, hoping to distract the "queen" long enough for everyone else to escape.

Elsewhere, with ranks of Auditors watching, Bill Door and Miss Flitworth are set upon by a newly animated combination harvester. Before the machine can close, however, it breaks down. Bill, using the knowledge he gleaned from Ned's ramblings, disabled the machine earlier. The Auditors disappear one by one. Bill Door bids farewell to Miss Flitworth, promising that he will see her again soon. He reminds her to tell Ned that he owes him a farthing for not destroying the scythe.

Now outside the mall hive, the wizards discuss what should be done. Clearly the hive needs to be destroyed, but Windle is still inside. Meanwhile, atop a tall mountain, Death



convenes with the Auditors. He is defiant to their will. They vanish, promising to tell Azreal. Alone once more, Death summons back into himself all of the many forms of death of which he was once comprised. Only one small piece escapes: Death-Of-Rats.

Windle Poons is overwhelmed by pink tubing and is quickly losing control of his undead systems when the wizards heroically burst on to the scene, shouting "yo!" They throw Windle into a trolley. The Dean announces that he will use three devastating spells in conjunction to destroy the hive. They all beat a hasty retreat as the Dean completes the necessary spells. Though the Dean sets a timer on the spells, the group's progress is blocked by the sudden appearance of the queen's snarling tubes.

Schleppel appears on the opposite side of the queen. He tosses aside his "security" door, revealing at last his true form: that of a giant shaggy monster. He quickly clears the hallway of pink tubing. Everyone escapes. Windle Poons suggests that Schleppel might want to live in the cellar of the Unseen University. The mall hive is consumed in a spectacular explosion of magic. Harmless leaflets litter all of Ankh-Morpork: "Everything must go!"

Mrs. Cake and the Fresh Start Club are visiting, by invitation, the wizards of the Unseen University. Windle Poons says that he's tired. Thinking that he is not long for unlife, he asks Mrs. Cake to look after "his dog" Lupine. Mrs. Cake agrees to do so. Windle Poons, convinced that the world no longer needs him, wanders off. As he walks, he chats with One-Man-Bucket about Ludmilla and Lupine and what is likely to happen on the next full moon, when he is a wolfman and she a wolfwoman.

Pages 278-316 Analysis

This is the climax of Bill Door's arc. Ned Simnel failed to hold up his end of the bargain and that failure has created difficulties for Bill. At his darkest moment, however, Bill places the safety of his friends ahead of his own, proving once more than he is defined by duty. Miss Flitworth decision to return for Bill is likely motivated by her knowledge of his character. Because Bill has always been there for her, she must be there for him.

Bill Door's many preparations are for naught. His plan never sees fruition. In the end, it is Bill's relationships which prove most critical to his success. In caring for his harvest, his harvest cares for him. Neither the harvester nor the new Death can form such relationships. They are machines. This resolution vindicates Bill Door, who re-adopts his Death persona, for the crime of personality. Only a person, after all, can achieve the level of care and dedication that Bill Door embodies.

Once again, the hive trolleys represent the danger of mechanistic work. Once they are disconnected from the queen, they lose purpose and direction. Deprived of will, they even fall into the service of their former enemies. The mall queen meanwhile, having lost her workers and soldiers, cannot respond to the invaders without tearing apart her own infrastructure. Elsewhere, the combination harvester fails for similar reasons: machines cannot adapt.



At the beginning of the novel, the wizards of the Unseen University couldn't wait for Windle to die. Now they come to his rescue. The difference is that Windle Poons has now proven himself. By selflessly choosing to stay behind so that his friends might live, Windle has proven himself worthy of trust, respect and friendship. The implication here is that finally, after 130 years of life, the zombie Windle Poons has, at long last, become a person worthy of consideration.

Seeing that he is no longer needed, Windle is prepared to die. This suggests that Windle's undead existence has been both selfless and purpose-driven. Indeed Windle's last thoughts are not of himself, but of his friends: Schleppel is happy in his new home. Lupine and Ludmilla are likely to find romance. Windle has set the stage for a better story, creating the echoes that will give his life meaning.



Pages 317-353

Pages 317-353 Summary

Death procrastinates in his study, hesitant to address the one lifetimer remaining on his desk. Wondering about the human need for mourning rituals, he instantly travels to Miss Flitworth's parlor. He opens each of the three chests sitting on her dresser. The two smaller ones contain her rumored gold. The third chest contains a wedding veil, white shoes, love letters and an engraved music box. Death travels instantly to the center of the universe where he consults the Supreme Being Azreal. He argues that mankind must create its own purpose and requests that Renata Flitworth be repaid the time she lent Bill Door. Azreal agrees. His "yes," written in large letters, fills an entire page. Death returns to Discworld with a small quantity of time.

Death visits a flower shop. He isn't sure what he wants to purchase, and finally agrees to buy everything the shopkeeper suggests in large quantity, although the flowers die by his mere presence. Next he visits a candy store, where he buys an expensive assortment of candy. At the candy merchant's suggestion that a "diamond is a girl's best friend," Death shops for a diamond. Unable to find a "friendly" enough gemstone, he instantly travels to a remote temple in the darkest Howaland and steals the world's largest diamond, the "Tear of Offler."

Miss Flitworth answers a knock to find Death at the door, offering her chocolates, a tremendous diamond, and a bouquet of dead flowers. Death offers to take her anywhere. She wants nothing more than to go to the harvest dance, and Death agrees to take her. Suddenly, Miss Flitworth finds herself wearing a gown studded with a king's ransom in diamonds. Miss Flitworth realizes that her lifetimer must be running out; Death is here to show her a good time before she passes. Death does not disagree. Later, at the dance, everyone greets "Good Old Bill" and Miss Flitworth. Death encourages Renata to take to the dance floor, arguing that she is only as old as she feels. Seeing everyone having so much fun, and remembering her youth, Miss Flitworth offers to dance with Death.

Renata and Death do a variety of dances. Death encourages the performers to continue playing beyond their endurance, eventually compelling them to play as if by magic. Afterward, and happy beyond measure, Miss Flitworth asks how Death plans to take her soul. Death explains that she's been dead since before they left for the dance. Renata notices that she suddenly looks much younger. Death places Miss Flitworth on Binky's back. Binky appears near an old mountain range, where Miss Flitworth is reunited with the ghost of her long lost love, Rufus.

The narrator speaks briefly of the "other" dance, the counterpart to the Morris dance, the one performed at the height of winter, in silence. He argues that one cannot dance the one without the other. Elsewhere, Windle Poons looks into the Ankh River from the Brass Bridge. Sergeant Colon appears, offering Windle a note that he was asked to



deliver. The note is a death prediction from Ixolite. Sergeant Colon continues on his way. Seconds later, Death appears.

Death isn't in any hurry. He pauses for a minute to chat with Windle Poons. Windle tells death that, in the time since he "died," he has discovered himself. He has learned that it's important to be needed, that being human means interdependence with the rest of humanity. Windle Poons says that one lifetime isn't enough. Death isn't quick to agree. With a spirit of relief and optimism, Windle Poons dies. Elsewhere, Reg Shoe paints his Fresh Start graffiti on a wall.

Back in death's domain, Death is gripped with ennui. He changes the landscape of his realm, creating fields of corn and a slight breeze. He sends Albert, his servant, away. Death-Of-Rats appears. Death takes the deathly rodent in hand. It squeaks in a meaningful way. Death disagrees, citing that he alone is Death. There can be no other Deaths. Just then, Death is reminded of the lonely Azreal, there at the center of the universe. Death allows Death-Of-Rats to exist separately, even going so far as to offer him advice on his new profession. Elsewhere, at the center of existence, Azreal remembers when all of this will be again.

Pages 317-353 Analysis

Bill Door's dream has come true, but so has his nightmare. He is once more the persona of Death, but now he is all the more alone for having once known friendship. Death has lost more than just Miss Flitworth. He's also lost Bill Door, his mortal alter ego. His need to understand mourning suggests that Death himself feels loss and regret. It would appear that, though he is again immortal, Death is not unchanged by his time on Discworld.

Of chief concern in this section are the ideas of meaning and value. What is worth a person's time? What is worth keeping? What does it mean to have lived? Earlier, Miss Flitworth said she relegated her wedding dress to the rag bag, but here it is revealed that she kept the veil. Like Windle Poons, Miss Flitworth will die with a great deal of unspent money. The suggestion here is that money, ultimately, is worthless.

Death's speech to Azreal summarizes the overarching philosophy of Reaper Man. The world is comprised of people, and people have only themselves upon which to rely. Meaning is constructed. Purpose is found. Value is defined by feeling, by sentiment. With this in mind, Death attempt to articulate his affection for Miss Flitworth through objects. These objects are invested with his intent and are therefore significant.

The dance demonstrates another way in which meaning is constructed: by performance. An individual is defined, to a large degree, by what he or she does. Bill Door is a reaper. Miss Flitworth is a farmer. For now, they are both dancers. The dance is both a shared experience and an overt expression of intimacy. Bill and Renata are effectively "going public" with their friendship.



The Morris dance is inseparable from the "other" dance, just as life is inseparable from death. Death comes for Windle as certainly night follows day. Discworld is whole again, the cogs of reality have resumed turning. Death pauses for a moment, realizing that Windle needs a moment; corn is not corn. Reg Shoe continues his denial of death, but there is a sense that one day he too will stand before the reaper.

In the end, Death has matured. He has learned to see people as individuals, as friends even. His decision to spare Death-Of-Rats is based, in part, on his empathy with Azreal, whose loneliness he compares to his own. In a very real sense, Death is now a parent, Death-Of-Rats his child. At long last he has a companion who shares a small part of his burden, someone who knows what it means to be a reaper.



Characters

Death

Death owes his very existence to collective belief. Though death itself existed long before mankind's consensus on death, it is mankind's collective belief that has given Death his form. He wears a cloak and wields a scythe precisely because this is how people imagine that Death should appear. This suggests, to some extent at least, that Death has inherited characteristics from mankind much as a child might inherit hair, eye-color or temperament from a parent. While Death may indeed be a metaphor made manifest, he is very much of mankind's lineage.

Though initially born of human belief, it is apparent that Death has matured. At some point he ceased to be a mere metaphor or caricature. Death is now an individual. He uses "I" when referring to himself. Death demonstrates likes, dislikes, principles and independent thought. His decision to spare Death-Of-Rats shows that he no longer exists as a mere personification of an idea. This Death can use independent judgment. Death has, for good or ill, become something akin to human.

Consider the new Death. Bill Door tells Renata Flitworth that his replacement will be as terrible as she can imagine. This, as it happens, is literally true. The new Death is not yet an individual. Rather, it is defined solely by man's fears of death. It, much like the combination harvester, is nothing more than function given form. One can easily imagine the new Death as being the adolescent form of the persona. In defeating the adolescent Death, Death metaphorically moves in adulthood.

Bill Door

Once Death is retired, he takes up the name Bill Door. Though he is Death no longer, Bill Door seems to have retained many qualities of his former self. For one, Bill Door is still a walking, talking skeleton. He also still generates a field that discourages (adult) people from fully comprehending his true form; when they look at Bill, they see whatever they expect to see. Bill also retains his knowledge of life and death. He can see everyone's lifetimer, and thus knows when people are going to die.

Bill Door, much like Death, is defined by work ethic. He takes great pride in a job well done. This is precisely why Bill is offended by the combination harvester, a soulless machination who has neither pride nor accountability. The harvester represents work without ethic, motion without purpose. It represents the stuff of oblivion. Bill defeats the combination harvester by doing what it cannot: he adapts. By listening to Ned discuss the harvester's construction, Bill is able to orchestrate its destruction.

Bill Door feels the passage of time. Ticking clocks drive to distraction. This is the most fundamental difference between Bill and Death. Bill can feel his life drawing to a close. For the first time, he understands the fear that men once held for him as Death. He now



understands that life is precious, that not all cornstalks are the same. Each man or woman is a unique individual whose life has worth.

Windle Poons

At the beginning of the novel, Windle Poons is a senile, 130-year-old wizard. For most of the story, however, he is an undead "zombie" with renewed mental faculties and superhuman strength. Having lived a sheltered life as a wizard, Windle discovers, in unlife, that living is about the connections that one makes with other people.

Miss Renata Flitworth

Renata Flitworth is the skinny old woman who hires Death (in his mortal persona of Bill Door) to work on her farm.

Auditors

The auditors are mystical, non-individuated beings whose job it is to oversee the running of the universe.

Azrael

Azrael is the supreme being of the cosmos.

Archchancellor Ridcully

Archchancellor Ridcully is the head wizard of the Unseen University. He is a rugged, boisterous man with a penchant for hunting.

Albert

Albert is Death's personal assistant. He is a deathless human who remains in Death's domain.

Bursar

The Bursar is the treasurer of the Unseen University. He is a retiring fellow who became Bursar due to his love of arithmetic.



Dean

Is the administrator in charge of the Unseen University. He is an overweight fellow with a fondness for food.

Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler

Throat is Ankh-Morpork hoodlum and street peddler.

Modo

Modo is the dwarven gardener of the Unseen University.

The Patrician

The Patrician, Lord Vetinari, is the supreme rule of Ankh-Morpork.

Death-Of-Rats

A fragment of the original Death, the Death-Of-Rats is responsible for reaping the souls of deceased rats. Death-Of-Rats is the only "little death" allowed to persist after Death's return.

Reg Shoe

Reg Shoe is a sentient zombie who advocates for undead rights. He is the founder and president of the Fresh Start Club, an undead support group.

Mrs. Evadne Cake

Mrs. Cake is a spiritual medium and precog. She speaks to the spirits with the help of her ghostly friend One-Man-Bucket.

Senior Wrangler

The Senior Wrangler is the wizard at the Unseen University who is responsible for taking care of horses.



Ludmilla

The daughter of Mrs. Cake, Ludmilla is a werewolf. She takes on the appearance of a wolf during the week of the full moon.

Librarian

The Librarian is the bookkeeper for the Unseen University. A magical accident transformed him into an orangutan.

One-Man-Bucket

One-Man-Bucket exists in the astral plane, where he serves as a friend and spirit guide for Mrs. Cake.

Schleppel

Schleppel is a bogeyman. For a bogeyman, he is quite shy, never preferring to jump out and startle people. Instead, he would rather hide behind doors or in cellars.

Count Arthur Winkings

Count Arthur Winkings is a petulant vampire obsessed, in part due to his wife's prompting, to lift up to the stereotype of being a vampire.

Countess Doreen Winkings

The wife of Count Winkings, the Countess is a "vampire by marriage" who pushes her husband to embrace the stereotype of being a vampire. She herself speaks in a fake Transylvanian accent.

Ned Simnel

Ned Simnel is a blacksmith and the creator of the combination harvester.

Ixolite

Ixolite is a shy banshee who, rather than predicting someone's death with a blood curdling wail, instead provides a card with the wail spelled out phonetically.

Lupine

Lupine is a manwolf. He is a wolf who becomes a man during the week of the full moon.

Trolleys

Hatched from snowglobes, the trolleys are semi-autonomous shopping carts which serve the mall queen. They behave more or less like insects.

The Mall Queen

The Mall Queen is the alien intelligence at the center of the "mall" hive. It controls the army of trolleys.



Objects/Places

Discworld

Discworld is the fantasy world in which the novel is staged. Discworld is flat and held aloft by four elephants standing on the back of a turtle.

Unseen University

The Unseen University is the wizard's university in Ankh-Morpork.

Ankh-Morpork

Ankh-Morpork is one of the larger, more populous cities of Discworld and also the primary setting for much of *Reaper Man*.

Death's Domain

Death's domain is the dimensional realm where Death resides. He can change its appearance subject to his whim.

Death's Study

Death's study is located in death's domain.

Death's Scythe

Death scythe is the instrument that Death uses to reap the souls of the recently deceased.

Death's Lifetimer

As a mortal, Death is given his own lifetimer. It counts down the moments of his life.

The Combination Harvester

The combination harvester is a machine used for harvesting large quantities of corn.



Snowglobes

A multitude of snowglobes begin appearing around Ankh-Morpork. Each one features a different landmark of Ankh-Morpork and is labeled with crude writing on its underside. They eventually "hatch" into trolley (i.e., shopping cart) creatures.

The Mall

The mall is a creature construct that houses the mall queen and her attending trolley creatures. The mall continuously plays music that adversely affects the minds of normal humans.

Tear of Offler

Supposedly the tear of a god, the Tear of Offler is the largest diamond in Discworld.

The Brass Bridge

The Brass Bridge spans the murky Ankh River. Windle Poons tries to commit suicide by throwing himself off of it.

Bill Door's Overalls

During Death's stint as a mortal, he wears a pair of overalls instead of his usual cloak.



Themes

Life and Death

Early in the novel, the narrator tells the reader that whoever wishes to dance the Morris dance must also be willing to dance its dark counterpart. One is meaningless without the other, just as life is meaningless without death. Reaper Man suggests that life's value directly correlates to its temporary, transitory nature. Time is precious precisely because it is finite. This is the underlying theme of Reaper Man.

Pratchett presents life as a kind of economy. If we invest only in ourselves, then our investments die with us. If, however, we diversify our investments, if we decide to share our lives with others, to sacrifice on behalf of others, we can build a legacy, potentially leaving the world a better place than we found it. To do this, however, we must be willing to surrender the most precious thing of all: our time.

Bill Door spends his time on work and friendship. These pastimes serve to distract him from his fear, while also providing him a sense of satisfaction and purpose. In exchange for this expenditure, Bill receives the affection, admiration and respect of others. Once Bill is gone, people will likely remember him as "Good Old Bill" and tell stories of his laughable archery. In this way Bill has achieved what Pratchett calls "echoes," extending his life through the influence he has made on others.

Being alive, however, does not necessarily mean that one has lived. Before his undeath, Windle Poons was a cloistered wizard, seldom venturing outside the walls of the Unseen University. His human contact was limited to his fellow wizards and to matters of academic interest. It isn't until Windle dies that he finally realizes how much time he's wasted. Because he risks his (un)life to save his friends, Ludmilla and Lupine live, and will likely find love together. That love will serve as an echo for the life of Windle Poons.

Objects and Ideas

Life is something that one acquires. This phrase is repeated throughout the text, always referring to "things" that seem to have taken on a life of their own. A thing might be an object, such as one of the many objects animated by the build-up of life force, or it might be a functional concept, such as life, time or death. It might even be something which was once alive, but is no longer. No matter the nature of a given thing, it can be made to take on a kind of life of its own.

Death began as a metaphor. A metaphor is a "thing." He was shaped by humankind's consensus on how Death should be personified. The skeleton, the robe and the scythe all serve to represent death in the minds of mortals. Since that time, however, Death has become "real" and grown into an individual. He now refers to himself as "I." He exists independently of the metaphor upon which he was based. Death has "acquired" life.



In Discworld, things, whether they are ideas or physical objects, are subject to growth and change. Swear words can come to life. Rugs can move under their own power. A diamond can be the tear of a god. A music box can represent broken dreams. The dead can walk. The time of our life is absolute, tangible and measured out in sand. In this world the line between metaphor and literal is blurred. Even life and death are not easily distinguishable from one another.

Man vs. Machine

Reaper Man takes a clear stance in favor of individualism over machinery. An individual, like Bill Door, can improvise and adapt, whereas a machine, like the combination harvester, is destroyed when something interferes with its delicate operation. Similarly, the mall hive is thrown into chaos when the queen is injured. The trolleys have no individual will, and so are helpless without guidance. The wizards of the Unseen University, however, are comprised of individuals. When one of their number is injured or incapacitated, the group is diminished but not defeated.

The Auditors of Reality represent a different kind of machine, that of a faceless bureaucracy. They are impersonal, strict, and bound by the very rules that they themselves enforce. When an Auditor develops a personality, it is immediately purged from the ranks. Being agents of order, Auditors value predictability. They scarcely recognize Death's loyalty, efficiency and work ethic. These are, after all, attributes of individual merit. The laws of the cosmos are not intended for individuals. Instead, they are to be applied to everyone equally, regardless of circumstances.

Death's audience with Azreal demonstrates how an individual might push aside the metaphorical "desk" to bypass bureaucratic red tape. He appeals to Azreal's "humanity" by speaking of justice and purpose. Later, when confronted with Death-Of-Rats, Death extends the same compassion to his subordinate that Azreal extended to him. He allows Death-Of-Rats to exist as an individual, separate from himself, thus diminishing himself for the sake of another. In this way, he prevents "law" from impeding justice.



Style

Point of View

Reaper Man is a third person omniscient narrative. Perspective is anchored to the current character of interest, but routinely switches between characters to explore different facets of the overarching story. Though the author is omniscient, the reader is privy only to the perspective of the current protagonist. There is nevertheless a sense that the story is continuing elsewhere, "off the page." While the reader follows the events of Bill Door and Windle Poons, for example, the Archchancellor Ridcully and the wizards of the Unseen University are captured by the mall queen. The reader isn't aware of this fact, however, until Windle Poons arrives at the mall.

Pratchett is the Ringworld authority. He provides frequent annotations concerning other relevant "facts" of Ringworld. This gives the impression that Ringworld is a "real place" and that Pratchett is the scholastic authority on the subject of Ringworld's culture and history. Nevertheless, the author often makes "round world" references, specifically referring to elements of the reader's world. This establishes Pratchett as "one of us." While he may be the authority on Ringworld, he is still very much a part of the "real" world.

Pratchett's writing is strongly directed. He establishes rather than implies, telling the reader what is rather than relying on reader interpretation. He will, for example, tell the reader that the Bursar is a calm, quiet fellow rather than demonstrating this behavior in the narrative. This gives Pratchett more control over the experience of the story, minimizing the risk of reader misinterpretation. It also allows Pratchett to quickly provide non-essential details so that the story may quickly continue.

Setting

Discworld, the setting of Reaper Man, is a planet-sized disc which sits atop four astronomical elephants. The four elephants, in turn, stand atop the turtle A'tuin. There is every indication that Discworld experiences 24-hour night and day cycles, seasons and weather much as a "round" world might. In fact, the world's unusual shape plays little or no bearing on the story itself. Experientially, the world seems, for all intents and purposes, very much like Earth.

Most of the story's events take place in the city of Ankh-Morpork. It is characterized as a medieval urban sprawl, teeming with trade, commerce and politics. It appears to be populated primarily with human beings, but several exotic "fantasy" races are also in residence, including werewolves, undead and trolls. The city is partly named for the Ankh River, which flows through its middle. This "river" amounts to little more than flowing sewage.



The story begins and ends in the domain of Death, where Death oversees an entire dimensional realm occupied only by himself and his assistant Albert. This is telling, because it reinforces the cyclical theme of the story: things end as they begin. The substance of the story is set in the world of mortals: the Unseen University, the streets of Ankh-Morpork, the home of Mrs. Cake. These settings represent life. Living things must end in death. Since the novel is begun in Death's domain, however, there is the suggestion that death also represents birth.

Language and Meaning

In *Reaper Man*, language plays a strong role in identification. Death is criticized by the auditors for referring to himself as "I," thus indicating that he regards himself as an individual, a state of mind seen as inappropriate for a personified embodiment of death. There is a sense that Death should serve as a machine, much like the combination harvester, deserving no name beyond the function he embodies. As a mortal, Death takes on the name Bill Door, giving him an identity with which to engage other mortals.

The character Death believes that language exists not as a means of expression or communication, but as a way for mortals to conceal their true feelings from one another. This presents language as something of a defense mechanism. To understand Renata, Death does not read her love letters. Instead, he looks to those things which she has kept, the things which she most values. The implication here is that the true measure of a person is not in what he or she says, but what they do. Behavior is a far more honest language than mere words.

In *Reaper Man*, profanity literally takes on a life of its own. In the absence of Death, life builds up in the world, animating previously inanimate objects. This quickening extends to words as well - or at least to the words of wizards. Whenever the wizards swear, their words spawn small, annoying flying creatures. This suggests that wizards, as practitioners of magic, use stronger words than most. It also suggests that, of those words that one might use, profanity is the most virile.

Font plays an interesting role in *Reaper Man*. When Death speaks, he does so in all caps and without quotation. Death's replacement, the new Death, similarly speaks without quotations, but in italics rather than with capital letters. These differences mark Death as unique, absolute, someone who falls outside the rules that govern mortals. In the one instance in which Azreal speaks, the single word he utters takes up an entire page, demonstrating his omnipotence.

Structure

Reaper Man isn't broken up into separate chapters. Instead, different sections are separated by a single blank line. The earliest sections concern Death's forced retirement and the effect it has on the world. Subsequent sections concern the university's efforts to address the aftermath of Death's retirement, Windle Poon's newfound undeath, and Death's role as a mortal. The story culminates with the much

delayed death of Windle Poons, the defeat of the mall queen, and a return to the natural order.

Reaper Man's narrative eventually sorts itself into three distinct casts of characters. In the first group is Death (aka Bill Door), Renata Flitworth and the citizens of a small farming community. The second group consists of Archchancellor Ridcully and the wizards of the Unseen University. The final group is comprised of Windle Poons, Ludmilla, Lupine and an assortment of undead. As the story unfolds, the casts assemble and experience facets of the plot separately, the narrative shifting between them. The second and third groups eventually merge at the mall. The first group remains separate from the others, but Death eventually comes to reap the soul of Windle Poons.

The story begins and ends in Death's domain, with the bulk of the narrative taking place on Discworld, the realm of the mortals. The story's progress, however, is marked by a steady increase in the fantastic. As "life" builds up in the world, spectacular elements become more prevalent. This trend culminates with Death petitioning Azreal on behalf of Renata Flitworth. The god's one word reply fills an entire page, visibly impressing upon the reader that a god - the God - has spoken, even as it draw attention to the artifice of the written word.



Quotes

"Since the trees were unable even to sense any event that took place in less than a day, they never heard the sound of axes." p. 11

"There seemed to be more Mustrum Ridcully than one body could reasonably contain." p. 39

"Mrs, Evadne Cake was a medium, verging on a small." p. 84

"All the religions had very strong views about talking to the dead. And so did Mrs. Cake. They held that it was sinful. Mrs. Cake held that it was just common courtesy." p. 102

"While he had been waiting to experience sleep, something had stolen part of his... life." p. 106

"He wondered if he'd ever felt wind and sunlight before. But he'd never experienced them like this; the way the wind pushed at you, the way the sun made you hot. The way you feel time passing. Carrying you with it." p. 143

"BUT, YOU SEE, I KNOW WHAT I BELIEVE. I BELIEVE... NOTHING." p. 159

"YES. TOTALLY. EVERY BIT DESTROYED. SO THAT IT IS ABSOLUTELY DEAD." p. 209

"He was halfway up his second row, but accelerating." p. 233

"NO CROWN. ONLY THE HARVEST." p. 282.

"No matter how fast light travels it finds that darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it." p. 321

"And the time design of the Clock was this: that the biggest hand only went around once." p. 322



Topics for Discussion

Why is Death forbidden to have a personality? Would he be better at his job if he didn't have a personality?

Is Bill Door a person? Why or why not?

What does the phrase "Corn is not corn" mean?

Bill Door's and Ned Simnel differ on their attitude toward "the harvest." In what way do they differ?

What does Reaper Man have to say about American consumerism?

Reg Shoe believes that the dead should be given the same rights as the living. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Why does Death agree to spare Death-Of-Rats?

In what way is Death changed by his experience in the mortal world?