

Wyrd Sisters Study Guide

Wyrd Sisters by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

In Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, wicked Lord Felmet kills the king of Lancre and takes over the throne. Three witches, Granny, Nanny, and Magrat, who have secreted away the heir to the throne, must overthrow Lord Felmet by revealing the truth. They turn Lord Felmet's lie-filled play around, making the players speak the truth and freeing the kingdom for a new ruler.

When the king is assassinated at the beginning of the novel, the coven of three witches unwittingly winds up with the infant heir to the throne. Granny, Nanny and Magrat, after defeating the usurper's assassins, entrust the baby to traveling thespians. Lord Felmet, usurper of the throne, is disturbed by reports of tax-exempt witches in his kingdom. He orders tax collectors to visit the witches and collect. The taxmen, however, are no match for the witches' mother-like authority and are unable to complete their task.

Lord Felmet's Fool convinces his majesty to consider a war of words, undermining the witches' authority through rumor and implication. The spirit of the kingdom, however, sensing Felmet's disdain for it, rebels against the new king with an earthquake. The witches, too, are contacted by various representatives of the kingdom, both man and animal, and asked to intercede against Lord Felmet. The witches are reluctant to meddle. Meanwhile, the Fool and Magrat, youngest of the witch coven, meet by chance and fall in love.

When the ghost of the dead king lures Nanny to the castle, the remainder of the coven is forced to rescue her. This puts the witches face to face with the usurper Felmet, whereupon they realize they cannot interfere without undermining the authority of the crown. The Fool's campaign of rumors, however, has taken its toll. Open disrespect from the citizenry pushes Granny to drop her compunction against meddling. The other witches follow suit.

With the Fool's assistance, Lord Felmet hatches a plot to rewrite history via a play, which will tell the "truth" about the old king and his untimely death. Granny decides, meanwhile, that she will see the king's heir, Tomjon, seated upon the throne. Granny, with the help of Nanny and Magrat, casts a spell that hurls the entire kingdom forward in time fifteen years.

Lord Felmet sends the Fool to Ankh-Morpork to find a playwright. There the Fool encounters the grown-up Tomjon and the theatre troupe to which he belongs. Without realizing that Tomjon is the prince, the Fool hires the playwright Hwel to write the play and stage it in Lancre. Seeing via crystal ball that Tomjon is preparing for a trip to Lancre, the witches assume he intends to recover the throne.

Hwel stages the play in Lancre, but the production is a disaster. The witches interfere, forcing the actors to speak the truth. The Fool, moving to protect Magrat from arrest, bears witness against the lord, accusing him of murder. Lord Felmet becomes entirely



unhinged, flees, and dies to an accidental fall. Lady Felmet, the instigator behind Lord Felmet, is arrested and imprisoned.

Tomjon refuses the throne of Lancre. He wishes to return to his theatre troupe in Ankh-Morpork. The Fool, who happens to be Tomjon's illegitimate older brother Verence, ascends to the throne instead and continues his relationship with Magrat. Nanny and Granny reveal to Magrat that, while Verence is indeed Tomjon's half-brother, they share a mother, not a father. Magrat intends to keep it a secret.



Pages 1-26

Pages 1-26 Summary

In Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, wicked Lord Felmet kills the king of Lancre and takes over the throne. Three witches, Granny, Nanny, and Magrat, who have secreted away the heir to the throne, must overthrow Lord Felmet by revealing the truth. They turn Lord Felmet's lie-filled play around, making the players speak the truth, and freeing the kingdom for a new ruler.

As the novel begins amid a fierce storm and huddled beneath tree and bent before cauldron, a coven of three witches adjourns, discussing when next they will meet. The author digresses to introduce the setting: Discworld. Flat as a disc, Discworld sits upon the shoulders of four elephants, which in turn sit upon the back of A'tuin, the great turtle. The turning of the disc generates magic for the world, most of which is vented out through the Ramtops region. Presently, a sentient storm is born from the peaks of the Ramtops as a coach, chased by three hooded riders, flees toward the sight of the coven's fire.

At Lancre castle, meanwhile, King Verence discovers that he, having just been assassinated, is now a ghost. The grim reaper appears to the late king, explaining that Verence is due to remain in this form for an indeterminate amount of time, adding that only psychics, close relatives, and cats will be able to see Verence from now on. With Death departed, the ghost Verence soon discovers he must remain in Lancre castle, which he is now destined to haunt.

The coven is interrupted by the arrival of the coach. A man emerges, living just long enough to thrust a bundled baby into Granny Weatherwax's arms, afterward falling dead to a crossbow bolt in the back. The coach's cloaked pursuers arrive, demanding that Granny turn over the baby. Weatherwax refuses. Before the ruffian leader can bring his cruel sword down upon the witch, he is stabbed in the back by one of his comrades. The second ruffian is confused by his own actions but insists that he couldn't allow Granny to be murdered. The third ruffian flees. Granny advises that the second do the same. In the coach, the witches find the royal crown of Lancre.

The ghost of King Verence meets the ghost of forgotten King Champot, the monarch responsible for castle Lancre's construction a thousand years before. Champot explains that Verence's continued hunger is illusory, a product of imagination, adding that Verence may not eat nor touch physical objects.

Duke Felmet, usurper of the throne, daydreams about trees while his angry, authoritarian wife prattles on. When it becomes apparent that her husband isn't listening, Lady Felmet rebukes her husband for allowing King Verence's servants to escape the castle. Lord Felmet promises his wife that he's taken care of the situation. Felmet, meanwhile, struggles with his regicidal guilt and worries as to the whereabouts



of the royal crown. Felmet and his Fool are interrupted by a report that "witches are abroad." Hearing this news, the ghost of King Verence is encouraged; perhaps the witches will see him.

The three witches discuss the baby and crown, deciding that each must be hidden. Left alone for a moment, Granny places the crown upon her head and is instantly seized by images of war and regicide. Later, Magrat and Granny discuss the strange compulsion that the crown seems to emanate, noting that it would likely complicate any attempts to hide the object. Magrat compares the crown to those she has seen in plays. Granny, who is unwilling to admit ignorance as to what a play is, gently prods Magrat for more information. Magrat reveals that there is a troupe in Lancre presently.

Pages 1-26 Analysis

The beginning of the book establishes the rules by which the remainder of the book will be governed. Discworld, being flat and situated as it is on the backs of elephants, is silly. This tells the reader that the story to follow is intended as humor. Since Ramptops is a highly magical region, the reader can expect magic to play an important role in the story. The assassination of Verence, and his subsequent reincarnation as a ghost, sets the plot in motion and establishes the rules for "haunting" which Nanny will later bend.

While the witches come off as humorous and sympathetic, it is not immediately obvious that they are among the "good guys." It isn't until Granny Weatherwax refuses to turn over the baby that the reader recognizes her as one of the protagonists. Similarly, it is not readily apparent that the witches possess any actual magic. At this point in the story, magical occurrences might still be explained by free will and natural phenomena. The assassin-for-hire might have chosen to turn on his colleague. Similarly, nearby strokes of lightning might have been a product of mere chance.

Lord Felmet's guilt at having murdered his liege is an obvious reference to Shakespeare's Macbeth. Unlike in Macbeth, however, where the perpetual hand washing behavior is exhibited by Lady Macbeth, here it is manifested by the male counterpart. If one follows the Shakespeare parallel, this leaves Lady Felmet with the worst characteristics of both Lord and Lady Macbeth. She, unlike her Shakespearean counterpart, is unfettered even by guilt. Pratchett makes this abundantly clear later in the story when Granny uses her magic to turn Lady Felmet's guilt against her, only to discover that there isn't much there with which to work. While Lord Felmet is indeed despicable, he is far more sympathetic than his ill-intended wife.



Pages 27-54

Pages 27-54 Summary

The witches decide to take in a play. Granny, who does not grasp that the play is fiction, is outraged when a man is seemingly murdered right before her eyes. Magrat does her best to calm Granny, but the elder witch continues to rant and rave. Even once she realizes that it's "just pretend," Granny goes out of her way to point out every artifice she detects. Magrat does her best to explain the mechanics of theatre, but the point seems lost on Granny. She takes to the stage and begins kicking over props.

Believing Granny is part of the show, the audience is amused. The play is a success. After the performance, Olwyn Vitoller, the theatre manager, introduces himself to the witches. The women are impressed by the man's voice and charisma. Granny is suspicious, thinking Olwyn a bit too glib, but even she is won over by a type of magic she does not quite understand - the magic of performance. Olwyn invites the three women into the pub.

Lord Felmet is displeased to learn that Lancre has witches and, further, that they do not pay taxes. The chamberlain tries to explain that witches are no trouble; they are, in fact, quite helpful and are thought to bring luck to any village in which they reside. Hearing this, Lady Felmet is disgusted, reminding her husband yet again that this is the reason it was necessary for him to murder his cousin the king. Lord Felmet, still plagued with guilt, compulsively tries to scrub the imagined blood of Verence from his hand.

In the pub, Granny, who is not the least bit comfortable in such environs, watches the marital interactions between Mr. and Mrs. Vitoller. She decides that any wife of Olwyn's would necessarily be exceptional. Learning that the couple is childless, Granny tentatively suggests that the couple adopt the wayward infant, her "godson." When the couple asks the child's name, Granny replies "Tom" and Nanny "John." Granny compromises with "Tomjon." The couple agrees to take the infant. Magrat reports that she has hidden the crown among the gilded crowns in the theatrical props.

The troupe packs up and leaves town. Magrat suggests that they, as the child's self-proclaimed godmothers, should bestow three gifts upon the child. After a fruitless discussion of what those gifts should be, the three witches agree to each make their decision in private. Magrat decides that Tomjon will "make friends easily." Nanny Ogg blesses the boy with "a bloody good memory." Granny Weatherwax, lastly, decides that the boy will "be whatever he thinks he is."

Four tax collectors carefully approach Granny Weatherwax's home, only to be startled by the old woman at the door. Later, Lord Felmet is incredulous to learn that, rather than collecting taxes as ordered, his men instead had tea and buns with Granny Weatherwax. Though furious and still feeling obsessively guilty, Lord Felmet dismisses



his sergeant and asks the Fool for advice, suggesting that the jester to draw upon his local knowledge, specifically any knowledge concerning witches.

At Lord Felmet's order, the Fool now sleeps outside the Lord's chamber door. Within the lord's chamber, Lord and Lady Felmet discuss the apparent enthrallment that the witches have over the townsfolk and what might be done about it. Meanwhile, the coven reconvenes at Nanny Ogg's cottage, where the group discusses the suspicious death of the old king and the new king's efforts to suppress rumors of regicide. All three witches tell of visits from would-be tax collectors.

Pages 27-54 Analysis

The play, as well as Granny's response to it, alludes to the novel's climax. Granny initially subscribes to the idea of "seeing is believing." She saw a man murdered and thus believes a man was murdered. Once it is apparent that the play is a performance, however, Granny feels betrayed. She sees the play as a "lie," a falsehood to be exposed. This foreshadows Lord Felmet's plot to rewrite history with the power of performance and the witch's efforts to make a mockery of that same performance. The audience is amused by Granny's intervention here in much the same way the reader will be amused by the witches' intervention later. To act is to perform. To perform is to entertain.

The witches represent everything that Lord Felmet is not. They may come and go as they wish and are subject to no laws. Lord Felmet, however, is under his wife's thumb and bound to a kingdom he hates. He is deflecting his regicidal guilt on to the witches, using them as a scapegoat for his own self-loathing. Lady Felmet is the true tyrant. She wishes to bring the witches to heel merely for the sake of control. Lady Felmet can't abide the idea that someone might live outside her control.

The witches are conscientious in their handling of the orphaned infant, not merely for the sake of the child himself, but also for the sake of the kingdom. Granny Weatherwax carefully chooses the couple to whom she offers the baby, looking for qualities that she would like to see engendered in the prince. The witches also see to the crown, ensuring that that the young prince might one day return to claim his birthright. This shows that, while the witches may be averse to meddling, they are not without a stake in the kingdom's future. They care both for Lancre and for the future of the child.

It is clear that much of the witches "power" in Lancre is dependent not on magic, but on their role in Lancre culture. They exist as matriarchs, vague parental figures who live on the periphery of society. They behave much as a mother might, causing grown men to behave as boys. Lord Felmet's tax collectors can no more stand up to the witches than they can stand up to their own mothers. The witches, like mothers, are sympathetic yet authoritarian, friendly yet scary.



Pages 55-81

Pages 55-81 Summary

The taxman returns to Lord Felmet with only the two coins that Magrat deigned to offer out of pity. The witches weren't interested in paying taxes to support government services. Lord Felmet is not amused. Fearful that Lord Felmet will ask him to return to the witches and once again endure their disapproving looks, the taxmen is pleased to learn the king plans to have him tortured instead. Lord Felmet broods over how much he hates his newly-won kingdom. He senses the land's resentment of him in return. The Fool does his best to distract the lord, but Felmet continues to obsess over the imagined blood on his hand.

A year passes. Olwyn and playwright Hwel discuss which plays they will attempt in the coming season. Baby Tomjon lurks nearby. Hwel retreats to alter his current play as per Olwyn's request. Baby Tomjon raids the props crate and the narrative implies that youngling places the crown of Lancre on his head. Hwel takes it away, insisting that it "hardly fits."

The Ramptops, normally a hotbed for peculiar manifestations of magic, is suddenly and eerily mundane. Since, by tradition, witches stay home on Hogswatchnight, Granny is home in bed when she notes this difference. Reaching out with her mind, Granny searches through the land, investigating life great and small. She senses a presence but can't pinpoint it. Finally she thinks to expand her mental search and, to her surprise, encounters a presence that is vast in proportion.

Castle Lancre is hit by a large earthquake, an event unheard of in the region. Convinced that the witches are behind the event, Lord Felmet interrogates the Fool. The Fool tries to ensure Felmet that the witches have never done any such thing and have never shown an interest in ruling the kingdom. Lord Felmet silences the rumbling by shouting that he is the king, after which he falls into a fit of weeping. Nearly on the verge of confessing to regicide, Lord Felmet abruptly regains his composure when Lady Felmet appears, demanding to know the cause of the earthquake. The Fool suggests that magic might be fought with words, the witches' reputations undermined by rumor and implication.

Breaking Hogswatchnight tradition, Granny ventures out of doors and into the moors, all the while feeling the attention of a strange mind upon her. Moments later, Granny encounter Magrat, who reports that she, too, felt a compulsion to break tradition. Hoping to complete the coven, Granny and Magrat go to Nanny's cottage, where they find the witch throwing a party. Though Nanny hasn't felt anything, she is convinced by Granny's demeanor that something is afoot. A presence, which Magrat characterizes as a very large dog, is searching for something. Nanny decides that they will, despite lacking the sword and cauldron that Magrat feels is necessary, perform an invocation.



Using a bleached copper stick instead of a sword and a washbasin in lieu of a cauldron, the coven summons a demonic presence from the water. Granny convinces the demon to cooperate by threatening to boil the water in which it sits. The demon explains that, while there's nothing wrong with the kingdom, the land has woken up and wants a king that cares for it. Having received this information, Granny banishes the demon.

Granny returns home, restless and thoughtful after the recent ordeal. It occurs to granny that a kingdom's heart might beat very, very slowly. Acting on a hunch, Granny exits her cottage to find a great variety of animals waiting outside. She tries to explain to the animals that she, as a witch, cannot interfere in politics - the king is whoever the king is - but the animals show no sign of comprehension. Granny, exasperated, returns to her cottage.

Pages 55-81 Analysis

At first glance, it seems that the kingdom's rejection of Lord Felmet is based on the great chain of being, the notion that Felmet, in ascending to the throne, has done something unnatural. In truth, it is simply because the kingdom feels rejected by Lord Felmet. Note that Felmet silences the rumbling by shouting "I am the king!" Only when Felmet admits to his responsibility as king does the land pause to hear what Felmet has to say. This act, however, also forces Felmet to confront the fatal flaw of his kingship: He neither desires, nor feels that he deserves, the crown. The kingdom can accept a tyrant and a murderer, but it will not accept a man who would not be king.

The invocation shows the true nature of magic in Discworld. While it is governed by rules, such rules are made to be broken. This is a subtle foreshadowing of the story's resolution. For much of the story, the witches believe that Tomjon will return from afar to reclaim his birthright. Destiny, however, like magic, is subject to compromise, innovation and invention. While it is true that a king's heir is always his son, and that one cannot choose one's parents, there is still no telling what people will do.

Since the animals come to Granny and not to Nanny, there is a subtle implication here that Granny is more closely tied to the land. Nanny, however, is visited by several townsfolk, each seeking to articulate grievances against the king. This suggests that Nanny, likely due to her many grown children, is more integrated into the culture of Lancre. Granny is the rural witch, whereas Nanny is the urban witch. Each woman interfaces with a different facet of Lancre's identity.



Pages 82-107

Pages 82-107 Summary

Though entrusted with Tomjon's education, Hwel has yet to hear the nearly-three-year-old boy speak his first word. Tomjon shocks everyone, however, by spontaneously reciting lines from one of Hwel's plays, pronouncing the words exactly as his adoptive father might. Soon, most of the troupe surrounds the child, prompting him to recite line after line. Young Tomjon proves himself a thespian of unparalleled skill.

The Ghost of king Verence finds the castle's kitchen filled with the ghosts of animals. He flees to the gallery disgusted by the sight. There he comes upon the large cat Greebo, which, as Death predicted, can see him. Noting the unusual nature of the animal, Verence concludes that it must be a witch's familiar. He lures the animal into a room rich with mice and with a broken window where rainfall might enter, and, using a ghostly trick which he has practiced exhaustively, slams the door, trapping the cat within. He reasons that the cat's master, presumably a witch, will eventually come seeking her familiar.

Elsewhere, the Fool stares into a lake, recalling his nightmarish apprenticeship under his cruel grandfather, from whom he learned the 383 guild-approved jokes. Lured by the sound of a woman singing, the Fool spies Magrat dancing about in the forest and is smitten by the sight. The Fool reveals himself and the two exchange awkward greetings. Suddenly realizing he has surprised a witch, the Fool flees into the forest. Magrat is disappointed.

Nanny Ogg has noted Greebo's absence, but Granny assures her that cats can take care of themselves. Noting that Magrat seems distracted, Nanny and Granny discuss politics. Townsfolk have been actively seeking Nanny's assistance with the new king; they want a king they can trust. Granny shares with Nanny her experience with the animals. The witches reason that it isn't that the new king is evil, but that he doesn't care for the kingdom. Nevertheless, the witches agree that magic should not interfere with politics. The two elder witches nettle Magrat for her obvious crush on the Fool, only to fall into bickering themselves.

Magrat, feeling a bit overwrought, performs a magical ritual to determine the Fool's name. To her surprise, the ritual works. She leaves her cottage, determined to find the final component of a love potion. Meanwhile, Nanny Ogg's efforts to track Greebo take her to Castle Lancre. Magrat, obsessing over doubts about her role as a witch, encounters guardsman Shawn, the youngest of Nanny Ogg's sons. Shawn reports that Nanny has been taken prisoner. Magrat says that she will take care of it.

Nanny is held in stocks. Lord and Lady Felmet threaten to torture her, but the witch seems largely indifferent to the idea. The Felmets depart, giving Nanny a chance to speak to the impatient ghost of King Verence. Verence explains that it was he who lured Nanny to the castle. Meanwhile, Shawn tells Granny Weatherwax about Nanny's



capture. He also reports, to Granny's dissatisfaction, that many rumors are spreading concerning the witches. Granny thanks the boy and prepares to travel.

Pages 82-107 Analysis

The witches' "gifts" are now made manifest in Tomjon. It is these same gifts that will make him so well-suited to the thespian life in which he has been placed. His excellent memory will ascertain that he never forgets his lines. His affability will guarantee him fans. His ability to "be whatever he thinks he is" will allow him to convincingly adopt any role. The witches have unwittingly stacked the odds against Tomjon ever becoming king, by making him too well suited to acting.

At this point in the story, various forces work to involve the witches in the fate of the kingdom. The animals appear to Granny and the citizens appear to Nanny. It is the ghost of King Verence, however, which draws the witches into direct conflict with Lord Felmet. By trapping Greebo, Verence involves Nanny and, by extension, the entire coven. Verence makes the conflict personal for the witches. In this respect, the former king Verence is continuing to have a say into Lancre's fate, even from beyond the grave.

The Fool is a tragic character. He, like Lord Felmet, is crushed by his own sense of propriety, too preoccupied with what he feels like he ought to do that he won't consider his own wants and needs. Magrat, in this case, represents that part of the Fool which he has long denied himself: love, romance and desire. The Fool's sudden retreat is symbolic of his habitual denial of these things, as well as representing Magrat's own fear of rejection. These are the obstacles these two lovers face.



Pages 108-136

Pages 108-136 Summary

Magrat preens before a mirror, hoping to achieve a look that is both attractive and more witch-seeming. Nanny and Ghost Verence, meanwhile, play a game of "I spy." Outside, Granny arrives at the castle gates, where a crowd has formed and is circulating rumors of Nanny's capture. A palace guardsman, not buying Granny's cover as an apple salesman, tries to bar her passage, but Granny stabs the guard's hand with a hairpin and hurries past. Lord and Lady Felmet return to the torture chamber, soon expelling the guilt-ridden Fool from the room. Nanny confesses nothing. Ghost Verence tries to focus his spirit energy well enough to move his one-time hunting knife, the weapon of his murder.

Magrat, also posing as an apple salesman, has no trouble getting past the fearful guards. While Granny wanders lost in the castle, Magrat runs afoul of lusty guardsmen. Seeing that Magrat is in trouble, the Fool intercedes, demanding that she be released. Magrat, together with the Fool, manages to overpower the guards. She demands to know where Nanny is. Magrat, finding the door to the prison inoperable, casts a spell upon it. The wooden door warps, exploding with roots and leaves. Granny Weatherwax, appearing from the shadows, admits to being impressed.

Within the prison, Lord and Lady Felmet cower before a floating knife. Granny Weatherwax secures the knife, just as Lady Felmet comes to her senses and calls for the guards. Granny Weatherwax, sensing the growing madness within the king, suggests that Lord Felmet abdicate the throne. The king refuses, pointing out that the witches cannot magically intervene without bringing ruin to both themselves and the kingdom. Granny Weatherwax reluctantly agrees, but warns that Verence's heir will one day return.

Granny departs, along with Magrat and Nanny, bristling with impotent fury. Nanny stops to retrieve a loose bit of stone from the castle, prompting gratitude from the ghost Verence. Magrat pauses to make a date with the Fool. Outside, the witches find the gathered citizens on the verge of protest. Prompted by Felmet, the witches make a show of civility and then make their way through a sniggering crowd. Later, still stewing in indignation, the witches consider their options.

The two elder witches scoff at Magrat's suggestion that they seek the help of other witches. Nanny also explains that magic is something that one prefers to use less, rather than more, as one grows more experienced. The ghost of Verence, who now haunts the bit of stone that Nanny recovered from the castle, begs Granny to restore his son to the throne before the kingdom falls apart. Granny pleads a reluctance to meddle. When Granny is nearly run down by a careless coach, however - something which would never have happened before the rumors—she is infuriated, resolving to at last resort to magic.



Pages 108-136 Analysis

During the whole prison sequence, Magrat is the only member of the coven to make overt use of magic. Granny gains access to the prison through intimidation and mild violence. Nanny is spared torture through the intervention of the ghost. Magrat is saved from the lusty guardsman by the Fool, whom she then must save in return, with a mere knife. While the witches do have magic at their disposal, they show restraint in its use. Considering the explosive way the prison door opens, there is an implication that overt magic may be dangerous and difficult to control.

The witches are bound by ethics. Any attempt to intervene in political affairs makes a travesty of whatever government they influence. Lord Felmet uses the phrase "hag ridden," suggesting that any king chosen by a witch would have his authority undermined by magic. In other words, the kingdom could never be certain whether or not the king was a puppet for the witches who enthroned him. This draws unfavorable parallels to Tomjon, whose personality has already been strongly influenced by the witch's intervention.

While Granny is able to turn a deaf ear to the many calls for her involvement, it is her own interests that force her to act. Her reputation has been tarnished and, in the process, her way of life has been compromised. This presents Granny not as a power-hungry witch seeking to influence royal politics, but as an individual acting in her own best interests. It could be argued that this makes Granny's decision to "meddle" more noble, as she has little choice but to act in her own defense. She didn't choose the battle. The battle chose her.



Pages 137-158

Pages 137-158 Summary

Lord Felmet congratulates the Fool on his stratagem of words. Lady Felmet, however, is convinced that strong men, rather than mere words, change the world. The jester disagrees, offering several examples of how a leader might use spin and rhetoric to govern through deception. The Lady is, despite herself, impressed. The Fool suggests that even history, which amounts to little more than words, might itself be rewritten. Hearing this, Lord Felmet pleads innocent to the murder of King Verence. Lady Felmet, an idea upon her, asks the Fool to find someone who can write a play.

The sentient storm, now resting, observes a gathering of witches. Granny, Nanny and Magrat gather to discuss what and how things must be done. Back at the castle, the Fool, acting on Magrat's instructions, rescues the cat Greebo from his humble prison. The Fool leaves the castle with the cat perched high upon his head. Meanwhile, the witches continue their discussion. Granny declares that she has no interest in cursing anyone, but instead plans to replace Felmet with Verence's heir.

Nanny quickly surmises that Granny intends to use time manipulation, similar to the legendary witch Black Aliss. Granny explains that time can be manipulated locally such that it flows faster or slower. She intends to move the entire kingdom of Lancre fifteen years into the future. Nanny, pointing out that Granny would have to fly a circuit around the entire kingdom, dismisses the idea as unworkable. Granny, undeterred, explains the daring plan. Nanny and Magrat find it dreadful. Meanwhile, with Greebo still perched on his head, the Fool - who is looking for Magrat's cottage - finds himself lost in the forest, whereupon Greebo abandons him.

Magrat waits hovering on her broomstick several hundred feet above the ground. She worries that the notoriously reckless Granny Weatherwax might have gotten herself into trouble. Just then, Granny comes thundering through the sky at breakneck speed. Magrat, after struggling to catch up, transfers magical energy to the elder witch. This unfortunately doesn't leave Magrat enough power to stay afloat. Somehow, despite all probability, Magrat lands on something soft: the Fool's head.

Magrat and the Fool greet one another. Neither is hurt. As per Nanny's earlier suggestion, Magrat gives the Fool a closer look. She notes that he is neither short nor hunchbacked. Rather, the impression is achieved in the way the Fool carries himself. Magrat explains to the Fool that powerful magic is afoot that night. Elsewhere, Granny meets up with Nanny. The two witches are bickering when Granny's broom suddenly fails, causing her to drop like a rock.

Alone together at last, Magrat and the Fool are shy and awkward. Magrat broaches the topic of the Fool's vocation, but this turns out not to be a happy tale. The Fool's training was cruel and regimented, seemingly entirely devoid of humor. He never imagined that



any other type of life was possible. Magrat speaks of her own tutelage, selected by Goodie Whemper from among a pool of little girls. Magrat suggests that the Fool leave Lord Felmet's service, but the Fool insists that it is his duty. The two lovers move closer, poised for their first kiss.

Pages 137-158 Analysis

Later, to Magrat, The Fool uses the example of Lady Felmet to rationalize his use of rhetoric on the Lord's behalf. Were it not for his rhetoric, the Fool argues, Lady Felmet would have her violent way, causing untold suffering to many. What the Fool fails to realize, however, is that his words perpetuate injustice in a way that is difficult to counter. A tyrant can be recognized and overthrown. A rhetorician, however, can evade responsibility through obscuring the truth. In separating act from agency, as Lord Felmet attempts to do with the play, justice becomes unattainable. This is the danger of words.

Since Magrat realizes that Granny would never knowingly wish harm upon her, she also realizes that Granny - in leaving Magrat with so little energy - trusts Magrat to take care of herself. This realization fills Magrat with a great sense of confidence. It is interesting to note, however, that Magrat's escapes injury largely due to luck. This suggests that either luck is itself a skill, or else luck is a large component of heroic achievement. Either or both might be true in Discworld.

The Fool's character is firstly defined in terms of duty. He doesn't feel as though he has any choice but to serve Lord Felmet. This will continue to be so until he finally defies Felmet and bears witness for the murder of King Verence. The fact that the Fool allows himself to be corralled into kingship suggests that, while he was able to deviate from duty the one time, he is nevertheless still largely defined by it. It is only through Magrat that the Fool sees possibility.



Pages 159-183

Pages 159-183 Summary

Granny complains that her broom is iced up. Nanny tries to get alongside her, but Granny's broom is whipping out of control and on fire. When Granny's broom fails completely, Nanny pulls off some fancy aerobatics to pluck Granny from the air. The two witches, despite Nanny's misgivings, continue the journey astride Nanny's broom. Granny arrives in time to get into position and cast the time-bending spell. It is a success. The first kiss between Magrat and her Fool lasts fifteen years.

The witches discuss the matter of finding Tomjon now that he is of age. Granny figures boy probably wound up, much like many people of destiny, in Ankh-Morpork, The Fool, meanwhile, is to be sent abroad to perform a task for Felmet. Magrat, once again, unsuccessfully tries to convince the Fool to leave the king's employ. The Fool, however, feels himself bound by duty.

Far away, in the city of Ankh-Morpork, playwright Hwel, paper and pen in hand, works diligently at his craft. Nearby, Vitoller's theatre, the Dysk, is nearing completion. Tomjon wakes with a muffled cry, complaining to Hwel of a nightmare in which he is trapped in a bowl, with three women's faces staring down upon him, arguing over matters of kingship. Though it is after midnight, Tomjon has no intention of returning to bed. Instead, he convinces Hwel to go out drinking with him.

When a barfly tries to pick a fight with Hwel, the matter quickly escalates into a brawl. Tomjon, however, stops the brawl in its tracks by expertly reciting a speech from one of Hwel's plays. The crowd is mesmerized. Hearing his own words so eloquently spoken, Hwel is overcome with pride. Tomjon insists that they find another establishment, even a dwarf bar. Hwel, being a dwarf himself, advises against it.

Moments later, Tomjon and Hwel witness a mugging. The victim, as it turns out, is the Fool. Though the thieves have a license to rob, they find that the jester has significantly more money than they're allowed to take. Tomjon advocates for the Fool and convinces the thieves to return the money. The Fool is grateful, offering to buy each of them something to drink. For a moment, Hwel thinks he might see an uncanny resemblance between Tomjon and the Fool.

Pages 159-183 Analysis

Unbeknownst to Granny, Nanny has positioned her family throughout the kingdom to silence the morning crows of every known rooster in Lancre. Since the spell requires that the flight be completed before the first cock crows, Nanny thinks to hold back the dawn by holding back the roosters. She exploits the wording of the spell at the expense of the spirit of the wording. This suggests that magic is not science but is instead prone

to loopholes, dodges and cheats. The fact that Nanny doesn't make Granny aware of this fact suggests that Nanny is mindful of Granny's overabundant pride.

It is noted several times that Nanny's cracked, green crystal ball does not receive sound. This is why the witches can never be too certain about what they're seeing within. It is humorously apparent, however, that while the crystal ball does not receive sound, it transmits sound quite well. Whenever the witches look upon Tomjon as he sleeps, the young man is able not only to hear, but also see, the witches looking down at him. This also alludes to the fact that the witches, whether they mean to or not, are affecting Tomjon's life, in this case by affecting his sleeping habits.

Tomjon's ability to mesmerize crowds is not entirely his own. The gift is largely due to the witches's influence. What is not immediately obvious, however, is that Tomjon is also very much dependent on Hwel for the eloquent words which Tomjon wields. This becomes most apparent later on when Tomjon, on verge of being crowned king, begs Hwel to tell him what to do to get himself out of the situation. This all points to Tomjon being something of an aberration, his greatness dependent on magic and wordcraft.



Pages 184-213

Pages 184-213 Summary

Tomjon, Hwel and the Fool are drunk in a dwarven bar when the Fool's brand of humor rubs a patron the wrong way. Tomjon defuses the situation, however, when he recognizes the dwarf in question as a greasepaint salesman. The dwarf is overjoyed to learn that Tomjon is among the actors he saw the previous week. Tomjon performs a few lines, sending the assembled dwarves into a fit of melancholic weeping. Finally realizing that his drinking companions are with the theater, the Fool declares that he's come five-hundred miles to find them.

The next day, Hwel tells Vitoller of the Fool's proposal. The Fool wishes Hwel to write a play upon a provided plot and then to perform it in Lancre. In the course of deciding whether or not Hwel should take the job, Vitoller reveals that he is indebted to loansharks for the construction of the new theater. Hearing this, Hwel agrees. Tomjon is anxious to see the Ramtops, the purported place of Tomjon's birth.

Hwel busily works on the new play. Tomjon, meanwhile, continues to have his dreams interrupted by broadcasts from Nanny's crystal ball. It seems the witches are preparing a spell to compel Tomjon to come to the Ramtops but are playing fast and loose with the recipe components. Unable to sleep, Tomjon looks through the mountain of crumpled castoffs from Hwel's creative process.

The play is finished. Vitoller approves but is having second thoughts about the trip to Ramtops. Hwel points out that only he, Tomjon and the apprentices will be making the trips. Most everyone else will remain behind. Vitoller admits he is worried about Tomjon, fearful of what destiny might await him.

Granny and Nanny, watching Tomjon through Nanny's crystal ball, speculate as to what the returning prince might be planning in the way of recovering the throne. Since the crystal ball does not have sound, they can't tell what's happening, but they do note that Tomjon is preparing for a trip. Magrat is alarmed at her colleagues' sudden willingness to meddle in political affairs. Nanny argues that Granny has made up her mind. Magrat borrows Nanny's crystal ball, which she then uses to spy on the Fool.

The troupe makes its way to the Ramtops, stopping every so often to put on a play. Hwel notes that the new play doesn't seem to have the same impact as his other works, and so he continues to tweak the scripts from one performance to the next. One day, with the Ramtops looming in the distance, the troupe is set upon by bandits. Tomjon delivers an excellent speech that moves most of the bandits to tears, but their leader, much to Tomjon's surprise, is still intent on robbing them. Just then, a milk-jug falls out of the sky and on to the bandit leader's head. The troupe, while very much surprised, continues on its way. Elsewhere, Magrat complains that Granny destroyed one of her favorite milk jugs. The kind you can't get anymore.



Now in the Ramptops, the troupe is lost in the moorlands. They decide to ask directions from the "woman in the funny hat." Tomjon notes that she'd been spying on them, trying to hide whenever she is spotted. Granny Weatherwax, pretending to be an old woman gathering wood, tells them they've come too far and to go back two miles. Some time later, still lost, they encounter Magrat, who gives them further instructions. Finally, lost yet again, they meet Nanny, who joins them as a guide.

Pages 184-213 Analysis

The observant reader will begin to suspect that Tomjon and the Fool are brothers at this point. Hwel notes the resemblance in the bar but dismisses it as a trick of the light. With this in mind, it's interesting to note that the Fool and Tomjon are almost diametric opposites, almost to the point that the Fool seems cursed in every way that Tomjon is blessed. Tomjon is a man of many roles. The Fool has just the one, and he doesn't like it very much.

Lord Felmet sends the Fool to Ankh-Morpork as part of his plan to destroy the past, but in so doing Felmet unwittingly drags the past, in the form of Tomjon, back to Ramptops. This speaks of a common trope in heroic literature: Destiny. There is a sense here that the truth will not be trifled with. Much as Oedipus Rex could not escape his prophecy, Lord Felmet cannot escape justice. Any efforts to evade destiny only serve to hasten destiny's arrival.

The story contains a strong implication that Hwel's play, since it is based upon a lie, is somehow unnatural. The audience doesn't warm to it in the manner of Hwel's other works. Even though the plot is flawless, the characters engaging and the dialogue witty, it still leaves the viewer cold and unmoved. Later, during the final performance, Tomjon notes that the play is trying to assume another shape, presumably the shape of truth. Hwel is unable to see the problem and so continues to hammer away at the piece.



Pages 214-232

Pages 214-232 Summary

Nanny reports to Granny that Tomjon and his companions have come to put on a play. Granny is dubious, insisting that the play is likely a cover for their true intentions of overthrowing Lord Felmet. Nanny also comments that Tomjon doesn't seem to like the Ramptops very much. Meanwhile, Hwel meets with Lord and Lady Felmet. The king is very pleased with the play, declaring that the events are depicted exactly as they occurred. Hwel, who is more than a bit unsettled by the Lord and Lady and not too fond of Lancre, is anxious to have the production over and done with. Before the Lady can interject, Lord Felmet pays out the promised 100 silver coins.

Magrat meets the Fool in the meadow by the lake. Though he is bent on wooing her, Magrat is more concerned with using her feminine wiles to learn about the play. Despite his insistence that he shouldn't divulge any information, the Fool gives everything away, including information on how to gain access to the play. He warns Magrat that Lord Felmet is expecting her and the other witches. Having learned the information that she came for, Magrat departs. The Fool laments not having had a chance to give Magrat the necklace he bought her.

On their way to the performance, Nanny and Granny discuss the greater purpose of the play, trying to guess as to what Tomjon is up to. Granny imagines that he might well leap off the stage and stab Lord Felmet to death. At the gate, they are met by the Fool. He invites Magrat to join him in one of the towers, arguing that it offers a great view of the courtyard where the play is to be held.

Nanny and Granny take their seats. The play begins. It occurs to Granny that the play constitutes a type of magic wielded by non-magical people, people who don't know the rules by which magic is governed. Backstage, much has already begun to go wrong, causing Hwel to fear the worst. Hwel gives the witch-actors a pep-talk. Realizing he hasn't a crown to wear as the evil king, Tomjon checks the props trunk where he finds and dons the true crown of Lancre.

The witches take issue with the play's vile depiction of them. The ghost of King Verence is horrified to hear his own son misrepresenting him, painting his own father as an evil tyrant. Granny is unsettled by the power of false history, despairing in the face of a lie so well crafted. Nanny is outraged by the implication that the witches put babies into cauldrons, but Granny urges restraint lest they worsen the problem. Having heard enough, Granny takes Nanny's hand and leads her away. Meanwhile, at the head of the audience, Lord Felmet orders his guardsmen to arrest the witches.

Backstage, Tomjon offers a few tips to the actor playing Death. It occurs to Tomjon that the play seems to be trying to force itself into a different shape. Suddenly, he is overcome by icy coldness and the sensation that something is trying to speak to him.



Tomjon flees for the door. Elsewhere, Lord Felmet's guards mistakenly arrest the actors playing the witches rather than the witches themselves.

Pages 214-232 Analysis

Granny has many preconceived notions concerning Tomjon. She has bought into the fairy tale of the prince come to reclaim his birthright. This portrays Granny, despite all evidence to the contrary, as something of a romantic character. She'd rather see the story unfold in a way that is poetically just. This also casts her into a role that is mildly antagonistic toward Tomjon. Since Granny wants to see Tomjon in the throne, she is add odds with Tomjon's desire not to be placed there. Granny has cast the young man into a role he is unwilling to play.

The lakeside encounter between Magrat and the Fool marks the first fracture in the Fool's thus far solid duty to Lord Felmet. Though he was ordered not to divulge information to the witches, the Fool nevertheless does so. What's more, he also willingly provides intelligence concerning the play, its intent, and how one might gain access. In other words, the Fool knowingly betrays Lord Felmet. This foreshadows the moment during the play when the Fool comes forward and bears witness against Lord Felmet for the murder of Verence.

Now seeing the witches' reaction to the play, the reader is again reminded that the matter is very personal for the witches. This is their reputations at stake, and not merely as witches, but as human being. Nanny, though a witch, is also a loving mother of several grown children. She is understandably horrified and outraged by the implication that she would throw babies into a cauldron.



Pages 233-264

Pages 233-264 Summary

The real witches are backstage looking at the script. They conclude that while they shouldn't change the words of the play, it would be fair game to make the actors forget their lines. Hwel appears, compliments the witches on their costumes, and orders them to the stage. Disappointed with the thunder-makers, Hwel demands thunder from the heavens. He is answered by a crack of thunder so loud that it leaves his ears ringing. The sentient storm is now fully matured and ready to join the show.

On stage, the witches make a mockery of the production by playing with their props downstage, distracting the audience from the actors. Hwel, watching from the wings, is livid. The actors struggle to remember their lines as Tomjon does his best to feed them cues and lines. Granny casts a spell on the actors, forcing them to enact the truth. They begin playing out, against their will, the moments leading up to the murder of King Verence.

The grim reaper himself comes upon the actor preparing to play death. With a snap of his bony fingers, he forces the actor to "forget." Hearing his cue, Death walks out on stage and begins to deliver his lines but is overcome by stage fright. Seeing a fellow actor in trouble, Tomjon feeds Death his lines. The murder's reenactment continues, prompting Lord Felmet to hysterically protest. The ghost of Verence possesses Tomjon to accuse Lord Felmet of murder.

When Lord Felmet orders the witches arrested, the Fool intercedes, claiming witness to Verence's murder. Felmet, suddenly unhinged, tries to attack the Fool, his wife and himself with a stage dagger. Granny declares that Tomjon is heir to the throne. Nanny knocks Lady Felmet unconscious with a cauldron. Lord Felmet, having fled, wanders the emptiest halls of castle Lancre, behaving as if he is already a haunting spirit. Death, tagging along, is unable to convince Felmet otherwise. Finally Lord Felmet stumbles, falls off a ledge, and dies. Felmet is a ghost at last.

Later, Tomjon quietly mulls the idea of being king. His thoughts turn to his adopted family and the troupe. Tomjon feels little connection to Lancre and the spectral father whom he is assured is seated at the head of the table. When Hwel is unable to provide Tomjon with the words he seeks, Tomjon addresses the assembly himself, refusing the kingship. Hwel points out that Tomjon is king by birth. Seeing this unfold, Magrat approaches with the Fool in tow.

Days later, the coven discusses the recent banquet, presumably held in the new king's honor. Magrat is depressed; the Fool - whose actual name is also Verence - hasn't had time for her since becoming king. Elsewhere, Tomjon and Hwel discuss their overland trip home, planning to offer performances along the road home. Hwel is working on a



new play: The Lancre King. The new King Verence, formerly known as the Fool, visits Magrat's cottage bearing wine and flowers. He falls asleep beside Magrat's fireplace.

Lady Felmet escapes from her prison and makes her way out to the moors, where she is eventually cornered by a collective of wildlife and presumably slain. In another part of the moors, the coven is in session. The two elder members, Granny and Nanny, reveal a secret to Magrat: While Tomjon and Verence are indeed brothers, they share a mother rather than a father. Verence is the product of a dalliance between the queen and the court jester. Magrat is exasperated by her elders but says that she won't tell Verence. Granny reminds Magrat that destiny is controlled by people, not the other way around.

Pages 233-264 Analysis

Granny counsels against creating new words for the play, instead opting to have the actors forget the existing words. The implication here is that creation is another form of recreation, another way to rewrite history. Granny can't tell the actors what to say without telling a different lie. Once the actors have forgotten their lines, the slate is blank. With a slight magical nudge from Granny, the play is allowed to assume the shape that it prefers: that of the truth. The fact that Lord Felmet's guards arrest the witch-actors rather than the witches themselves, suggests that Felmet's men have an impaired ability to tell truth from facsimile. Considering their lord, this isn't surprising.

As the climax approaches, the frequency of supernatural involvement increases. The storm thunders right on cue. Granny's "truth" spell is apparent to the entire audience. The ghost of Verence possesses Tomjon. Death himself takes the stage. These events all point to a matter of great importance, suggesting that kingship is something more important than a mere device of government. With the weight of such forces behind it, it's almost impossible to imagine that one could simply choose not to be king.

The Fool trades his jester's cap for a crown, becoming the new King Verence. In doing so, he has inherited yet another dutiful burden. King Verence is pleased to observe, however, that being a king "is no laughing matter." He is, at long last, worthy of dignity. Verence's visit to Magrat's cottage indicates that their love will endure, albeit forced between the cracks of a king's duty. Since it is Magrat who first showed Verence that it was possible to be more than a fool, the reader can rest assured that, with Magrat's help, the king is done with foolishness. As king, all things are possible.



Characters

Granny Esme Weatherwax

Granny Weatherwax is the matriarch of the coven. She is authoritarian, proper and also something of a prude. Her reputation as a witch, coupled with her confident air, allows Granny to take charge of any situation in which she finds herself. Granny is also highly egotistical, feeling that others should accommodate for her rather than she accommodating them. For the most part, the world happily obliges. People, birds and, on occasion, even mountains, will make way for Granny Weatherwax.

Granny has a strong sense of magical ethics. She feels that, were a witch to use magic to influence politics, magic would then continually be needed to maintain her will in the political realm. By using magic in such a way, Granny feels, the witch invalidates the destinies of man and compromises free will. Granny does have her limits, however. When she is nearly run down in the street by a coachman that should have (in her mind) given her a wide berth, Granny's ego demands she meddle in the affairs of kings.

Despite her rough exterior, Granny is at heart, a good person. She grows indignant at the sight of injustice. She carefully sees to Tomjon's wellbeing. Even her system of ethics, which largely centers itself around non-involvement, is intended to create the greatest good for the greatest number of people. That being said, it is Granny who most readily throws aside her ethics when confronted by a wrong in need of righting. As much as Granny is a woman of principle, she is also a woman of compassion.

Magrat Garlick

The newest to witch-hood and youngest of the coven, Magrat is still in the blush of youth. Being something of a bookworm, Magrat is better versed in the theory of magic than in its practice. She often insists on elaborate and—in the minds of her elders—unnecessary rituals. Magrat has yet to grasp the degree to which magic is based on instinct and will. She would rather that magic were neat, tidy and entirely predictable. This reflects Magrat's personality: someone who prefers order and procedure.

Despite her need for order, Magrat is still, by virtue of her age, prone to behaving like an adolescent. She is self-conscious and goes out of her way to dress like a witch, selecting her attire based on presentation rather than function. She also worries about her appearance as a young woman. This is most obvious in her dealings with the Fool, by whom she is quickly smitten. In particular, Magrat spends much time and attention on her hair, which despite her best magical efforts, remains frizzy and unmanageable.

Despite her appreciation for strong principles, Magrat is continually exasperated by the Fool's loyalty to Lord Felmet, a man obviously unworthy of fealty. She repeatedly attempts to convince the Fool to abandon Felmet's employ but is frustrated each time. Ironically, Magrat is annoyed with her elders when they violate their code of ethics to



meddle in affairs. She can't see the parallel between the exceptions that Granny and Nanny choose to make and the exceptions she would ask of the Fool.

Nanny Ogg

Likely the eldest-most member of the coven, Nanny Ogg is also the most social. Having several grown children, Nanny is well integrated into Lancre society. This gives her a strong support and control network in form of children, grandchildren and in-laws. Nanny Ogg's family acts as her eyes, ears and fists.

Nanny is quite a bit more bohemian than her coven colleagues. She is prone to singing, dancing and heavy drinking. Granny, in particular, is often frustrated by Nanny's tendency to get drunk, dance on tabletops, and sing a song about a certain hedgehog. Of all the witches, Nanny is one who seems to have the most fun.

King Verence

King Verence is the ruling monarch of Lancre. He is assassinated by Lord Felmet and spends most of the story as a ghost.

The Fool

The Fool is the court jester of Lancre castle. He is also the illegitimate son of the Queen and ultimately ascends to the throne.

Death

Death is the personification of death, the grim reaper. He generally appears just before or after someone dies, but, uncharacteristically, chooses to play himself in one of Hwel's plays.

Lady Felmet

Lady Felmet is the wife of Lord Leonal Helmet. Very much modeled after Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, Lady Felmet is the source of her husband's ambition.

Lord Leonal Felmet

Leonal Felmet is the duke who, at his wife's behest, usurps the throne of Lancre. His guilt at having murdered Verence eventually drives him insane.



Tomjon

Tomjon is the son of Verence and the rightful heir to throne of Lancre. He eventually abdicates his claim to the throne, allowing his half-brother, the Fool, to take his place. Tomjon would prefer to return to acting.

Olwin Vitoller

Olwin Vitoller is a charismatic and accomplished actor. He adopts Tomjon at the behest of the witches Granny, Nanny and Magrat.

Mrs. Vitoller

Mrs. Vitoller is the wife of Otwin and the adopted mother of Tomjon.

The Storm

The Storm is a recurring personified weather system. It matures throughout the story, appearing for a thunderous climax at the end.

Hwel

Hwel is the playwright for Vitoller's troupe. He is clearly inspired by William Shakespeare.

The Kingdom

The kingdom of Lancre is personified. It does not wish to have Leonal Felmet as its ruler because Leonal Felmet does not care for the kingdom. The kingdom's indignation serves as an impetus for the witches to dethrone Felmet.

Goodie Whemper

Good Whemper, now deceased, is the witch who taught witchcraft to Magrat.

Black Aliss

Black Aliss is a famous witch credited for performing many astonishing feats of magic. She serves as the standard by which a witch's achievement is judged.



Nanny Ogg's Children

Nanny Ogg has several children, all of whom are now fully grown. She often refers to them throughout the story.

Citizens of Lancre

The citizens of Lancere are very matter-of-fact. They react to King Felmet's tyranny with relative indifference.

The Ghosts of Lancre Castle

When King Verence dies and becomes a ghost, he discovers that Lancre castle his haunted by various ghosts, including previous kings of Lancre.

Witches

In Lancre, though witches are regarded with great respect, they are neither feared nor loved. Citizens do their best to stay out of a witch's way and witches do their best to stay out of Lancre politics.

Kings

The witches hypothesize that Lancre functions best when lead by an unremarkable leader, someone with limited imagination and few ideas.

Entertainers

Granny Weatherwax notes that actors possess a certain kind of magical ability that allows them to create their own reality.

Dwarves

Hwel, who is himself a dwarf, refers to dwarves several times throughout the story. They are characterized as greedy, often digging, and predominantly below ground.



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.

Lancre Castle

Lancre castle is a crumbling stronghold precipitously situated on the slanting edge of a cliff.

The Crown of Lancre

The crown of Lancre is a heavy, unattractive crown worn by the ruling monarch of Lancre. Granny Weatherax learns that it is both magical and laden with the suffering of many prior kings.

Ramptop

Ramptop is the mountainous region in which Lancre is located. Level ground is at a premium.

Lancre

Lancre is the kingdom in which much of Wyrd Sisters takes place. The plot centers upon the rulership of Lancre.

Ankh-Morpork

Ankh-Morpork is one of the larger, more populous cities of Discworld.

Granny's Broomstick

Granny Weatherwax's broomstick is noted for unreliability. In particular it has trouble starting up.



Crystal Ball

The witches routinely use a crystal ball to monitor Tomjon's coming of age. While it lacks sound, it does seem to transmit sound to those who are observed.

Stone from Lancre Castle

Since the ghost of King Verence must forever haunt Lancre Castle, the witches remove a stone from the castle wall so that the ghost may travel elsewhere.

Grimoires

Magrat learned much of her witchcraft from a collection of grimoires, or magic books. As a result, the other two witches, Granny and Nanny, find Magrat's methods overly formal and unnecessarily particular.

The Fool's Cap

The Fool wears a "horned" cap covered with bells.



Themes

Duty and Responsibility

In *Wyrd Sisters*, duty and responsibility work against one another. Tomjon refuses the kingship, arguing that, despite his pedigree, he is ill suited to the job. Hwel rebuts by declaring that "A king isn't something you're good at, it's something you are." Similarly, the Fool hates his role as fool but nevertheless is compelled to remain loyal to a king that proves himself, time and again, malign and insane. Because the Fool is bound by duty, he is incapable of behaving responsibly. Instead duty requires him to enact the will of a man whom he knows to be insane. Similarly, had Tomjon accepted the crown, he'd have done so irresponsibly, with full knowledge that he'd make for a poor king.

Granny Weatherwax represents a more a libertarian view of duty and responsibility. Her duty is to firstly to herself and her own code of ethics. Until her own interests are impinged upon, she is content to leave the land and its king to fend for itself. Granny is therefore reluctant (at first) to use magic to influence events, fearing that one spell would lead to another and another. She would rather trust individuals to govern themselves independent of her involvement. This is apparent to Magrat when Granny, having deprived the broomstick-riding Magrat of most of her magic, nevertheless trusts the younger witch to reach the ground safely.

In the end, responsibility wins out. Tomjon does not take the throne of Lancre and the Fool ultimately turns on Lord Felmet. Each man, instead, opts to take the job to which he is best suited. Tomjon returns to the theatre, where his aptitude for acting will be best realized. The Fool, meanwhile, who has already proved his skill at politics, takes the crown. The plot demonstrates a meritocratic system, where individuals are valued and measured by personal ability, rather than birth and privilege.

History

In *Wyrd Sisters*, history provides the standard by which the present is judged. Granny Weatherwax is inspired to achieve greatness by the stories of the legendary Black Aliss. Aliss serves as a goal, a benchmark for Granny's status as a witch. Similarly, Lord Felmet is repeatedly judged against his predecessors. The collective understanding of kingship is defined by the kings who have come before. It is history which defines culture as well as a citizen's understanding of his or her place within that culture.

Considering history's role in understanding the present, it is clear what Granny Weatherwax finds so troubling about the play commissioned by Lord Felmet. As historical fiction, the play proposes to represent the past. Unfortunately Hwel's play—perhaps through no fault of his own - tells a story that is the exact opposite of truth. This demonstrates the danger of rhetoric, the method by which words can be used to



obscure or "create" the truth. Since mankind's understanding of history is articulated with words, the existence of rhetoric is troublesome at best.

In *Wyrd Sisters* there is a sense of objective history, a kind of history which is true, undeniable and unchangeable. This is, of course, literally so: the past cannot truly be altered. Pratchett goes one step further, however, in also presenting an understanding of history which cannot be denied. Even before the witches interfere with the play, the production is plagued with problems. Tomjon notes that it seems almost as if the play is resisting the actor's efforts to bend it into an unnatural shape. The truth manifests itself despite the artifice of the play.

Performance

In *Wyrd Sisters*, identity is largely dependent on performance. Magrat performs the role of witch in how she dresses and acts. She wears silver jewelry and elaborate robes. She tries to speak authoritatively. Granny, being an older, more experienced witch, performs her role less self-consciously. She wears the black cloak befitting her station, but she's not one for affectations. For Granny, being a witch is more about manifesting one's will. She does what she wants, when she wants, and goes where she wishes. Those in Granny's path can sense her determination. This is due largely to Granny's indomitable demeanor. She manifests the role of witch through action.

Tomjon, who Granny has magically blessed to "always be whatever he thinks he is" has an uncanny knack for performance. So perfect is Tomjon's role-playing that he is able to channel the author's intent better than the author himself. Interestingly, Tomjon is able to summon dialogue entirely out of context and still move a crowd as if it were in context. This suggests that language has the power to affect people independently of the meaning that words convey. There is also a sense, however, that Tomjon can only use this ability if provided with a script. Tomjon is effectively channeling the genius of Hwel.

Lord Felmet is unable to perform the role of king. Though he has usurped the throne and has exercised his kingly power to oppress the people, the citizens of Lancre refuse to recognize his authority. Further, the very land itself, including the plants and animals therein, rejects his rule. This suggests that kingship requires something more than mere performance. This reinforces Hwel's notion that a king is something that one is, rather than something that one does.



Style

Point of View

Pratchett writes in a third person omniscient perspective. Events are usually described relative to the current character of interest, jumping between characters as the story unfolds. This transition is sometimes abrupt, with the switch occurring in the span of a paragraph. Omniscience aside, the author generally focuses on one character at a time, only allowing the reader "inside the head" of the currently active character.

Pratchett is authoritative. There is very much a sense that the author is possessed of all knowledge: past, present and future. Further, the author often makes "round world" references to things such as light bulbs, subways and Zen philosophy. This draws attention to the artifice of the story, reminding the reader that the "how" of storytelling is just as important as the story itself. It also suggests that the authority of Discworld, Terry Pratchett himself, is very much of the reader's world.

Pratchett will often explicate his characters rather than have the reader interpret their behavior. He will, for example, directly tell the reader that Granny Weatherwax is too proud to admit ignorance. This approach produces a more directed style of storytelling, where the story is defined more by the author's intent than from the reader's engagement with the text. This is not to say, however, that the characters are without ambiguity; the breadth of the Fool's character is not entirely apparent until late the story.

Setting

The setting of Discworld, as its name implies, is a planetary-sized flat disc. It is held aloft by four elephants, who themselves stand atop the Great Turtle A'tuin. The disc rotates, wheeling its way through seasons. The sun, meanwhile, orbits the disc, passing beneath the disc at night and rising over the rim at dawn. Pratchett notes that when the sun passes below the disc, an elephant must move a leg to allow it by. This suggests that Discworld's cosmology is ridiculous, geared more for humor rather than plausibility.

Functionally, Discworld is similar to Earth. Days are of approximately the same length. Seasons, as previously noted, come and go. Weather systems (though apparently self-aware and long-lived) occur as one might expect. Exactly as Earth, the surface of Discworld is populated with mountains, forests and animal life. Perhaps the starkest difference between Earth and Discworld, other than the obvious difference in shape, is that Discworld is suffused with magic and the supernatural. Pratchett makes several references to wizards, witches, ghosts, exotic creatures and the existence of gods.

Most of the story centers on the mountainous region of Ramtop and, specifically, the kingdom of Lancre. Lancre, like most of the Ramptops, is sloped, forested and subject to frequent rains. The kingdom is ruled from the crumbling Castle Lancre which,



perched upon a sloping ledge, exists in perpetual danger of sliding from its foundation into the neighboring chasm.

Language and Meaning

Granny Weatherwax recognizes language as having its own sort of magic. Upon first meeting the performer Otwin Vitoller, she is overcome by the quality of his voice and the richness of his words. Granny acknowledges Otwin as a kind of peer, a practitioner of another kind of magic. Later in the story, it occurs to Granny that plays, by emulating reality, can actually alter people's perception of the world. They effectively have the power to rewrite history by repackaging events in a more satisfying form.

Lord Felmet lives in fear of the words "liar," "usurper," and "murderer." They allude to unpleasant truths that Lord Felmet would sooner avoid. The Fool, however, demonstrates how such associations can be used to one's advantage. Pleasant words can be paired with unpleasant actions, thus making the actions seem more agreeable. Unpleasant words meanwhile, in the form of rumor, can be used to slander others.

Pratchett often uses misunderstood words as a vehicle for humor. Being a proud witch, Granny Weatherwax is unwilling to admit she doesn't know the word "theatre." After learning that a "theatre" is where one goes to see a "play," Granny decides that a "theatre" must be a musical instrument. Later, Granny makes a similar mistake with the word "thespian," believing that it refers to a native of Thespia. This device also illustrates the disconnect between sign and signifier which rhetoric exploits.

Structure

Though the novel is not broken up into identifiable chapters, different sections and situations are separated from one another by a single blank line. The earliest sections concern the assassination of King Verence and the usurpation of the throne by Lord Felmet. Lord Felmet's disrespect for the land brings him into conflict with a local coven of witches. The remainder of the novel involves the witches' efforts to, through magic and manipulation, seat a more suitable king.

Pratchett foreshadows liberally, both overtly and through implication. Granny, for example, suggests that kingship is a job fit for a "fool." The two elder witches, Granny and Nanny, talk at length concerning the ethics of magic, illustrating why witches and wizards should not use magic to tinker with politics. Since all three witches magically interfere with Tomjon's growth and development, there is every indication that the prince is now unsuitable for the throne, as he is now tainted by magic. Only the fool, as Granny unwittingly observed, is fit to be king.

Throughout much of the story, there is a sense that events must follow a path preordained by destiny. Many of the standard tropes are employed: a disinherited prince unaware of his heritage, raised by adopted parents, and protected by unseen

guardians. Since the destiny does not see fruition, in direct opposition to the employed tropes, the Wyrdsisters is a deconstructionist tale in addition to being a parody.



Quotes

"You have to stay where you were killed. That's what haunting means. Take it from me. I know." —page 10

"It was a rich and wonderful voice, with ever diphthong gliding into place. It was a golden brown voice." —page 31

"He raised taxes and burned a few villages on general principles, just to show everyone who they were dealing with. It didn't seem to have any effect."—page 57

"I can't go around mucking with kings just because you don't like them. Where would it all end?" —page 81

"The air or menace was only slightly dispelled by the sound of her running up and down outside, trying to get her broomstick started." —page 107

"Sorry about that, your majesty. It's just her showing off. She doesn't even know where Thespia is." —page 133

"I hate it. But that's got nothing to do with it. If I've got to be a fool, I'll do it properly." —page 159

"He wasn't very good at quaffing. Too much of the drink actually landed in his mouth. Judging by the taste in it, some incontinent creature had also scored a direct hit." —page 187

"Gods, how could anyone like a kingdom like this?" —page 215

"No pain, thought the fool. Funny, that. On the other hand, you obviously can't feel pain when you're dead. It would be wasted." —page 241

"A king isn't something you're good at, it's something you are." —page 253

"The front ranks of the massed creatures opened to let her pass, and then closed in again. Even the rabbits. The kingdom exhaled." —page 261



Topics for Discussion

If Duke Felmet doesn't like the kingdom of Lancre, why does he kill King Verence to attain it?

If the kingdom rejected Duke Felmet as king, how might it have reacted to a King Tomjon?

Throughout most of the novel, Granny Weatherwax is opposed to meddling in political affairs. What changes her mind?

If the Fool were missing from the story, how might the story be different?

In what way are the witches of Wyrd Sisters the same or different from the common stereotype of witches?

Granny Weatherwax is convinced that words have a special power to rewrite history. Is this true? Why or why not?

Will the Fool, the new King Verence, make a good king? Why or why not? What qualities does he possess that make him good or bad for the job?