

by Terry Patterson

In a brain bigger than a city, with geological slowness, He thinks only of the Weight.

Most of the weight is of course accounted for by Berilia, Tubul, Great T'Phon and Jerakeen, the four giant elephants upon whose broad and startanned shoulders the disc of the World rests, garlanded by the long waterfall at its vast circumference and domed by the baby-blue vault of Heaven.

Astropsychology has been, as yet, unable to establish what they think about.

The Great Turtle was a mere hypothesis until the day the small and secretive kingdom of Krull, whose rim-most mountains project out over the Rimfall, built a gantry and pulley arrangement at the tip of the most precipitous crag and lowered several observers over the Edge in a quartzwindowed brass vessel to peer through the mist veils.

The early astrozoologists, hauled back from their long dangle by enormous teams of slaves, were able to bring back much information about the shape and nature of A'Tuin and the elephants but this did not resolve fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of the universe.

For example, what was Atuin's actual sex? This vital question, said the Astrozoologists with mounting authority, would not be answered until a larger and more powerful gantry was constructed for a deep-space vessel. In the meantime they could only speculate about the revealed cosmos.

There was, for example, the theory that A'Tuin had come from nowhere and would continue at a uniform crawl, or steady gait, into nowhere, for all time. This theory was popular among academics. An alternative, favoured by those of a religious persuasion, was that A'Tuin was crawling from the Birthplace to the Time of Mating, as were all the stars in the sky which were, obviously, also carried by giant turtles. When they arrived they would briefly and passionately



bravely responding to the situation by feverishly demolishing the bridges. But already the ships in the Morpork docks - laden with grain, cotton and timber, and coated with tar - were blazing merrily and, their moorings burnt to ashes, were breasting the river Ankh on the ebb tide, igniting riverside palaces and bowers as they drifted like drowning fireflies towards the sea. In any case, sparks were riding the breeze and touching down far across the river in hidden gardens and remote rickyards. The smoke from the merry burning rose miles high, in a wind-sculpted black column that could be seen across the whole of the discworld. It was certainly impressive from the cool, dark hilltop a few leagues away, where two figures were watching with considerable interest.

The taller of the pair was chewing on a chicken leg and leaning on a sword that was only marginally shorter than the average man. If it wasn't for the air of wary intelligence about him it might have been supposed that he was a barbarian from the hubland wastes.

His partner was much shorter and wrapped from head to toe in a brown cloak. Later, when he has occasion to move, it will be seen that he moves lightly, cat-like.

The two had barely exchanged a word in the last twenty minutes except for a short and inconclusive argument as to whether a particularly powerful explosion had been the oil bond store or the workshop of Kerible the Enchanter. Money hinged on the fact.

Now the big man finished gnawing at the bone and tossed it into the grass, smiling ruefully.

"There go all those little alleyways," he said. "I liked them."

"All the treasure houses," said the small man. He added thoughtfully, "Do gems burn, I wonder? 'Tis said they're kin to coal."

"All the gold, melting and running down the gutters," said the big one, ignoring him. "And all the wine, boiling in the barrels."

"There were rats," said his brown companion.

The small swordsman known as the Weasel said nothing. He was watching the road in the ruddy light. Few had come that way since the widershins gate had been one of the first to collapse in a shower of white-hot embers.

But two were coming up it now. The Weasel's eyes always at their sharpest in gloom and half-light, made out the shapes of two mounted men and some sort of low beast behind them. Doubtless a rich merchant escaping with as much treasure as he could lay frantic hands on. The Weasel said as much to his companion, who sighed.

"The status of footpad ill suits us," said the barbarian, "but as you say, times are hard and there are no soft beds tonight."

He shifted his grip on his sword and, as the leading rider drew near, stepped out onto the road with a hand held up and his face set in a grin nicely calculated to reassure yet threaten.

"Your pardon, sir-" he began.

The rider reined in his horse and drew back his hood. The big man looked into a face blotched with superficial burns and punctuated by tufts of singed beard. Even the eyebrows had gone.

"Bugger off," said the face. "You're Bravd the Hublander, aren't you?"

\*The shape and cosmology of the disc system are perhaps worthy of note at this point. There are, of course, two major directions on the disc: Hubward and Rimward. But since the disc itself revolves at the rate of once every eight hundred days (in order to distribute the weight fairly upon its supportive pachyderms, according to Re-forgule of Krull) there are also two lesser directions, which are Turnwise and Widdershins. Since the disc's tiny orbiting sunlet maintains a fixed orbit while the majestic disc turns slowly beneath it, it will be readily deduced that a disc year consists of not four but eight seasons. The summers are those times when the sun rises or

and frosty nights drag on towards Backspindlewinter and a new Hogs' Watch Night nestling like a frozen jewel at its heart.

Since the Hub is never closely warmed by the weak sun the lands there are locked in permafrost. The Rim, on the other hand, is a region of sunny islands and balmy days. There are, of course, eight days in a disc week and eight colours in its light spectrum. Eight is a number of some considerable occult significance on the disc and must never, ever, be spoken by a wizard.

Precisely why all the above should be so is not clear, but goes some way to explain why, on the disc, the Gods are not so much worshipped as blamed.

Bravd became aware that he had fumbled the initiative.

"Just go away, will you?" said the rider. "I just haven't got time for you, do you understand?" He looked around and added: "That goes for your shadow-loving fleabag partner too, wherever he's hiding."

The Weasel stepped up to the horse and peered at the dishevelled figure.

"Why, it's Rincewind the wizard, isn't it?" he said in tones of delight, meanwhile filing the wizard's description of him in his memory for leisurely vengeance. "I thought I recognized the voice."

Bravd spat and sheathed his sword. It was seldom worth tangling with wizards, they so rarely had any treasure worth speaking of.

"He talks pretty big for a gutter wizard," he muttered.

"You don't understand at all," said the wizard wearily. "I'm so scared of you my spine has turned to jelly, it's just that I'm suffering from an overdose of terror right now. I mean, when I've got over that then I'll have time to be decently frightened of you."

The Weasel pointed towards the burning city. "You've been through that?" he asked.

plete and utter chaos was lightning, then he'd be the sort to stand on a hilltop in a thunderstorm wearing wet copper armour and shouting "All gods are bastards". Got any food?"

"There's some chicken," said Weasel. "in exchange for a story." "What's his name?" said Bravd, who tended to lag behind in conversations.

"Twoflower."

"Twoflower?" said Bravd. "What a funny name."

"You," said Rincewind, dismounting, 'do not know the half of it. Chicken, you say?"

"Devilled," said Weasel. The wizard groaned.

"That reminds me," added the Weasel, snapping his fingers, "there was a really big explosion about, oh, half an hour ago."

"That was the oil bond store going up," said Rincewind, wincing at the memory of the burning rain.

Weasel turned and grinned expectantly at his companion, who grunted and handed over a coin from his pouch. Then there was a Scream from the roadway, cut off abruptly. Rincewind did not look up from his chicken.

"One of the things he can't do, he can't ride a horse," he said. Then he stiffened as if sandbagged by a sudden recollection, gave a small yelp of terror and dashed into the gloom. When he returned, the being called Twoflower was hanging limply over his shoulder. It was small and skinny, and dressed very oddly in a pair of knee length britches and a shirt in such a violent and vivid conflict of colours that Weasel's fastidious eye was offended even in the half-light.

"No bones broken, by the feel of things," said Rincewind. He was breathing heavily. Bravd winked at the Weasel and went to investigate the shape that they assumed was a pack animal.

cunning even than you, Weasel."

"What is it called then, this mighty magic?"

Rincewind shrugged. "in our tongue it is reflected-sound-as-of-underground-spirits. Is there any wine?"

"You must know that I am not without artifice where magic is concerned," said Weasel. "only last year did I - assisted by my friend there - part the notoriously powerful Archmage of Ymitury from his staff, his belt of moon jewels and his life, in that approximate order. I do not fear this reflected-sound-of-underground-spirits of which you speak. However," he added, "you engage my interest. Perhaps you would care to tell me more?"

Bravd looked at the shape on the road. It was closer now, and clearer in the pre-dawn light. It looked for all the world like a--

"A box on legs?" he said.

"I'll tell you about it," said Rincewind. "if there's any wine, that is."

Down in the valley there was a roar and a hiss. Someone more thoughtful than the rest had ordered to be shut the big river gates that were at the point where the Ankh flowed out of the twin city. Denied its usual egress, the river had burst its banks and was pouring down the fire-ravaged streets. Soon the continent of flame became a series of islands, each one growing smaller as the dark tide rose. And up from the city of fumes and smoke rose a broiling cloud of steam, covering the stars. Weasel thought that it looked like some dark fungus or mushroom.

The twin city of proud Ankh and pestilent Morpork, of which all the other cities of time and space are, as it were, mere reflections, has stood many assaults in its long and crowded history and has always risen to flourish again. So the fire and its subsequent flood, which destroyed everything left that was not flammable and added a particularly noisome flux to the survivors' problems, did not mark



Now the stranger was standing on the quayside watching several straining seamen carry a large brass-bound chest down the gangplank. Another man, obviously the captain, was standing beside him. There was about the seaman - every nerve in Blind Hugh's body, which tended to vibrate in the presence of even a small amount of impure gold at fifty paces, screamed into his brain - the air of one anticipating imminent enrichment.

Sure enough, when the chest had been deposited on the cobbles, the stranger reached into a pouch and there was the flash of a coin. Several coins Gold. Blind Hugh, his body twanging like a hazel rod in the presence of water, whistled to himself. Then he nudged Wa again, and sent him scurrying off down a nearby alley into the heart of the city. When the captain walked back onto his ship, leaving the newcomer looking faintly bewildered on the quayside, Blind Hugh snatched up his begging cup and made his way across the street with an ingratiating leer. At the sight of him the stranger started to fumble urgently with his money pouch.

"Good day to thee, sire," Blind Hugh began, and found himself looking up into a face with four eyes in it. He turned to run!

"!" said the stranger, and grabbed his arm. Hugh was aware that the sailors lining the rail of the ship were laughing at him. At the same time his specialised senses detected an overpowering impression of money. He froze. The stranger let go and quickly thumbed through a small black book he had taken from his belt. Then he said "Hallo."

"What?" said Hugh. The man looked blank.

"Hallo?" he repeated, rather louder than necessary and so carefully that Hugh could hear the vowels tinkling into place.

"Hallo yourself," Hugh riposted. The stranger smiled widely fumbled yet again in the pouch. This time his hand came out holding a large gold coin. It was in fact slightly larger than an 8,000-dollar Ankhian crown and the design on it was unfamiliar, but it spoke

and freelance gawpers were watching them with interest.

"Look," he said, "I know a good tavern, is that enough?" He shuddered to think of the gold coin escaping from his life. He'd keep that one, even if Ymor confiscated all the rest. And the big chest that comprised most of the newcomer's luggage looked to be full of gold, Hugh decided. The four-eyed man looked at his book.

I would like to be directed to an hotel, place of repose, tavern, a-

"Yes, all right. Come on then," said Hugh hurriedly. He picked up one of the bundles and walked away quickly. The stranger, after a moment's hesitation, strolled after him.

A train of thought shunted its way through Hugh's mind. Getting the newcomer to the Broken Drum so easily was a stroke of luck, no doubt of it, and Ymor would probably reward him. But for all his new acquaintance's mildness there was something about him that made Hugh uneasy, and for the life of him he couldn't figure out what it was. Not the two extra eyes, odd though they were. There was something else. He glanced back. The little man was ambling along in the middle of the street, looking around him with an expression of keen interest.

Something else Hugh saw nearly made him gibber.

The massive wooden chest, which he had last seen resting solidly on the quayside, was following on its master's heels with a gentle rocking gait. Slowly, in case a sudden movement on his part might break his fragile control over his own legs, Hugh bent slightly so that he could see under the chest.

There were lots and lots of little legs. Very deliberately, Hugh turned around and walked very carefully towards the Broken Drum.

"Odd," said Ymor.

"He had this big wooden chest," added Cripple Wa.

"He'd have to be a merchant or a spy," said Ymor.

spies and I expect they eat merchants."

"He looked a bit like a merchant," volunteered Wa. "Except he wasn't fat."

There was a flutter of wings at the window. Ymor shifted his bulk out of the chair and crossed the room, coming back with a large raven. After he'd unfastened the message capsule from its leg it flew to join its fellows lurking among the rafters.

Withel regarded it without love. Ymor's ravens were notoriously loyal to their master, to the extent that Withel's one attempt to promote himself to the rank of greatest thief in Ankh-Morpork had cost their master's right hand man his left eye. But not his life, however. Ymor never grudged a man his ambitions.

"B12," said Ymor, tossing the little phial aside and unrolling the tiny scroll within.

"Gorrin the Cat," said Withel automatically. "On station up in the gong tower at the Temple of Small Gods."

"He says Hugh has taken our stranger to the Broken Drum. Well, that's good enough. Broadman is a - friend of ours, isn't he?"

"Aye," said Withel, "if he knows what's good for trade."

"Among his customers has been your man Gorrin," said Ymor pleasantly, "for he writes here about a box on legs, if I read this scrawl correctly."

He looked at Withel over the top of the paper. Withel looked away. "He will be disciplined," he said flatly. Wa looked at the man leaning back in his chair, his black-clad frame resting as nonchalantly as a Rimland puma on a jungle branch, and decided that Gorrin atop Small Gods temple would soon be joining those little deities in the multifold dimensions of Beyond. And he owed Wa three copper pieces.

Ymor crumpled the note and tossed it into a corner. "I think we'll wander along to the Drum later on, Withel. Perhaps, too, we may try this beer that your men find so tempting."

in the city who appeared to have much treasure. Some reports from the more observant spies included details about a book that told the stranger what to say, and a box that walked by itself. These facts were immediately discounted. No magician capable of such enchantments ever came within a mile of Morpork docks.

It still being that hour when most of the city was just rising or about to go to bed there were few people in the Drum to watch Twoflower descend the stairs. When the Luggage appeared behind him and started to lurch confidently down the steps the customers at the rough wooden tables, as one man, looked suspiciously at their drinks.

Broadman was browbeating the small troll who swept the bar when the trio walked past him. "What in hell's that?" he said.

"Just don't talk about it," hissed Hugh. Twoflower was already thumbing through his book.

"What's he doing?" said Broadman, arms akimbo.

"It tells him what to say. I know it sounds ridiculous," muttered Hugh.

"How can a book tell a man what to say?"

"I wish for an accommodation, a room, lodgings, the lodging house, full board, are your rooms clean, a room with a view, what is your rate for one night?" said Twoflower in one breath.

Broadman looked at Hugh. The beggar shrugged.

"He's got plenty money," he said.

"Tell him it's three copper pieces, then. And that Thing will have to go in the stable."

"?" said the stranger. Broadman held up three thick red fingers and the man's face was suddenly a sunny display of comprehension. He reached into his pouch and laid three large gold pieces on Broadman's palm. Broadman stared at them. They represented about four times the worth of the Broken Drum, Staff included. He

"Foood," said the stranger. "Yes. Cutlet, hash chop, stew, ragout, fricassee, mince, collops, souffle, dumpling, blancmange, sorbet, gruel, sausage, not to have a sausage, beans, without a hear, kickshaws, jelly, jam. Giblets." He beamed at Broadman.

"All that?" said the innkeeper weakly.

"It's just the way he talks," said Hugh, "Don't ask me why. He just does."

All eyes in the room were watching the stranger - except for a pair belonging to Rincewind the wizard, who was sitting in the darkest corner nursing a mug of very small beer.

He was watching the Luggage.

Watch Rincewind.

Look at him. Scrawny, like most wizards, and clad in a dark red robe on which a few mystic sigils were embroidered in tarnished sequins. Some might have taken him for a mere apprentice enchanter who had run away from his master out of defiance, boredom, fear and a lingering taste for heterosexuality. Yet around his neck was a chain bearing the bronze octagon that marked him as an alumnus of Unseen University, the high school of magic whose time-and-space transcendent campus is never precisely Here or There. Graduates were usually destined for mageship at least, but Rincewind - after an unfortunate event - had left him knowing only one spell and made a living of sorts around the town by capitalising on an innate gift for languages. He avoided work as a rule, but had a quickness of wit that put his acquaintances in mind of a bright rodent. And he knew sapient pearwood when he saw it. He was seeing it now, and didn't quite believe it.

An archmage, by dint of great effort and much expenditure of time, might eventually obtain a small staff made from the timber of the sapient peartree. It grew only on the sites of ancient magic there were probably no more than two such staffs in all the cities of the

He prided himself on his fluency in the tongue, but the stranger only looked bemused.

"It won't work," said Hugh knowledgeably, "it's the book, you see. It tells him what to say. Magic."

Rincewind switched to High Borogravian, to Vanglemesht, Sumtri and even Black Oroogu, the language with no nouns and only one adjective, which is obscene. Each was met with polite incomprehension. In desperation he tried heathen Trob, and the little man's face split into a delighted grin.

"At last!" he said. "My good sir! This is remarkable!" (Although in Trob the last word in fact became "a thing which may happen but once in" the usable lifetime of a canoe hollowed diligently by axe and fire from the tallest diamondwood tree that grows in the noted diamondwood forests on the lower Slopes of Mount Awayawa, home of the firegods or so it is said.").

"What was all that?" said Broadman suspiciously.

"What did the innkeeper say?" said the little man.

Rincewind swallowed. "Broadman," he said. "Two mugs of your best ale, please."

"You can understand him?"

"Oh, sure."

"Tell him tell him he's very welcome. Tell him breakfast is - uh - one gold piece." For a moment Broadman's face looked as though some vast internal struggle was going on, and then he added with a burst of generosity. "I'll throw in yours, too."

"Stranger," said Rincewind levelly. "if you stay here you will be knifed or poisoned by nightfall. But don't stop smiling, or so will I."

"Oh, come now," said the stranger, looking around.

"This looks like a delightful place. A genuine Morporkean tavern. I've heard so much about them, you know. All these quaint old beams. And so reasonable, too."

three looked down to see if there was a coin in it.

"Pleased to meet you," said Rincewind. "I'm Rincewind. Look, I wasn't joking. This is a tough place."

"Good! Exactly what I wanted!"

"Eh?"

"What is this stuff in the mugs?"

"This? Beer. Thanks, Broadman. Yes. Beer. You know. Beer."

"Ah, the so-typical drink. A small gold piece will be sufficient payment, do you think? I do not want to cause offense."

It was already half out of his purse.

"Yarrt," croaked Rincewind. "I mean, no, it won't cause offense."

"Good. You say this is a tough place. Frequented, you mean, by heroes and men of adventure?"

Rincewind considered this. "Yes?" he managed.

"Excellent. I would like to meet some."

An explanation occurred to the wizard. "Ah," he said. "You've come to hire mercenaries ("warriors who fight for the tribe with most milknut-meal")?"

"Oh no. I just want to meet them. So that when I get home I can say that I did it."

Rincewind thought that a meeting with most of the Drum's clientele would mean that Twoflower never went home again, unless he lived downriver and happened to float past.

"Where is your home?" he inquired.

Broadman had slipped away into some back room, he noticed. Hugh was watching them suspiciously from a nearby table.

"Have you heard of the city of Des Palargic?"

"Well, I didn't spend much time in Trob. I was just passing through, you know-"

"Oh, it's not in Trob. I speak Trob because there are many beTrobi sailors in our ports. Des Palargic is the major seaport of the Agatean Empire."

made noisome by vats and bubbling beakers and lined with shelves

containing shadowy shapes suggestive of skulls and stuffed impossibilities.

"Well?" he demanded.

"One cannot hurry these things," said the old alchemist peevishly.

"Assaying takes time. Ah." He prodded the saucer, where the coin now lay in a swirl of green colour. He made some calculations on a scrap of parchment.

"Exceptionally interesting," he said at last.

"Is it genuine?"

The old man pursed his lips. "it depends on how you define the term," he said. "if you mean: is this coin the same as, say, a fifty-dollar piece, then the answer is no."

"I knew" it," screamed the innkeeper, and started towards the door.

"I'm not sure that I'm making myself clear," said the alchemist. Broadman turned round angrily.



"I said this coin isn't like ours. It is pure gold."

After Broadman had left, at a run, the alchemist spent some time staring  
at the ceiling. Then he drew out a very small piece of thin parchment,  
rummaged for a pen amongst the debris on his workbench, and wrote a very  
short, small, message. Then he went over to his cages of white doves,  
black cockerels and other laboratory animals. From one cage he removed a  
glossy coated rat, rolled the parchment into the phial attached to a hind  
leg, and let the animal go.

It sniffed around the floor for a moment, then disappeared down a hole in  
the far wall. At about this time a hitherto unsuccessful fortune-teller  
living on the other side of the block chanced to glance into her scrying  
bowl, gave a small scream and, within the hour, had sold her jewellery,  
various magical accoutrements, most of her clothes and almost all her  
other possessions that could not be conveniently carried on the fastest  
horse she could buy. The fact that later on, when her house collapsed in  
flames, she herself died in a freak landslide in the Morpork Mountains,

And in the Broken Drum Rincewind was listening open-mouthed  
as Twoflower  
talked.

"So I decided to see for myself," the little man was saying. "Eight  
years" saving up, this has cost me. But worth every half-rhinu. I  
mean,  
here I am. In Ankh-Morpork. Famed in song and story, I mean.  
In the  
streets that have known the tread of Hemic Whiteblade. Hrun the  
Barbarian, and Bravd" the Hublander and the Weasel... It's all  
just  
like I imagined, you know."

Rincewind's face was a mask of fascinated  
horror.

"I just couldn't stand it any more back in Des Pelargic," Two-  
flower went  
on blithely, "sitting at a desk all day, just adding up columns of  
figures, just a pension to look forward to at the end of it...  
where's  
the romance in that? Twoflower, I thought, it's now or never. You  
don't  
just have to listen to stories. You can go there. Now's the time to  
stop  
hanging around the docks listening to sailors" tales. So I com-  
piled a  
phrase book and bought a passage on the next ship to the Brown  
Islands."

"Would a rhinu be one of those big gold coins?" said Rincewind.

"Yes." Twoflower looked worriedly at the wizard over the top of his strange seeing-lenses. "Will two thousand be sufficient, do you think?"

"Yarrrt," croaked Rincewind. "I mean, yes sufficient . "

"Good."

"Um. Is everyone in the Agatean Empire as rich as you?"

"Me? Rich? Bless you, whatever put that idea into your head? "I am but a poor clerk! Did I pay the innkeeper too much, do you think?" Twoflower added.

"Uh. He might have settled for less," Rincewind conceded.

"Ah. I shall know better next time. I can see I have a lot to learn. An idea occurs to me. Rincewind would you perhaps consent to be employed as a, I don't know, perhaps the word "guide" would fit the circumstances? I think I could afford to pay you a rhinu a day."

Rincewind opened his mouth to reply but felt the words huddle together in

say? One  
a day. Every day?"

"I think perhaps in the circumstances I should make it one and  
one-half  
rhinu per day. Plus any out-of-pocket expenses, of course."

The wizard rallied magnificently. "That will be fine," he said.  
"Great."

Twoflower reached into his pouch and took out a large round  
gold object,  
glanced at it for a moment, and slipped it back. Rincewind didn't  
get a  
chance to see it properly.

"I think," said the tourist, "that I would like a little sleep now. It  
was a long crossing. And then perhaps you would care to call  
back at noon  
and we can take a look at the city."

"Sure."

"Then please be good enough to ask the innkeeper to Show me to  
my room."

Rincewind did so, and watched the nervous Broadman, who had  
arrived at a  
gallop from some back room, lead the way up the wooden steps  
behind the  
bar. After a few seconds the luggage got up and pattered across  
the floor

future might as well have been engraved in bright colours on his eyeballs. The space between his shoulder blades began to itch.

The

sensible thing to do, he knew, was to buy a horse. It would have to be a

fast one, and expensive - offhand, RinceWind couldn't think of any

horse-dealer he knew who was rich enough to give change out of almost a

whole ounce of gold.

And then, of course, the other five coins would help him set up a useful

practice at some safe distance, say two hundred miles. That would be the

sensible thing.

But what would happen to Twoflower, all alone in a city where even the

cockroaches had an unerring instinct for gold? A man would have to be a

real heel to leave him.

The Patrician of Ankh-Morpork smiled, but with his mouth only.

"The Hub Gate, you say?" he murmured.

The guard captain saluted smartly. "Aye, lord. We had to shoot the horse

before he would stop."

Rincewind didn't doubt it. He glanced towards the balcony that ran down one side of the audience room. A sudden run, a nimble jump - a sudden hail of crossbow quarrels. He shuddered. The Patrician cradled his chin in a beringed hand, and regarded the wizard with eyes as small and hard as beads.

"Let me see," he said. "Oathbreaking, the theft of a horse, uttering false coinage - yes, I think it's the Arena for you, Rincewind."

This was too much.

"I didn't steal the horse! I bought it fairly!"

"But with false coinage. Technical theft, you see."

"But those rhinu are solid gold!"

"Rhinu?" The Patrician rolled one of them around in his thick fingers.

"is that what they are called? How interesting. But, as you point out, they are not very similar to dollars..."

"Well, of course they're not-"

"Ah you admit it, then?"

the right.

Rincewind suddenly felt very alone.

It is said that when a wizard is about to die Death himself turns up to

claim him (instead of delegating the task to a subordinate, such as

Disease or Famine, as is usually the case). Rincewind looked around

nervously for a tall figure in black( wizards, even failed wizards, have

in addition to rods and cones in their eyeballs the tiny octagons that

enable them to see into the far octarine, the basic colour of which all

other colours are merely pale shadows impinging on normal four-dimensional space. It is said to be a sort of fluorescent greenish-yellow purple).

Was that a flickering shadow in the corner?

"Of course," said the Patrician, "I could be merciful." The shadow disappeared. Rincewind looked up an expression of insane hope on his face.

"Yes?" he said.

The Patrician waved a hand again. Rincewind saw the guards leave the

chamber. Alone with the lord of the twin cities, he almost wished they

say," said

the Patrician amiably, otherwise you will die. In an interesting fashion.

Over a period. Please stop fidgetting like that. Since you are a wizard

of sorts, you are of course aware that we live upon a world shaped, as it

were, like a disc? And that there is said to exist, towards the far rim,

a continent which though small is equal in weight to all the mighty

landmasses in this hemisphere? And that this, according to ancient

legend, is because it is largely made of gold?"

Rincewind nodded. Who hadn't heard of the Counterweight Continent? Some

sailors even believed the childhood tales and sailed in search of it. Of

course, they returned either empty handed or not at all. Probably eaten

by giant turtles, in the opinion of more serious mariners. Because, of

course, the Counterweight Continent was nothing more than a solar myth.

"It does, of course, exist," said the Patrician. "Although it is not made

of gold, it is true that gold is a very common metal there. Most of the

mass is made up by vast deposits of octiron deep within the crust. Now it



"I see," said the Patrician sweetly. "You feel, perhaps, that it would be a marvellous thing to go to the Counterweight Continent and bring back a shipload of gold?"

Rincewind had a feeling that some sort of trap was being set.

"Yes?" he ventured.

"And if every man on the shores of the Circle Sea had a mountain of gold of his own? Would that be a good thing? What would happen? think carefully." Rincewind's brow furrowed. He thought. "We'd all be rich?"

The way the temperature fell at his remark told him that it was not the correct one.

"I may as well tell you, Rincewind, that there is some contact between the Lords of the Circle Sea and the Emperor of the Agatean Empire, as it is Styled," the Patrician went on. "There is little common ground between us. We have nothing they want, and they have nothing we can afford. It is an old Empire, Rincewind. Old and cunning

However,

he landed this morning. He might have met a great hero, or the cunningest of thieves, or some wise and great sage. He met you. He has employed you as a guide. You will be a guide, Rincewind, to this looker, this Twoflower. You will see that he returns home with a good report of our little homeland. What do you say to that?"

"Er. Thank you, lord," said Rincewind miserably.

"There is another point, of course. It would be a tragedy should anything untoward happen to our little visitor. It would be dreadful if he were to die, for example. Dreadful for the whole of our land, because the Agatean Emperor looks after his own and could certainly extinguish us at a nod. A mere nod. And that would be dreadful for you, Rincewind, because in the weeks that remained before the Empire's huge mercenary fleet arrived certain of my servants would occupy themselves about your person in the hope that the avenging captains, on their arrival, might find their anger tempered by the sight of your still-living body. There are certain spells that can prevent the life departing from a body, be it never so abused,

the privacy of his own skull.

"Capital! I gather already that you and Twoflower are on the best of terms. An excellent beginning. When he returns safely to his homeland you will not find me ungrateful. I shall probably even dismiss the charges against you. Thank you, Rincewind. You may go."

Rincewind decided not to ask for the return of his five remaining rhinu.

He backed away, cautiously.

"Oh, and there is one other thing," the Patrician said, as the wizard groped for the door handles.

"Yes, lord?" he replied, with a sinking heart.

"I'm sure you won't dream of trying to escape from your obligations by fleeing the city. I judge you to be a born city person. But you may be sure that the lords of the other cities will be appraised of these conditions by nightfall." "I assure you the thought never even crossed my mind, lord."

"Indeed? Then if I were you I'd sue my face for slander."

The dark interior of the Drum was a broil of fighting men, quite a number of them - a third and longer glance confirmed - in bits. Rincewind swayed back as a wildly thrown stool sailed past and smashed on the far side of the street.

Then he dived in.

He was wearing a dark robe, made darker by constant wear and irregular washings. In the raging gloom no-one appeared to notice a shadowy shape that shuffled desperately from table to table. At one point a fighter, staggering back, trod on what felt like fingers. A number of what felt like teeth bit his ankle. He yelped shrilly and dropped his guard just sufficiently for a sword, swung by a surprised opponent, to skewer him.

Rincewind reached the stairway, sucking his bruised hand and running with a curious, bent-over gait. A crossbow quarrel thunked into the banister rail above him, and he gave a whimper. He made the stairs in one breathless rush, expecting at any moment another, more accurate shot.

hurled it. Rincewind ducked. There was a brief scream behind him as the crossbow man, sighting down his weapon, dropped it and clutched at his throat.

The big man was already reaching for another knife. Rincewind looked around wildly, and then with wild improvisation drew himself up into a wizardly pose.

His hand was flung back. "Asoniti! Kyoruchal Beazleblor! "

The man hesitated, his eyes flicking nervously from side to side as he waited for the magic. The conclusion that there was not going to be any hit him at the same time as Rincewind, whirring wildly down the passage, kicked him sharply in the groin. As he screamed and clutched at himself the wizard dragged open the door, sprang inside, slammed it behind him and threw his body against it, panting.

It was quiet in here. There was Twoflower, sleeping peacefully on the bed. And there, at the foot of the bed, was the Luggage.

Rincewind took a few steps forward, cupidity moving him as easily as if

Rincewind looked at his fingers, and then at the lid. It looked heavy, and was bound with brass bands. It was quite still now.  
What wind?

"Rincewind!"

Twoflower sprang off the bed. The wizard jumped back, wrenching his features into a smile.

"My dear chap, right on time! We'll just have lunch, and then I'm sure you've got a wonderful programme lined up for this afternoon."

"That's great,"

Rincewind took a deep breath. "look," he said desperately, "let's eat somewhere else. There's been a bit of a fight down below.

"A tavern brawl? Why didn't you wake me up?"

"Well, you see, I - what?"

"I thought I made myself clear this morning, Rincewind. I want to see genuine Morporkian life the slave market, the Whore Pits, the Temple of Small Gods, the Beggars' Guild... and a genuine tavern brawl." A faint

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"For a Start, people get hurt."

"Oh, I wasn't suggesting we get involved. I just want to see one, that's all. And some of your famous heroes. You do have some, don't you? It's not all dockside talk?" And now, to the wizard's astonishment, Twoflower was almost pleading.

"Oh, yeah. We have them all right," said Rincewind hurriedly. He pictured them in his mind, and recoiled from the thought.

All the heroes of the Circle Sea passed through the gates of Ankh-Morpork sooner or later. Most of them were from the barbaric tribes nearer the frozen Hub, which had a sort of export trade in heroes. Almost all of them had crude magic swords, whose Unsuppressed harmonics on the astral plane played hell with any delicate experiments in applied sorcery for miles around, but Rincewind didn't object to them on that score. He knew himself to be a magical dropout, so it didn't bother him that the mere

izing a  
rota.

He rubbed his nose. The only heroes he had much time for were Bravd and the Weasel, who were out of town at the moment, and Hrun the Barbarian, who was practically an academic by Hub standards in that he could think without moving his lips. Hrun was said to be roving somewhere Turnwise.

"Look," he said at last. "have you ever met a barbarian?"

Twoflower shook his head.

"I was afraid of that," said Rincewind. "Well. they're--"

There was a clatter of running feet in the street outside and a fresh uproar from downstairs. It was followed by a commotion on the stairs. The door was flung open before Rincewind could collect himself sufficiently to make a dash for the window. But instead of the greed-crazed madman he expected, he found himself looking into the round red face of a Sergeant of the Watch. He breathed again. Of course. The Watch were always careful not to intervene too soon in any brawl where the odds were not heavily



ignored  
him. "This the foreigner?" he inquired.

"We were just leaving," said Rincewind quickly, and switched to Trob.

"Twoflower, I think we ought to get lunch somewhere else. I know some places."

He marched out into the corridor with as much aplomb as he could muster.

Twoflower followed, and a few seconds later there was a strangling sound from the sergeant as the luggage closed its lid with a snap, stood up, stretched, and marched after them.

Watchmen were dragging bodies out of the room downstairs. There were no survivors. The Watch had ensured this by giving them ample time to escape via the back door, a neat compromise between caution and justice that benefited all parties.

"Who are all these men?" said Twoflower.

"Oh, you know. Just men," said Rincewind. And before he could stop himself some part of his brain that had nothing to do took control of his mouth and added, "Heroes, in fact."

Zenell-

"Is Hrun the Barbarian here?" said Twoflower, looking around eagerly.

Rincewind took a deep breath.

"That's him behind us," he said.

The enormity of this lie was so great that its ripples did in fact spread

out one of the lower astral planes as far as the Magical Quarter across

the river, where it picked up tremendous velocity from the huge standing

wave of power that always hovered there and bounced wildly across the

Circle Sea. A harmonic got as far as Hrun himself, currently fighting a

couple of gnolls on a crumbling ledge high in the Caderack Mountains, and

caused him a moment's unexplained discomfort. Twoflower, meanwhile, had

thrown back the lid of the Luggage and was hastily pulling out a heavy

black cube.

"This is fantastic," he said. "They're never going to believe this at home."

"What's he going on about?" said the sergeant doubtfully.

them all to stand over by the window, please? This won't take a moment.

And, er, Rincewind? "

"Yes?"

Twoflower stood on tiptoe to whisper.

"I expect you know what this is, don't you?" Rincewind stared down at the box. It had a round glass eye protruding from the centre of one face, and a lever at the back.

"Not wholly, " he said.

"It's a device for making pictures quickly," said Twoflower. "Quite a new invention. I'm rather proud of it but, look, I don't think these gentlemen would - well, I mean they might be - sort of apprehensive?"

Could you explain it to them? I'll reimburse them for their time, of course."

"He's got a box with a demon in it that draws pictures," said Rincewind shortly. 'do what the madman says and he will give you gold."

The Watch smiled nervously.

High above the disc the second albatross soared; so high in fact that its tiny mad orange eyes could see the whole of the world and the great, glittering, girdling Circle Sea. There was a yellow message capsule strapped to one leg. Far below it, unseen in the clouds, the bird that had brought the earlier message to the Patrician of Ankh-Morpork flapped gently back to its home.

Rincewind looked at the tiny square of glass in astonishment. There he was, all right - a tiny figure, in perfect colour, standing in front of a group of Watchmen whose faces were each frozen in a terrified rictus. A buzz of wordless terror went up from the men around him as they craned over his shoulder to look.

Grinning, Twoflower produced a handful of the Smaller coins Rincewind now recognized as quarter-rhinu. He winked at the wizard.

"I had similar problems when I stopped over in the Brown Islands," he said. "They thought the iconograph steals a bit of their souls. Laughable, isn't it?"

The coins quietened the men's agitation in the way that gold can,  
and  
Rincewind was amazed to find, half a minute later, that he was  
holding a  
little glass portrait of Twoflower wielding a huge notched sword  
and  
smiling as though all his dreams had come true.

They lunched at a small eating-house near the Brass Bridge,  
with the  
luggage nestling under the table. The food and wine, both far su-  
perior to  
Rincewind's normal fare, did much to relax him. Things weren't  
going to  
be too bad, he decided. A bit of invention and some quick think-  
ing, that  
was all that was needed.

Twoflower seemed to be thinking too. Looking reflectively into his  
wine  
cup he said, "Tavern fights are pretty common around here, I ex-  
pect?"

"Oh, fairly."

"No doubt fixtures and fittings get damaged?"

"Fixt - oh, I see. You mean like benches and whatnot. Yes, I sup-  
pose so."

"That must be upsetting for the innkeepers."

"You did say you wanted to try some typical Morporkean food," said

Rincewind. "What was that about risks?"

"Oh, I know all about risks. They're my business."

"I thought that's what you said. I didn't believe it the first time either."

"Oh, I don't take risks. About the most exciting thing that happened to me was knocking some ink over. I assess risks. Day after day. Do you know what the odds are against a house catching fire in the Red Triangle district of des Pelargic? Five hundred and thirty-eight to one. I calculated that," he added with a trace of pride.

"What--" Rincewind tried to suppress a burp-- "what for? "Scuse me." He helped himself to some more wine

"For--" Twoflower paused. "I can't say it in Trob, I don't think the beTrobi have a word for it. in our language we call it-" he said a collection of outlanfish syllables.

"Inn-sewer-ants," repeated Rincewind. "That's a funny word. Wossit mean?"

"Well suppose you have a ship loaded with, say, gold bars. it might run

"Then, if the cargo is lost, I reimburse you."

"Reeburs?"

"Pay you the value of your cargo," said Twoflower patiently.

"Oh I get it. It's like a bet, right?"

"A wager? In a way, I suppose."

"And you make money at this inn-sewer-ants?"

"It offers a return on investment, certainly."

Wrapped in the warm yellow glow of the wine, Rincewind tried to think of inn-sewer-ants in circle sea terms.

"I don't think I unnerstan" this inn-sewer-ants," he said firmly, idly watching the world spin by,

"Magic now. Magic I unnerstan"."

Twoflower grinned. "Magic is one thing, and reflected-sound-of-underground-spirits is another, he said."

"whah?"

what!" "that funny word you used," said Rincewind impatiently.

round his neck, Rincewind trailed behind, whimpering at intervals and checking to see that his head was still there. A few others followed, too. In a city where public executions, duels, fights, magical feuds and strange events regularly punctuated the daily round the inhabitants had brought the profession of interested bystander to a peak of perfection.

They were, to a man, highly skilled yawpers. In any case, Two-flower was delightedly taking picture after picture of people engaged in what he described as typical activities, and since a quarter-rhinu would subsequently change hands "for their trouble" a tail of bemused and happy nouveaux-riches was soon following him in case this madman exploded in a shower of gold.

At the Temple of the Seven-Handed Sek a hasty convocation of priests and ritual heart-transplant artisans agreed that the hundred-span high statue of Sek was altogether too holy to be made into a magic picture, but a payment of two rhinu left them astoundedly agreeing that perhaps He wasn't as holy as all that.



that froze

the light, that passed through them: or something like that, anyway.

Rincewind often suspected that there was something, somewhere, that was better than magic. He was usually disappointed.

However, he soon took every opportunity to operate the box. Twoflower was

only too pleased to allow this, since that enabled the little man to appear in his own pictures. It was at this point that Rincewind noticed

something strange. Possession of the box conferred a kind of power on the

wielder which was that anyone, confronted with the hypnotic glass eye,

would submissively obey the most peremptory orders about stance and expression.

It was while he was thus engaged in the Plaza of Broken Moons that

disaster struck. Twoflower had posed alongside a bewildered charm-seller,

his crowd of new-found admirers watching him with interest in case he did something humorously lunatic.

Rincewind got down on one knee, the better to arrange the picture, and pressed the enchanted lever.

took all  
those pictures of young ladies, should you? It's monochrome  
from now on,  
friend. Alright?"

"Alright. Yeah, Sure," said Rincewind. In one dim corner of the  
little  
box he thought he could see an easle, and a tiny unmade bed.  
He hoped he  
couldn't. "So long as that's understood," said the imp, and shut  
the  
door. Rincewind thought he could hear the muffled sound of  
grumbling and  
the scrape of a stool being dragged across the floor.

"Twoflower-" he began, and looked up.

Twoflower had vanished. As Rincewind stared at the crowd, with  
sensations  
of prickly horror traveling up his spine, there came a gentle prod  
in the  
small of his back.

"Turn without haste," said a voice like black silk. "Or kiss your  
kidneys  
goodbye."

The crowd watched with interest. It was turning out to be quite a  
good  
day.

at the bags of gold. Withel smiled. It made an unnerving effect on his scar-crossed face.

"I know you," he said. "a gutter wizard. What is that thing?"

Rincewind became aware that the lid of the Luggage was trembling slightly, although there was no wind. And he was still holding the picture-box.

"This? It makes pictures," he said brightly. "Hey. just hold that smile, will you?" He backed away quickly and pointed the box.

For a moment Withel hesitated. "What? he said.

"That's fine, hold it just like that..." said Rincewind.

The thief paused, then growled and swung his sword back.

There was a snap, and a duet of horrible screams Rincewind did not glance around for fear of the terrible things he might see, and by the time Withel looked for him again he was on the other side of the plaza and still accelerating.

The albatross descended in wide, slow sweeps that ended in an undignified

carelessness brought on by surprise - sucking at the nasty beak  
wound on  
the back of his hand

Rincewind pounded down an alley, paying no heed to the  
screams of rage  
coming from the picture box and cleared a high wall with his  
frayed robe  
flapping around him like the feathers of a dishevelled jackdaw.  
He landed  
in the forecourt of a carpet shop, scattering the merchandise and  
customers dived through its rear exit trailing apologies skidded  
down  
another alley and stopped, teetering dangerously, just as he was  
about to  
plunge unthinkingly into the Ankh.

There are said to be some mystic rivers one drop of which can  
steal a  
man's life away. After its turbid passage through the twin cities  
the  
Ankh could have been one of them.

In the distance the cries of rage took on a shrill note of terror.  
Rincewind looked around desperately for a boat, or a handhold  
up the  
sheer walls on either Side of him.

He was trapped.

Unbidden, the Spell welled up in his mind. It was perhaps un-  
true to say

Medicine

had been unable to coax it. Precisely which one it was they were also unable to ascertain, except that it was one of the eight basic spells that were intricately interwoven with the very fabric of time and space itself.

Since then it had been showing a worrying tendency, when Rincewind was feeling rundown or especially threatened, to try to get itself said. He clenched his teeth together but the first syllable forced itself around the corner of his mouth. His left hand raised involuntarily and, as the magical force whirled him round, began to give off octarine sparks...

The Luggage hurtled around the corner, its several hundred knees moving like pistons. Rincewind gaped. The spell died, unsaid. The box didn't appear to be hampered in any way by the ornamental rug draped roguishly over it, nor by the thief hanging by one arm from the lid. It was in a very real sense, a dead weight. Further along the lid were the remains of two fingers, owner unknown.

Presumably the box had to have a master. In the absence of  
Twoflower, had  
it adopted him?

The tide was turning and he could see debris drifting down-  
stream in the  
yellow afternoon light towards the river gate, a mere hundred  
yards  
downstream. It was the work of a moment to let the dead thief  
join them.

Even if it was found later it would hardly cause comment. And  
the sharks  
in the Ankh were used to solid, regular meals.

Rincewind watched the body drift away, and considered his next  
move. The

Luggage would probably float. All he had to do was wait until  
dusk, and

then go out with the tide. There were plenty of wild places down-  
stream

where he could wade ashore, and then - well, if the Patrician  
really had

sent out word about him then a change of clothing and a shave  
should take

care of that. In any case, there were other lands and he had a fa-  
cility

for languages. Let him but get to Chimera or Gonim or Ecalpon  
and half a

dozen armies couldn't bring him back. And then - wealth, com-  
fort,

security...

"Ah, Gorphal," said the Patrician pleasantly. Come in. Sit down.  
Can I  
press you to a candied starfish?"

"I am yours to command, master," said the old man calmly.  
"Save, perhaps,  
in the matter of preserved echinoderms."

The Patrician shrugged, and indicated the scroll on the table.

"Read that," he said.

Gorphal picked up the parchment and raised one eyebrow slightly when he  
saw the familiar ideograms of the Golden Empire. He read in silence for  
perhaps a minute, and then turned the scroll over to examine minutely the  
seal on the obverse.

"You are famed as a student of empire affairs,"  
said the Patrician. "Can you explain this?"

"Knowledge in the matter of the Empire lies less in noting particular  
events than in studying a certain cast of mind," said the old diplomat.

"The message is curious, yes, but not surprising."

"This morning the Emperor instructed," the Patrician allowed himself the

in the service of several Emperors. He regards them as a necessary but tiresome ingredient in the successful running of the Empire. He does not like things out of place. The Empire was not built by allowing things to get out of place. That is his view."

"I begin to see-" said the Patrician.

"Quite so." Gorphal smiled into his beard. "This tourist is a thing that is out of place. After acceding to his master's wishes Nine Turning Mirrors would, I am quite sure, make his own arrangements with a view to ensuring that one wanderer would not be allowed to return home bringing, perhaps, the disease of dissatisfaction. The Empire likes people to stay where it puts them. So much more convenient, then, if this Two Flower disappears for good in the barbarian lands. meaning here, master."

"And your advice?" said the Patrician.

Gorphal shrugged.

"Merely that you should do nothing. Matters will undoubtedly resolve



"Quite so, master."

The Patrician nodded. It was all rather a relief. He agreed with  
Nine

Turning Mirrors - life was difficult enough; People ought to stay  
where  
they were put.

Brilliant constellations shone down on the discworld. One by one  
the

traders shuttered their shops. One by one the gonophs, thieves,  
finewirers, whores, illusionists, backsliders and second-storey  
men awoke

and breakfasted. Wizards went about their polydimensional af-  
fairs.

Tonight saw the conjunction of two powerful planets, and already  
the air

over the Magical Quarter was hazy with early spells.

"Look," Said Rincewind, "this isn't getting us anywhere." He  
inched

sideways. The Luggage followed faithfully, lid half open and  
menacing.

Rincewind briefly considered making a desperate leap to safety.  
The lid

smacked in anticipation. In any case, he told himself with sink-  
ing heart,

the damn thing would only follow him again. It had that dogged  
look about

it. Even if he managed to get to a horse, he had a nasty suspi-  
cion that

The box moved forward slightly. Now there was just a narrow strip of greasy jetty between Rincewind's heels and the river. A flash of precognition told him that the box would be able to swim faster than he could. He tried not to imagine what it would be like to drown in the Ankh.

"It won't stop until you give in, you know," said a small voice conversationally.

Rincewind looked down at the iconograph, still hanging around his neck.

Its trapdoor was open and the homunculus was leaning against the trap, smoking a pipe and watching the proceedings with amusement.

"I'll take you in with me, at least," said Rincewind through gritted teeth.

The imp took the pipe out of his mouth. "What did you say?" he said.

"I said I'll take you in with me, dammit!"

"Suit yourself." The imp tapped the side of the box meaningfully. "We'll see who sinks first."

The luggage yawned, and moved forward a fraction of an inch.

"You're a wizard," said the picture imp. "You'll think of some way to find him."

"Not much of a wizard, I'm afraid."

"You can just jump down on everyone and turn them into worms," the imp added encouragingly, ignoring his last remark.

"No. Turning To Animals is an Eighth Level spell. I never even completed my training. I only know one spell."

"Well, that'll do."

"I doubt it," said Rincewind hopelessly

"What does it do, then?"

"Can't tell you. Don't really want to talk about it. But frankly," he sighed, "no spells are much good. It takes three months to commit even

a simple one to memory, and then once you've used it, pow it's gone.

that's what's so stupid about the whole magic thing, You know. You spend

twenty years learning the spell that makes nude virgins appear in your

bedroom, and then you're so poisoned by quicksilver fumes and half-blind

"Well, if you must know, I thought he didn't mean magic. Not as such."

"What else is there, then?"

Rincewind began to feel really wretched. "I don't know," he said. "A better way of doing things, I suppose. Something with a bit of sense in it. Harnessing - harnessing the lightning, or something."

The imp gave him a kind but pitying look.

"Lightning is the spears hurled by the thunder giants when they fight," it said gently, "established meteorological fact. You can't harness it."

"I know," said Rincewind miserably. That's the flaw in the argument, of course."

The imp nodded. and disappeared into the depths of the iconograph ." A few moments later Rincewind smelled bacon frying. He waited until his stomach couldn't Stand the strain any more, and rapped on the box. The imp reappeared.

"I've been thinking about what you said," it said even before Rincewind

stomach?"

"Eat something, then. That's logic."

"How? Every time I move that damn box flexes its hinges at me!"

The luggage, on cue, gaped widely.

"See?"

"It's not trying to bite you," said the imp. "There's food in there. You're no use to it starved."

Rincewind peered into the dark recesses of the Luggage. There were

indeed, among the chaos of boxes and bags of gold, several bottles and

packages in oiled paper. He gave a cynical laugh, mooched around the

abandoned jetty until he found a piece of wood about the right length,

wedged it as politely as possible in the gap between the lid and the box,

and pulled out one of the flat packages. It held biscuits that turned out

to be as hard as diamond-wood.

"Bloody hell," he muttered, nursing his teeth.

"Captain Eightpanther's Travellers" Digestives them," said the imp from

the doorway to his box, "saved many a life at sea, they have."

"Trust?"

"Yes. That's what he didn't, the water here. See? Rincewind opened a

bottle. The liquid inside might have been water. It had a flat, empty

flavour, with no trace of life. "Neither taste nor smell." he grumbled

The luggage gave a little creak, attracting his attention. With a lazy

air of calculated menace it shut its lid slowly, grinding Rincewind's

impromptu wedge like a dry loaf.

"All right, all right," he said. "I'm thinking."

Ymor's headquarters were in the leaning Tower at the junction of Rime

Street and Frost Alley. At midnight the solitary guard leaning in the

shadows looked up at the conjoining planets and wondered idly what

change in his fortunes they might herald.

There was the faintest of sounds, as of a gnat yawning.

The guard glanced down the deserted street, and now caught the glimmer of

moonlight on something lying in the mud a few yards away. He picked it

up. The lunar light gleamed on gold, and his intake of breath was almost

true, that something as heavy as gold could fall naturally from the sky.

As he drew level with the opposite alley mouth some more fell. It was still in its bag, there was an awful lot of it, and Rincewind brought it down heavily onto his head.

When the guard came to he found himself looking up into the wild-eyed face of a wizard, who was menacing his throat with a sword. In the darkness too, Something was gripping his leg.

It was the disconcerting sort of grip that suggested that the gripper could grip a whole lot harder, if he wanted to.

"Where is he, the rich foreigner?" hissed the wizard. "Quickly!"

"What's holding my leg?" said the man, with a note of terror in his voice. "He tried to wriggle free.

The pressure increased

"You wouldn't want to know," said Rincewind

"Pay attention, please. Where's the foreigner?"

"Not here. They've got him at Broadman's place."

out of the dark and plunged off after the wizard. Something with  
hundreds  
of tiny feet.

With only his home-made phrase book to help him Twoflower  
was trying to  
explain the mysteries of in-sour-ants to Broadman . The fat inn-  
keeper was  
listening intently, his little black eyes glittering. From the other  
end  
of the table Ymor watched with mild amusement, occasionally  
feeding one  
of his ravens with scraps from his plate. Beside him Withel paced  
up and  
down.

"You fret too much," said Ymor, without taking his eyes from the  
two men  
opposite him. "I can feel it Stren. Who would dare attack us  
here? And  
the gutter wizard will come. He's too much of a coward not to.  
And he'll  
try to bargain. And we shall have him. And the gold. And the  
chest."

Withel's one eye glared, and he made a fist into the palm of a  
black-gloved hand.

"Who would have thought there was so much  
sapient pearwood in the whole of the disc?" he said.

"How could we have known?"



of his position. Ymor had on several occasions seen him look around the

room with an expression of deep satisfaction he had also been talking for

ages to broadman and Ymer had seen a piece of paper change hands and

Broadman had given the foreigner some coins. It was strange. When

Broadman got up and waddled past Ymer's chair the thiefmaster's arm shot

out like a steel spring and grabbed the fat man by his apron.

"What was that all about friend?" asked Ymor quietly.

"N-nothing, Ymor. Just private business, like."

"There are no secrets between friends, Broadman."

"Yar. Well, I'm not sure about it myself, really. It's a sort of bet, see?" said the innkeeper nervously "inn-sewer-ants, it's called. It's like

a bet that the Broken Drum won't get burned down."

Ymor held the man's gaze until Broadman twitched in fear and embarrassment. Then the thiefmaster laughed.

"This worm-eaten old tinder pile?" he said. "The man must be mad! "

"Yes, but mad with money. He says now he's got the - can't remember the

The door slammed back on its hinges and thudded into the wall.

"Hey, that's my door. " screamed Broadman. Then he realised who was standing at the top of the steps, and ducked behind the table a mere shaving of time before a short black dart sped across the room and thunked into the woodwork.

Ymor moved his hand carefully, and poured out another flagon of beer.

"Won't you join me, Zlorf?" he said levelly. "and put that sword away, Stren. Zlorf Flannelfoot is our friend "

The president of the Assassins' Guild spun his short blowgun dexterously and slotted it into its holster in one smooth movement.

"Stren!" said Ymor.

The black-clad thief hissed, and sheathed his sword. But he kept his hand on the hilt, and his eyes on the assassin.

That wasn't easy. Promotion in the Assassins Guild was by competitive examination, the Practical being the most important - indeed, the only -

their hats.

He strolled down the stairs, followed by a number of assassins. When he was directly in front of Ymor he said: "I've come for the tourist."

"Is it any of Your business, Zlorf?"

"Yes. Gringo, Urmond - take him."

Two of the assassins stepped forward. Then Stren was in front of them, his sword appearing to materialise an inch from their throats without having to pass through the intervening air.

"Possibly I could only kill one of you," he murmured, "but I suggest you ask yourselves which one?"

"Look up, Zlorf," said Ymor.

A row of yellow, baleful eyes looked down from the darkness among the rafters.

"One step more and you'll leave here with fewer eyeballs than you came with," said the thiefmaster. "So sit down and have a drink, Zlorf, and let's talk about this sensibly. I thought we had an agreement. You don't

Zlorf Stared at Twoflower, who grinned at him.

He shrugged. He seldom wasted time wondering why people wanted other

people dead. It was just a living. "Who is your client, may I ask?" said

Ymor.

Zlorf held up a hand. "Please!" he protested. "Professional etiquette."

"Of course. By the way-"

"Yes?"

"I believe I have a couple of guards outside-"

"Had."

"And some others in the doorway across the street-"

"Formerly."

"And two bowmen on the roof."

A flicker of doubt passed across Zlorf's face, like the last shaft of sunlight over a badly ploughed field. The door flew open, badly damaging

the assassin who was standing beside it.

"Stop doing that!" shrieked Broadman, from under his table.

Bridge. Stren - remove him."

Rerpf held up a beeringed hand. Stren Withel hesitated halfway to the door

as several very large trolls ducked under the doorway and stood on either

side of the fat man, blinking in the light. Muscles the size of melons

bulged in forearms like flour sacks. Each troll held a double-headed axe.

Between thumb and forefinger.

Broadman erupted from cover, his face Suffused with rage.

"Out!" he screamed. "Get those trolls out of here!" No-one moved. The room was suddenly quiet.

Broadman looked around quickly. It began to dawn on him just what he had

said, and to whom. A whimper escaped from his lips, glad to be free. He

reached the doorway to his cellars just as one of the trolls, with a lazy

flick of one ham-sized hand, sent his axe whirling across the room. The

slam of the door and its subsequent splitting as the axe hit it merged

into one sound.

"Bloody hell!" exclaimed Zlorf Flannelfoot.

chants?"

"And traders," agreed Rerpf. Behind him now, in addition to more trolls,  
were several humans that Ymor vaguely recognized. He had seen them,  
maybe, behind counters and bars. Shadowy figures, usually - easily  
ignored, easily forgotten. At the back of his mind a bad feeling began to  
grow. He thought about how it might be to be, say, a fox confronted with  
an angry sheep. A sheep, moreover, that could afford to employ wolves.

"How long has this - Guild - been in existence, may I ask?" he said.

"Since this afternoon," said Rerpf. "I'm viceguildmaster in charge of  
tourism, you know."

"What is this tourism of which you Speak?"

"Uh - we are not quite sure..." said Rerpf. An old beaded man poked  
his head over the guildmaster's shoulder and cackled, 'speaking on behalf  
of the winesellers of Morpork, Tourism means Business See?"

"Well?" said Ymor coldly.

away? You

come all the way to see our fine city with its many points of historical

and civic interest, also many quaint customs, and you wake up dead in

some back alley or as it might be floating down the Ankh, how are you

going to tell all your friends what a great time you're having? Let's

face it, you've got to move with the times."

Zlorf and Ymor met each other's gaze.

"We have, have we?" said Ymor.

"Then let us move, brother," agreed Zlorf. In one movement he brought his

blowgun to his mouth and sent a dart hissing towards the nearest troll.

It spun around, hurling its axe, which whirred over the assassin's head

and buried itself in a luckless thief behind him.

Rerpf ducked, allowing a troll behind him to raise its huge iron crossbow

and fire a spear-length quarrel into the nearest assassin. That was the

start...

It has been remarked before that those who are sensitive to radiations in

It had to be Death. No-one else went around with empty eye sockets and,  
of course, the scythe over one shoulder was another clue. As Rincewind  
stared in horror a courting couple, laughing at some private joke, walked  
straight through the apparition without appearing to notice it.

Death, insofar as it was possible in a face with no movable features, looked surprised.

RINCEWIND? Death said, in tones as deep and heavy as the slamming of  
leaden doors, far underground.

"Um," said Rincewind, trying to back away from that eyeless stare.

BUT WHY ARE YOU HERE? (Boom, boom went crypt lids, in the worm-haunted  
fastnesses under old mountains...)

"Um, why not?" said Rincewind. "Anyway, I'm sure you've got lots to do,  
so if you'll just-"

I WAS SURPRISED THAT YOU JOSTLED ME, RINCEWIND. FOR I HAVE AN  
APPOINTMENT WITH THEE THIS VERY NIGHT.

"Oh no, not-"



Rincewind backed away, hands spread protectively in front of him. The dried fish salesman on a nearby stall watched this madman with interest.

I COULD LEND YOU A VERY FAST HORSE. IT WON'T HURT A BIT.

"No!" Rincewind turned and ran. Death watched him go and shrugged bitterly.

SOD YOU, THEN, Death said. He turned, and noticed the fish salesman. With a snarl Death reached out a bony finger and stopped the man's heart, but he didn't take much pride in it.

Then death remembered what was due to happen later that night. It would not be true to say that death smiled, because in any case His features were perforce frozen in a calcareous grin. But He hummed a little tune, cheery as a plague pit, and pausing only to extract the life from a passing mayfly, and one-ninth of the lives from a cat cowering under the fish stall (all cats can see into the octarine) - Death turned on His heel and set off towards the Broken Drum.

Short Street, Morpork, is in fact one of the longest in the city. Filigree

moving arrow-fast...

A darker shadow inched its way along one of the walls of the Drum, a few yards from the two trolls who were guarding the door. Rincewind was sweating. If they heard the faint clinking of the specially-prepared bags at his belt...

One of the trolls tapped his colleague on the Shoulder, producing a noise like two pebbles being knocked together. He pointed down the starlit street...

Rincewind darted from his hiding place, turned, and hurled his burden through the Drum's nearest window.

Withel saw it arrive. The bag arced across the room, turning slowly in the air, and burst on the edge of a table. A moment later gold coins were rolling across the floor, spinning, glittering.

The room was suddenly silent, save for the tiny noises of gold and the whimpers of the wounded. With a curse Withel despatched the assassin he had been fighting. "It's a trick!" he screamed. "No-one move!"

being  
hurled far across the room and the frame itself giving way. Door  
and  
frame landed on a table, which flew into splinters. It was then  
that the  
frozen fighters noticed that there was something else in the pile  
of  
wood. It was a box, shaking itself madly to free itself of the  
smashed  
timber around it.

Rincewind appeared in the ruined doorway hurling another of his  
gold  
grenades. It Smashed into a wall, showering coins.

Down in the cellar Broadman looked up, muttered to himself,  
and carried  
on with his work. His entire spindlewinter's supply of candles  
had  
already been strewn on the floor, mixed with his store of kindling  
wood.

Now he was attacking a barrel of lamp oil. "inn-sewer-ants" he  
muttered.

Oil gushed out and swirled around his feet.

Withel stormed across the floor, his face a mask of rage. Rince-  
wind took  
careful aim and caught the thief full in the chest with a bag of  
gold.

But now Ymor was shouting, and pointing an accusing finger. A  
raven

lick up a  
few errant feathers.

At the same moment the giant candlewheel fell from the ceiling,  
plunging  
the room into gloom. Rincewind, coiling himself like a spring,  
gave a  
Standing jump and grasped a beam, swinging himself up into the  
relative  
safety of the roof with a strength that amazed him.

"Exciting, isn't it?" said a voice by his ear.

Down below, thieves, assassins, trolls and merchants all realised  
at  
about the same moment that they were in a room made treach-  
erous of  
foothold by gold coins and containing something, among the  
Suddenly  
menacing shapes in the semi-darkness, that was absolutely hor-  
rible. As  
one they made for the door, but had two dozen different recollec-  
tions of  
its exact position.

High above the chaos Rincewind stared at  
Twoflower.

"Did you cut the lights down?" he hissed.

"Yes."

"Everyone's gone."

He dragged Twoflower across the littered floor and up the steps. They burst out into the tail end of the night. There were still a few stars but the moon was down, and there was a faint grey glow to rimward. Most important, the street was empty. Rincewind sniffed.

"Can you smell oil?" he said.

Then Withel stepped out of the shadows and tripped him up.

At the top of the cellar steps Broadman knelt down and fumbled in his tinderbox. It turned out to be damp.

"I'll kill that bloody cat," he muttered, and groped for the spare box that was normally on the ledge by the door. It was missing. Broadman said a bad word.

A lighted taper appeared in mid-air, right beside him.

HERE, TAKE THIS.

"Thanks," said Broadman

DON'T MENTION IT.

BUT YES, said Death.

Rincewind rolled.

For a moment he thought Withel was going to spit him where he lay. But it was worse than that. He was waiting for him to get up.

"I see you have a sword, wizard," he said quietly. "I suggest you rise, and we shall see how well you use it." Rincewind stood up as slowly as he dared, and drew from his belt the short sword he had taken from the guard a few hours and a hundred years ago. It was a short blunt affair compared to Withel's hair-thin rapier.

"But I don't know how to use a sword," he wailed.

"Good."

"You know that wizards can't be killed by edged weapons?" Said Rincewind desperately. Withel smiled coldly. "So I have heard," he said. "I look forward to putting it to the test." He lunged. Rincewind caught the thrust by sheer luck, jerked his hand away in shock, deflected the second stroke by coincidence, and took the third one through his robe at heart-height.

you little-

As his Sword went back for his final sweep the sullen glow that had been growing in the doorway of the Broken Drum flickered, dimmed, and erupted into a roaring fireball that sent the walls billowing outward and carried the roof a hundred feet into the air before bursting through it, in a gout of red-hot tiles.

Withel stared at the boiling flames, unnerved. And Rincewind leapt. He ducked under the thief's sword arm and brought his own blade around in an arc so incompetently misjudged that it hit the man flat-first and jolted out of the wizard's hand. Sparks and droplets of flaming oil rained down as Withel reached out with both gauntleted hands and grabbed Rincewind's neck, forcing him down.

"You did this!" he screamed. "You and your box of trickery. "

His thumb found Rincewind's windpipe. This is it, the wizard thought. Wherever I'm going, it can't be worse than here...

"Excuse me," said Twoflower.

withdrew

his hand bunched into a fist.

"Don't move," he said.

"Am I doing this right?" asked Twoflower anxiously.

"He says he'll skewer your liver if you move,"

Rincewind translated freely.

"I doubt it," said Withel.

"Bet?"

"No!"

As Withel tensed himself to turn on the tourist Rincewind lashed out and caught the thief on the jaw. Withel stared at him in amazement for a moment, and then quietly toppled into the mud.

The wizard uncurled his stinging fist and the roll of gold coins slipped between his throbbing fingers.

He looked down at the recumbent thief.

"Good grief," he gasped.



the crackle  
of collapsing rafters. "Come on!"

He grabbed Twoflower's reluctant arm and dragged him down the street.

"My luggage!"

"Blast your luggage. Stay here much longer and you'll go where you don't need luggage. Come on!" screamed Rincewind.

They jogged on through the crowd of frightened people leaving the area, while the wizard took great mouthfuls of cool dawn air. Something was puzzling him.

"I'm sure all the candles went out," he said. "So how did the Drum catch fire?"

"I don't know," moaned Twoflower. "It's terrible, Rincewind. We were getting along so well, too."

Rincewind stopped in astonishment, so that another refugee cannoned into him and spun away with an oath.

"Getting on?"

was

wise. I've still got the rhinu he paid as his first premium."

Rincewind didn't know the meaning of the word premium, but his mind was working fast.

"You inn-sewered the Drum?" he said. "You bet Broadman it wouldn't catch fire?"

"Oh yes. Standard valuation. Two hundred rhinu, Why do you ask?"

Rincewind turned and stared at the flames racing towards them, and wondered how much of Ankh Morpork could be bought for two hundred rhinu.

Quite a large piece, he decided. Only not now, not the way those flames were moving... He glanced down at the tourist.

"You-" he began, and searched his memory for the worst word in the Trob tongue; the happy little beTrobi didn't really know how to swear properly.

"You," he repeated. Another hurrying figure bumped into him, narrowly missing him with the blade over its shoulder. Rincewind's tortured temper exploded.

Every word fell as heavily as slabs of marble; moreover, Kincewind was

certain that he was the only one who heard them.

He grabbed Twoflower again.

"Let's get out of here!" he suggested.

One interesting side effect of the fire in Ankh-Morpork concerns the

inn-sewer-ants policy, which left the city through the ravaged roof of

the Broken Drum, was wafted high into the discworld's atmosphere on the

ensuing thermal, and came to earth several days and a few thousand miles

away on an uloruaha bush in the beTrobi islands. The simple, laughing

islanders subsequently worshipped it as a god, much to the amusement of

their more sophisticated neighbours. Strangely enough the rainfall and

harvests in the next few years were almost .supernaturally abundant, and

this led to a research team being despatched to the islands by the Minor

Religions faculty of Unseen University. Their verdict was that it only

went to show.

The fire, driven by the wind, spread out from the Drum faster than a man

They rode through just before the first of the big gate timbers descended  
in an explosion of sparks Morpork was already a cauldron of flame.

As they galloped up the red-lit road Rincewind glanced sideways at his  
travelling companion currently trying hard to learn to ride a horse.

Bloody hell, he thought. He's alive! Me too. Who'd have thought it?

Perhaps there is something in this reflected-sound-of-underground-spirits? It was a cumbersome phrase. Rincewind tried to get his tongue  
round the thick syllables that were the word in Twoflower's own language.

"Ecolirix?" he tried. "Ecro-gnothics? Echo-gnomics?"

That would do. That sounded about right.

Several hundred yards downriver from the last smouldering suburb of the  
city a strangely rectangular and apparently heavily-waterlogged object  
touched the mud on the widdershin bank. Immediately it sprouted numerous  
legs and scabbled for a purchase.

don't

ask me how. Is there any more wine?"

The Weasel picked up the empty wineskin.

"I think you have had just about enough wine this night," he said.

Bravd's forehead wrinkled.

"Gold is gold," he said finally. "How can a man with plenty of gold consider himself poor? You're either poor or rich. It stands to reason

Rincewind hiccupped. He was finding Reason rather difficult to hold on

to. "Well," he said, "what I think is, the point is, well, you know octiron?"

The two adventurers nodded. The strange iridescent metal was almost as

highly valued in the lands around the Circle Sea as sapient pearwood, and

was about as rare. A man who owned a needle made of octiron would never

lose his way, since it always pointed to the Hub of the discworld, being

acutely sensitive to the disc's magical field; it would also miraculously

darn his socks.

"Well, my point is, you see, that gold also has its

The little man called Twotlower appeared to be asleep. The Weasel looked  
down at him and shook his head.

"The city awaits, such as it is," he said. "Thank you for a pleasant  
tale, Wizard. What will you do now?"

He eyed the Luggage, which immediately backed away and snapped its lid at  
him.

"Well, there are no ships leaving the city now," giggled Rincewind. "I  
suppose we'll take the coast road to Quirm. I've got to look after  
him,  
you see. But look, I didn't make it-"

"Sure, sure," said the Weasel soothingly. He turned away and swung  
himself into the saddle of the horse that Bravd was holding. A  
few  
moments later the two heroes were just specks under a cloud of  
dust,  
heading down towards the charcoal city.

Rincewind stared muzzily at the recumbent tourist. At two recumbent  
tourists. In his somewhat defenceless state a stray thought,  
wandering  
through the dimensions in search of a mind to harbour it, slid  
into his

their brains. Mushrooms, too "

"However-" said the brown-clad one. He reached into his tunic and took out a golden disc on a short chain. Bravd raised his eyebrows.

"The wizard said that the little man had some sort of golden disc that told him the time," said the Weasel.

"Arousing your cupidity, little friend? You always were an expert thief, Weasel."

"Aye," agreed the Weasel modestly. He touched the knob at the disc's rim, and it flipped open.

The very small demon imprisoned within looked up from its tiny abacus and scowled. "It lacks but ten minutes to eight of the clock," it snarled. The lid slammed shut, almost trapping the Weasel's fingers

With an oath the Weasel hurled the time-teller far out into the heather, where it possibly hit a stone. Something, in any event, caused the case to split; there was a vivid octarine flash and a whiff of brimstone as the time being vanished into whatever demonic dimension it called home.

ancient Ankh, and honest enchantments.

## The Sending of Eight - Prologue

The discworld offers sights far more impressive than those found in

universes built by Creators with less imagination but more mechanical

aptitude. Although the disc's sun is but an orbiting moonlet, its prominences hardly bigger than croquet hoops, this slight drawback must

be set against the tremendous sight of Great A'Tuin the Turtle, upon

Whose ancient and meteor-riddled shell the disc ultimately rests.

Sometimes, in His slow journey across the shores of infinity, He moves

His countrysized head to Snap at a passing comet.

But perhaps the most impressive sight of all - if only because most

brains, when faced with the Sheer galactic enormity of A'Tuin, refuse to

believe it- is the endless Rimfall, where the seas of the disc boil ceaselessly over the Edge into space. Or perhaps it is the Rim-bow, the

eight-coloured, worldgirdling rainbow that hovers in the mist-laden air

over the Fall. The eighth colour is octarine, caused by the scatter-effect of strong sunlight on an intense magical field.



far end;

especially when one can peer into other dimensions at worlds whose

Creators had more mechanical aptitude than imagination. No wonder, then,

that the disc gods spend more time in bickering than in omniscience.

On this particular day Blind Io, by dint of constant vigilance the chief

of the gods, sat with his chin on his hand and looked at the gaming board

on the red marble table in front of him. Blind Io had got his name

because, where his eye sockets should have been, there were nothing but

two areas of blank skin. His eyes, of which he had an impressively large

number, led a semi-independent life of their own. Several were currently

hovering above" the table.

The gaming board was a carefully-carved map of the disc world, overprinted with squares. A number of beautifully modelled playing pieces

were now occupying some of the squares. A human onlooker would, for

example, have recognized in two of them the likenesses of Bravd and the

Weasel. Others represented yet more heroes and champions, of which the

by  
Offler) and shortly afterwards Night had cashed his chips,  
pleading an  
appointment with Destiny. Several minor deities had drifted up  
and were  
kibitzing over the shoulders of the players.

Side bets were made that the Lady would be the next to leave the  
board.

Her last champion of any standing was now a pinch of potash in  
the ruins  
of still-smoking Ankh-Morpork. and there were hardly any pieces  
that she  
could promote to first rank.

Blind Io took up the dice-box, which was a skull various orifices  
had  
been stoppered with rubies, and with several of his eyes on the  
lady he  
rolled three fives. She smiled This was the nature of the Lady's  
eyes:  
they were bright green, lacking iris or pupil, and they glowed  
from  
within.

The room was silent as she scabbled in her box of pieces and,  
from the  
very bottom, produced a couple that she set down on the board  
with two  
decisive clicks. The rest of the playerS, as one God, craned for-  
ward to  
peer at them.

inside.

And then She sent them bouncing across the table.

A six. A three. A five.

Something was happening to the five, however.

Battered by the chance collision of several billion molecules, the die flipped onto a point, spun gently and came down a seven.

Blind Io picked up the cube and counted the sides. "Come on," he said wearily, "play fair."

## 2. The Sending of Eight

The road from Ankh-Morpork to Quirm is high, white and winding, a thirty-league stretch of potholes and half-buried rocks that spirals around mountains and dips into cool green valleys of citrus trees, crosses liana-webbed gorges on creaking rope bridges and is generally more picturesque than

Picturesque. That was a new word to Rincewind the wizard (Being Unseen

Twoflower was a tourist, the first ever seen on the discworld.  
Tourist,  
Rincewind had decided, meant "idiot".

As they rode leisurely through the thyme-scented bee-humming  
air,  
Rincewind pondered on the experiences of the last few days.  
While the  
little foreigner was obviously insane, he was also generous and  
considerably less lethal than half the people the wizard had  
mixed with  
in the city Rincewind rather liked him. Disliking him would have  
been  
like kicking a puppy.

Currently Twoflower was showing a great interest in the theory  
and  
practice of magic.

"It all seems, well, rather useless to me," he said. "I always  
thought  
that, you know, a wizard just said the magic words and that was  
that. Not  
all this tedious memorising."

Rincewind agreed moodily. He tried to explain that magic had in-  
deed once  
been wild and lawless, but had been tamed back in the mists of  
time by  
the Olden Ones, who had bound it to obey among other things  
the Law of

preparation if the wizard wished to prevent the simple principle of leverage flicking his brain out through his ears.

He went on to add that some of the ancient magic could still be found in its raw state, recognisable- to the initiated - by the eightfold shape it made in the crystalline structure of space-time. There was the metal octiron, for example, and the gas octogen. Both radiated dangerous amounts of raw enchantment.

"It's all very depressing," he finished.

"Depressing?"

Rincewind turned in his saddle and glanced at Twoflower's Luggage, which was currently ambling along on its little legs, occasionally snapping its lid at butterflies. He sighed.

"Rincewind thinks he ought to be able to harness the lightning," said the picture-imp, who was observing the passing scene from the tiny doorway of the box slung around Twoflower's neck. He had Spent the morning painting picturesque views and quaint Scenes for his master, and had been allowed

very well going on about pure logic and how the universe was ruled by logic and the harmony of numbers, but the plain fact of the matter was that the disc was manifestly traversing space on the back of a giant turtle and the gods had a habit of going round to atheists' houses and smashing their windows.

There was a faint sound, hardly louder than the noise of the bees in the rosemary by the road. It had a curiously bony quality, as of rolling skulls or a whirling dicebox. Rincewind peered around. There was no-one nearby.

For some reason that worried him.

Then came a slight breeze, that grew and went in the space of a few heartbeats. It left the world unchanged save in a few interesting particulars. There was now, for example, a five-metre tall mountain troll standing in the road. It was exceptionally angry. This was partly because trolls generally are, in any case, but it was exacerbated by the fact that the sudden and instantaneous teleportation from its lair in the

"Only to people!" shouted Rincewind. He drew his sword and, with a smooth overarm throw, completely failed to hit the troll. The blade plunged on into the heather at the side of the track.

There was the faintest of sounds, like the rattle of old teeth. The sword struck a boulder concealed in the heather - concealed, a watcher might have considered, so artfully that a moment before it had not appeared to be there at all. It sprang up like a leaping salmon and in mid-ricochet plunged deeply into the back of the troll's grey neck.

The creature grunted, and with one swipe of a claw gouged a wound in the flank of Twoflower's horse, which screamed and bolted into the trees at the roadside. The troll spun around and made a grab for Rincewind.

Then its sluggish nervous system brought it the message that it was dead. It looked surprised for a moment, and then toppled over and shattered into gravel (trolls being silicaceous lifeforms, their bodies reverted instantly to stone at the moment of death).

It sounded like dice.

"Rincewind?"

The long aisles of trees threw Twoflower's voice from side to side and eventually tossed it back to him, unheeded. He sat down on a rock and tried to think.

Firstly, he was lost. That was vexing, but it did not worry him unduly.

The forest looked quite interesting and probably held elves or gnomes, perhaps both. In fact on a couple of occasions he had thought he had seen strange green faces peering down at him from the branches. Twoflower had always wanted to meet an elf. In fact what he really wanted to meet was a dragon, but an elf would do. Or a real goblin.

His Luggage was missing, and that was annoying. It was also starting to rain. He squirmed uncomfortably on the damp stone, and tried to look on the bright side. For example, during its mad dash his plunging horse had burst through some rushes and disturbed a she-bear with her cubs, but had gone on before the bear could react. Then it had suddenly been galloping



or something?

The stone really was uncomfortable. Twoflower looked down and, for the first time, noticed the strange carving.

It looked like a spider. Or was it a squid? Moss and lichens rather blurred the precise details. But they didn't blur the runes carved below it. Twoflower could read them clearly, and they said: Traveller the hospitable temple of Bel-Shamharoth lies one thousand paces Hubwards. Now this was strange, Twoflower realized, because although he could read the message the actual letters were completely unknown to him. Somehow the message was arriving in his brain without the tedious necessity of passing through his eyes.

He stood up and untied his now-riddable horse from a sapling. He wasn't sure which way the Hub lay. but there seemed to be an old track of sorts leading away between the trees. This Bel-Shamharoth seemed prepared to go out of his way to help stranded travellers. In any case, it was that or the wolves. Twoflower nodded decisively.

About three miles away a failed wizard was hanging by his hands from a high branch in a beech tree.

This was the end result of five minutes of crowded activity. First, an enraged she-bear had barged through the undergrowth and taken the throat out of his horse with one swipe of her paw. Then, as Rincewind had fled the carnage, he had run into a glade in which a number of irate wolves were milling about. His instructors at Unseen University, who had despaired of Rincewind's inability to master levitation, would have then been amazed at the speed with which he reached and climbed the nearest tree, without apparently touching it.

Now there was just the matter of the snake.

It was large and green, and wound itself along the branch with reptilian patience. Rincewind wondered if it was poisonous, then chided himself for asking Such a silly question. Of course it would be poisonous.

"What are you grinning for?" he asked the figure on the next branch.

tence from

Death would have anchored a ship.

Rincewind's arms screamed their agony at him.

He scowled at the vulture-like, slightly transparent figure.

"Won't hurt?" he said. "Being torn apart by wolves won't hurt?"

He noticed another branch crossing his dangerously narrowing one a few feet away. If he could just reach it...

He swung himself forward, one hand outstretched. The branch, already bending, did not break. It simply made a wet little sound and twisted.

Rincewind found that he was now hanging on to the end of a tongue of bark and fibre, lengthening as it peeled away from the tree. He looked down, and with a sort of fatal satisfaction realized that he would land right on the biggest wolf.

Now he was moving slowly as the bark peeled back in a longer and longer strip. The snake watched him thoughtfully.

But the growing length of bark held. Rincewind began to congratulate

Click. It may have been a twig snapping, except that the sound appeared to be inside Rincewind's head. Click, click. And a breeze that failed to set a single leaf atremble.

The hornets' nest was ripped from the branch as the strip passed by. It shot past the wizard's head and he watched it grow smaller as it plummeted towards the circle of upturned muzzles.

The circle suddenly closed.

The circle suddenly expanded.

The concerted yelp of pain as the pack fought to escape the furious cloud echoed among the trees. Rincewind grinned inanely.

Rincewind's elbow nudged something. It was the tree trunk. The strip had carried him right to the end of the branch. But there were no other branches. The smooth bark beside him offered no handholds. It offered hands, though. Two were even now thrusting through the mossy bark beside him; slim hands, green as young leaves. Then a shapely arm followed, and then the hamadryad leaned right out and grasped the astonished wizard

the air. But, somehow, it wasn't quite the same.

Blind Io pushed his stack of chips across the table, glowered through

such of his eyes that were currently in the room, and strode out. A few

demigods tittered. At least Offler had taken the loss of a perfectly good

troll with precise, if somewhat reptilian, grace.

The Lady's last opponent shifted his seat until he faced her across the

board.

"Lord," She said, politely.

"Lady," he acknowledged. Their eyes met.

He was a taciturn god. It was said that he had arrived in the Discworld

after some terrible and mysterious incident in another Eventuality. It is

Of course the privilege of gods to control their apparent outward form,

even to other gods; the Fate of the discworld was currently a kindly man

in late middle age, greying hair brushed neatly around features that a

maiden would confidently proffer a glass of small beer to, should they

appear at her back door. It was a face a kindly youth would gladly help

their

terrible, wheeling stars...

The lady coughed politely, and laid twenty-one white chips on the table.

Then from her robe she took another chip, silvery and translucent and

twice the size of the others. The soul of a true Hero always finds a

better rate of exchange, and is valued highly by the gods.

Fate raised an eyebrow.

"And no cheating, Lady." he said.

"But who could cheat Fate?" she asked. He shrugged.

"No-one. Yet everyone tries."

"And yet, again, I believe I felt you giving me a little assistance against the others?"

"But of course. So that the endgame could be the sweeter, lady. And now..."

He reached into his gaming box and brought forth a piece, setting it down

on the board with a satisfied air. The watching deities gave a collective

Sigh. Even the Lady was momentarily taken aback. it was certainly ugly.

"Mayhap our necrotic friend was loathe to go near this one,"  
laughed

Fate. He was enjoying himself.

"It should never have been spawned."

"Nevertheless," said Fate gnomically. He scooped the dice into  
their  
unusual box, and then glanced up at her.

"Unless," he added, "you wish to resign...?"

She shook her head.

"Play," she said.

"You can match my stake?"

"Play."

Rincewind knew what was inside trees: wood, sap, possibly  
squirrels. Not  
a palace.

Still- the cushions underneath him were definitely softer than  
wood, the  
wine in the wooden cup beside him was much tastier than sap,  
and there  
could be absolutely no comparison between a squirrel and the  
girl sitting  
before him, clasping her knees and watching him thoughtfully,  
unless

The girl was green- flesh green. Rincewind could be absolutely certain

about that, because all she was wearing was a medallion around her neck.

Her long hair had a faintly mossy look about it. Her eyes had no pupils

and were a luminous green.

Rincewind wished he had paid more attention to anthropology lectures at

University.

She had said nothing. Apart from indicating the couch and offering him

the wine she had done no more than sit watching him, occasionally rubbing

a deep scratch on her arm.

Rincewind hurriedly recalled that a dryad was so linked to her tree that

she suffered wounds in sympathy.

"Sorry about that," he said quickly. "it was just an accident. I mean,

there were these wolves, and-

"You had to climb my tree, and I rescued you," said the dryad smoothly. "How lucky for you. And for your friend, perhaps?"

"Friend?"



Rincewind choked on his wine. His ears tried to crawl into his head in terror of the syllables they had just heard. The Soul Eater before he could stop them the memories came galloping back. Once, while a student of practical magic at Unseen University, and for a bet, he'd slipped into the little room off the main library - the room with walls covered in protective lead pentagrams, the room no-one was allowed to occupy for more than four minutes and thirty-two seconds, which was a figure arrived at after two hundred years of cautious experimentation

He had gingerly opened the Book, which was chained to the octiron pedestal in the middle of the rune-strewn floor not lest someone steal it, but lest it escape for it was the Octavo, so full of magic that it had its own vague sentience. One spell had indeed leapt from the crackling pages and lodged itself in the dark recesses of his brain. And, apart from knowing that it was one of the Eight Great Spells, no-one would know which one until he said it. Even Rincewind did not. But he could feel it sometimes, sidling out of sight behind his Ego, bidding its time...

Where's the  
Temple?"

"Hubwards, towards the centre of the forest," said the dryad. "it is very old."

"But who would be so stupid as to worship Belhim? I mean, devils yes, but he's the Soul Eater-"

"There were - certain advantages. And the race that used to live in these parts had strange notions."

"What happened to them, then?"

"I did say they used to live in these parts." The dryad stood up and stretched out her hand. "Come. I am Druellae. Come with me and watch your friend's fate. It should be interesting."

"I'm not sure that-" began Rincewind.

The dryad turned her green eyes on him.

"Do you believe you have a choice?" she asked.

A staircase broad as a major highway wound up through the tree, with vast

"I wondered about that. I mean, are we really in a tree? Have I been reduced in size? From outside it looked narrow enough for me to put my arms around."

"It is."

"Um, but here I am inside it?"

"You are."

"Um," said Rincewind.

Druellae laughed.

"I can see into your mind, false wizard! Am I not a dryad? Do you not know that, what you belittle by the name tree is but the mere four-dimensional analogue of a whole multidimensional universe which - no, I can see you do not. I should have realised that you weren't a real wizard when I saw you didn't have a staff."

"Lost it in a fire," lied Rincewind automatically.

"No hat with magic sigils embroidered on it."

"It blew off."

would

need weapons to fight Rincewind. They , looked as though they could

shoulder their way through solid rock and beat up a regiment of trolls

into the bargain. The three handsome giants looked down at him with

wooden menace. Their Skins were the colour of walnut husks, and under it

muscles bulged like sacks of melons.

He turned around again and grinned weakly at Druellae. Life was beginning

to take on a familiar shape again.

"I'm not rescued, am I?" he said. "I'm captured, right?"

"Of course."

"And you're not letting me go?" It was a statement.

Druellae shook her head. "You hurt the Tree. But you are lucky. Your

friend is going to meet Bel-Shamharoth. You will only die."

From behind two hands gripped his shoulders in much the same way that an

old tree root coils relentlessly around a pebble.

"With a certain amount of ceremony, of course," the dryad went on. "After

the Sender of Eight has finished with your friend."

golden  
haze. The endless stair ran right through it.

Several hundred dryads were clustered at the other end of the hall. They

parted respectfully when Druellae approached, and stared through

Rincewind as he was propelled firmly along behind. Most of them were

females, although there were a few of the giant males among them. They

stood like god-shaped statues among the small, intelligent females.

Insects, thought Rincewind. The Tree is like a hive.

But why were there dryads at all? As far as he could recall, the tree

people had died out centuries before. They had been out-evolved by

humans, like most of the other Twilight Peoples. only elves and trolls

had survived the coming of Man to the discworld; the elves because they

were altogether too clever by half, and the troller-folk because they

were at least as good as humans at being nasty, spiteful and greedy.

Dryads were supposed to have died out, along with gnomes and pixies.

The background roar was louder here.

Fifty or so of the females formed a tight cluster, joined hands and walked backwards until they formed the circumference of a large circle.

The rest of the dryads began a low chant. Then, at a nod from Druellae, the circle began to spin widdershins.

As the pace began to quicken and the complicated threads of the chant

began to rise Rincewind found himself watching fascinated. He had heard

about the Old Magic at University, although it was forbidden to wizards.

He knew that when the circle was spinning fast enough against the

standing magical field of the discworld itself in its slow turning, the

resulting astral friction would build up a vast potential difference which would earth itself in a vast discharge of the Elemental Magical

Force.

The circle was a blur now, and the walls of the Tree rang with the echoes

of the chant.

Rincewind felt the familiar sticky prickling in the scalp that indicated

the build-up of a heavy charge of raw enchantment in the vicinity, and so

he was not utterly amazed when, a few seconds later, a shaft of vivid

a sensible wizard would never mention the number if he could avoid it. Or you'll be eight alive, apprentices were jocularly warned. Bel-Shamharoth was especially attracted to dabblers in magic who, by being as it were beachcombers on the shores of the unnatural were already half-enmeshed in his nets. Rincewind's room number in his hall of residence had been 7a. He hadn't been surprised).

Rain streamed off the black walls of the temple. The only sign of life was the horse tethered outside, and it wasn't Twoflower's horse. For one thing, it was too big. It was a white charger with hooves the size of meat dishes and leather harness aglitter with ostentatious gold ornamentation. It was currently enjoying a nosebag.

There was something familiar about it. Rincewind tried to remember where he had seen it before.

It looked as though it was capable of a fair turn of speed," anyway. A speed which, once it had lumbered up to it, it could maintain for a long time. All Rincewind had to do was shake off his guards, fight his way out

She waved a hand. The focus of the image moved inwards, darted through a great octagonal arch way and sped along the corridor within. There was a figure there, sidling along stealthily with its back against one wall. Rincewind saw the gleam of gold and bronze.

There was no mistaking that shape. He'd seen it many times. The wide chest, the neck like a tree trunk, the surprisingly small head under its wild thatch of black hair looking like a tomato on a coffin... he could put a name to the creeping figure, and that name was Hrun the Barbarian.

Hrun was one of the Circle Sea's more durable heroes: a fighter of dragons, a despoiler of temples, a hired sword, the kingpost of every street brawl, He could even - and unlike many heroes of Rincewind's acquaintance - speak words of more than two syllables, if given time and maybe a hint or two.

There was a sound on the edge of Rincewind's hearing. It sounded like several skulls bouncing down the steps of some distant dungeon. He looked



speed. Something

caught the hood of his robe, which tore off. A he-dryad waiting at the

stairs spread his arms, hurtling towards him. Without breaking his stride

Rincewind ducked again, so low that his chin was on a level with his

knees, while a fist like a log sizzled through the air by his ear.

Ahead of him a whole spinney of the tree men awaited. He spun around,

dodged another blow from the puzzled guard, and sped back towards the

circle, passing on the way the dryads who were pursuing him and leaving

them as disorganized as a set of skittles.

But there were still more in front, pushing their way through the crowds

of females and smacking their fists into the horny palms of their hands

with anticipatory concentration.

"Stand still, false wizard," said Druellae, stepping forward. Behind her

the enchanted dancers spun on, the focus of the circle was now drifting

along a violet-lit corridor.

Rincewind cracked.

"Will you knock that off " he snarled"

even the simplest cantrap for, say, killing cockroaches or scratching the small of his back without using his hands. The mages at Unseen University had tried to explain this by suggesting that the involuntary memorising of the spell had, as it were, tied up all his spell-retention cells. In his darker moments Rincewind had come up with his own explanation as to why even minor spells refused to stay in his head for more than a few seconds.

They were scared, he decided.

"Um-" he repeated.

"A small one would do," said Druellae, watching him curl his lips in a frenzy of anger and embarrassment. She signalled, and a couple of he-dryads closed in.

The spell chose that moment to vault into the temporarily-abandoned saddle of Rincewind's consciousness. He felt it sitting there, leering defiantly at him.

"I do know a spell," he said wearily.

"Yes? Pray tell," said Druellae.

back. From

her throat came a sound of pure terror.

Rincewind looked around. The rest of the dryads were also backing away.

What had he done? Something terrible, apparently.

But in his experience it was only a matter of time before the normal

balance of the universe restored itself and started doing the usual

terrible things to him. He backed away, ducked between the still-spinning

dryads who were creating the magic circle, and watched to see what

Druellae would do next.

"Grab him," she screamed. "Take him a long way

from the Tree and kill him!"

Rincewind turned and bolted.

Across the focus of the circle.

There was a brilliant flash.

There was a sudden darkness.

There was a vaguely Rincewind-shaped violet shadow, dwindling to a point and winking out.

It explained why, earlier in the afternoon, he had espied a chest by the side of the track while riding through this benighted forest. Its top was invitingly open, displaying much gold. But when he had leapt off his horse to approach it the chest had sprouted legs and had gone trotting off into the forest, stopping again a few hundred yards away.

Now, after several hours of teasing pursuit, he had lost it in these hell-lit tunnels. On the whole, the unpleasant carvings and occasional disjointed skeletons he passed held no fears for Hrun. This was partly because he was not exceptionally bright while being at the same time exceptionally unimaginative, but it was also because odd carvings and perilous tunnels were all in a day's work. He spent a great deal of time in similar situations, seeking gold or demons or distressed virgins and relieving them respectively of their owners, their lives and at least one cause of their distress.

Observe Hrun, as he leaps cat-footed across a suspicious tunnel mouth. Even in this violet light his skin gleams coppery. There is much gold

of the

Archmandrite of B'Ituni, and he was already regretting it. It was beginning to get on his nerves.

"I tell you it went down that last passage on the right," hissed Kring in a voice like the scrape of a blade over stone.

"Be silent!"

"All I said was-"

"Shut up!"

And Twoflower...

He was lost, he knew that. Either the building was much bigger than it

looked, or he was now on some wide underground level without having gone

down any steps, or - as he was beginning to suspect - the inner dimensions of the place disobeyed a fairly basic rule of architecture by

being bigger than the outside. And why all these strange lights? They

were eight-sided crystals set at regular intervals in the walls and ceiling, and they shed a rather unpleasant glow that didn't so much

illuminate as outline the darkness. And whoever had done those carvings

on the wall, Twoflower thought charitably, had probably been drinking too

Twoflower  
noticed that even the stones themselves had eight sides.

"I don't like it," said the picture imp, from his box around Twoflower's  
neck.

"Why not?" inquired Twoflower.

"It's weird."

"But you're a demon. Demons can't call things weird. I mean,  
what's weird  
to a demon?"

"Oh, you know," said the demon cautiously, glancing around  
nervously and  
shifting from claw to claw. "Things. Stuff."

Twoflower looked at him sternly. "What things?"

The demon coughed nervously (demons do not breathe, however,  
every  
intelligent being, whether it breathes or not, coughs nervously at  
some  
time in its life. And this was one of them as far as the demon was  
concerned). "Oh, things," it said wretchedly. "Evil things. Things  
we  
don't talk about is the point I'm broadly trying to get across,  
master."

"What was that?" he asked. "Didn't you hear something?"

"Me? Hear? No! not a thing," the demon insisted.

It jerked back into its box and slammed the door. Twoflower tapped on it.

The door opened a crack.

"It sounded like a stone moving," he explained.

The door banged shut. Twoflower shrugged.

"The place is probably falling to bits," he said to himself.

He stood up.

"I say!" he Shouted. Is anyone there?"

AIR, Air, air, replied the dark tunnels.

"Hullo?" he tried. lo, Lo, lo.

"I know there's someone here, I just heard you playing dice! "

ICE, Ice, ice.

"Look, I had just-"

Twoflower stopped. The reason for this was the bright point of light that

bling in slow motion while hanging in mid-air. Twoflower wondered why he had thought of the phrase "a sliver of a scream"...and began to wish he hadn't.

It was beginning to look like Rincewind. The wizard's mouth was open, and his face was brilliantly lit by the light of - what? Strange suns, Twoflower found himself thinking. Suns men don't usually see. He shivered.

Now the turning wizard was half man-size. At that point the growth was faster, there was a sudden crowded moment, a rush of air, and an explosion of sound. Rincewind tumbled out of the air, screaming. He hit the floor hard, choked, then rolled over with his head cradled in his arms and his body curled up tightly.

When the dust had settled Twoflower reached out gingerly and tapped the wizard on the shoulder.

The human ball rolled up tighter.

"It's me," explained Twoflower helpfully. The wizard unrolled a fraction.

"What?" he said.



"Get out? How did you get in? Don't you know?"

"Don't say it!"

Twoflower backed away from this madman

"Don't say it!"

"Don't say what?"

"The number."

"Number?" said Twoflower. "Hey, Rincewind-"

"Yes, number! Between seven and nine. Four plus four" "What, ei-"

Rincewind's hands clapped over the man's mouth. "Say it and we're doomed.

Just don't think about, right. Trust me!"

"I don't understand," wailed Twoflower.

Rincewind relaxed slightly; which was to say that he still made a violin

string look like a bowl of jelly.

"Come on," he said. "Let's try and get out. And I'll try and tell you."

After the first Age of Magic the disposal of grimoires began to become a

Countries near the Rim simply loaded down the books of dead mages with leaden pentagrams and threw them over the Edge. Near the Hub less satisfactory alternatives were available. Inserting the offending books in canisters of negatively polarized octiron and sinking them in the fathomless depths of the sea was one (burial in deep caves on land was earlier ruled out after some districts complained of walking trees and five-headed cats) but before long the magic seeped out and eventually fishermen complained of shoals of invisible fish or psychic clams.

A temporary solution was the construction, in various centres of magical lore, of large rooms made of denatured octiron, which is impervious to most forms of magic. Here the more critical grimoires could be stored until their potency had attenuated.

That was how there came to be at Unseen University the Octavo, greatest of all grimoires, formerly owned by the Creator of the Universe. It was this book that Rincewind had once opened for a bet. He had only a second to stare at a page before setting off various alarm spells, but that was

"It'd vanished from the page," he said. "No-one will know until I say it.

Or until I die, of course. Then it will sort of say itself. For all I know it stops the universe, or ends Time, or anything."

Twoflower patted him on the shoulder.

"No sense in brooding," he said cheerfully. "Let's have another look for a way out."

Rincewind shook his head. All the terror had been spent now. He had broken through the terror barrier, perhaps, and was in the dead calm state of mind that lies on the other side. Anyway, he had ceased to gibber.

"We're doomed," he stated. "We've been walking around all night. I tell you, this place is a spiderweb. It doesn't matter which way we go, we're heading towards the centre."

"It was very kind of you to come looking for me, said Twoflower. "How did you manage it it was very impressive."

"Well," began the wizard awkwardly. "I just 'I can't leave old Two-flower there' and-"

"That's right."

Rincewind glared at him in the hellish purple glow. "Find Bel-Shamharoth?" he said.

"Yes. We don't have to get involved."

"Find the Soul Render and not get involved? Just give him a nod, I suppose, and ask the way to the exit? Explain things to the Sender of Eignnnnng," Rincewind bit off the end of the word just in time and finished, "You're insane. Hey! Come back!"

He darted down the passage after Twoflower, and after a few moments came to a halt with a groan.

The violet light was intense here, giving everything new and unpleasant colours. This wasn't a passage, it was a wide room with walls to a number that Rincewind didn't dare to contemplate, and 7a passages radiating from it.

Rincewind saw, a little way off, a low altar with the Same number of sides as four times two. It didn't occupy the centre of the room,

The Luggage came ambling down one of the other passages that radiated from the room.

"That's great," said Rincewind. "Fine. It can lead us out of here. Now."

Twoflower was already rummaging in the chest

"Yes," he said. "After I've taken a few pictures Just let me fit the attachment-"

"I said now-"

Rincewind stopped. Hrun the Barbarian was standing in the passage mouth directly opposite him, a great black sword held in one ham-sized fist.

"You?" said Hrun uncertainly.

"Ahaha. Yes," said Rincewind. "Hrun, isn't it? Long time no see. What brings you here?"

Hrun pointed to the luggage.

"That," he said. This much conversation seemed to exhaust Hrun. Then he added, in a tone that combined statement, claim, threat and ultimatum:  
"Mine."

the uncertain light Rincewind thought he could see rows of enormous

teeth, white as bleached beechwood.

"Hrun," he said quickly, "there's something I ought to tell you."

Hrun turned a puzzled face to him.

"What?" he said.

"It's about numbers. Look, you know if you add seven and one, or three

and five, or take two from ten. You get a number. While you're here don't

say it and we might all stand a chance of getting out of here alive. Or

merely just dead."

"Who is he?" asked Twoflower. He was holding a cage in his hands, dredged from the bottom-most depths of the Luggage. It appeared to be full of sulking pink lizards.

"I am Hrun," said Hrun proudly. Then he looked at Rincewind.

"What?" he said.

"Just don't say it, okay?" said Rincewind.

He looked at the sword in Hrun's hand. It was black, the sort of black

that is less a colour than a graveyard of colours, and there was a

grinding  
noises, deep under the earth.

And the echoes, although they became softer, refused to die away. They  
bounced from wall to wall, crossing and recrossing, and the violet light  
flickered in time with the sound.

"You did it!" screamed Rincewind. "I said you shouldn't say eight!"

He Stopped, appalled at himself. But the word was out now, and joined its  
colleagues in the general susurration.

Rincewind turned to run, but the air suddenly seemed to be thicker than  
treacle. A charge of magic bigger than he had ever seen was building up;  
when he moved, in painful slow motion, his limbs left trails of golden  
sparks that traced their shape in the air.

Behind him there was a rumble as the great octagonal slab rose into the  
air, hung for a moment on one edge, and crashed down on the floor.

Something thin and black snaked out of the pit and wrapped itself around

"N-nothing!" said Twoflower. "What's happening?"

"I'm being dragged into this pit, what do you think?"

"Oh Rincewind, I'm sorry-"

"You're sorry-"

There was a noise like a singing saw and the pressure on Rincewind's legs abruptly ceased. He turned his head and saw Hrun crouched by the pit, his sword a blur as it hacked at the tentacles racing out towards him.

Twoflower helped the wizard to his feet and they crouched by the altar stone, watching the manic figure as it battled the questing arms.

"It won't work," said Rincewind. "The Sender can materialise tentacles.

What are you doing?"

Twoflower was feverishly attaching the cage of subdued lizards to the picture box, which he had mounted on a tripod.

"I've just got to get a picture of this," he muttered.

"It's stupendous! Can you hear me, imp?"



"Run away and leave Hrun with that thing?" he said.

Rincewind looked blank. "Why not?" he said. "it's his job."

"But it'll kill him,"

"It could be worse," said Rincewind.

"What?"

"It could be us," Rincewind pointed out logically.

"Come on!"

Twoflower pointed. "Hey" he said. "It's got my Luggage! "

Before Rincewind could restrain him Twoflower ran around the edge of the pit to the box, which was being dragged across the floor while its lid snapped ineffectually at the tentacle that held it. The little man began to kick at the tentacle in fury. Another one snapped out of the melee around Hrun and caught him around the waist. Hrun himself was already an indistinct shape amid the tightening coils. Even as Rincewind stared in horror the Hero's sword was wrenched from his grasp and hurled against a wall.

shot out  
like a whip and coiled around his throat, choking him. Stagger-  
ing and  
gasping, Rincewind was dragged across the floor.

One flailing arm caught Twoflower's picture box as it skittered  
past on  
its tripod. He snatched it up instinctively, as his ancestors might  
have  
snatched up a stone when faced with a marauding tiger. If only  
he could  
get enough room to swing it against the Eye...

...the Eye filled the whole universe in front of him. Rincewind felt  
his  
will draining away like water from a sieve.

In front of him the torpid lizards stirred in their cage on the pic-  
ture  
box. Irrationally, as a man about to be beheaded notices every  
scratch  
and stain on the executioner's block, Rincewind saw that they  
had  
overlarge tails that were bluish-white and, he realized, throbbing  
alarmingly. As he was drawn towards the Eye the terrors-truck  
Rincewind  
raised the box protectively, and at the same time heard the pic-  
ture imp  
say

"They're about ripe now, can't hold them any longer. Everyone  
smile,

before

bunching up protectively in front of the abused Eye. The whole mass

dropped into the pit and a moment later the big slab was snatched up by

several dozen tentacles and slammed into place, leaving a number of

thrashing limbs trapped around the edge.

Hrun landed rolling, bounced off a wall and came up on his feet. He found

his sword and started to chop methodically at the doomed arms Rincewind

lay on the floor, concentrating on not going mad. A hollow wooden noise

made him turn his head.

The Luggage had landed on its curved lid. Now it was rocking angrily and

kicking its little legs in the air.

Warily, Rincewind looked around for Twoflower. The little man was in a

crumpled heap against the wall, but at least he was groaning.

The wizard pulled himself across the floor painfully, and whispered,

"What the hell was that?"

"Why were they so bright?" muttered Twoflower

"God, my head..."

"Of course. Standard attachment."

Rincewind staggered across to the box and picked it up. He'd seen salamanders before, of course, but they had been small specimens. They had also been floating in a jar of pickle in the curiobiological museum down in the cellars of Unseen University, since live salamanders were extinct around the Circle Sea.

He tried to remember the little he knew about them. They were magical creatures. They also had no mouths, since they subsisted entirely on the nourishing quality of the octarine wavelength in the discworld's sunlight, which they absorbed through their skins. Of course, they also absorbed the rest of the sunlight as well, storing it in a special sac until it was excreted in the normal way. A desert inhabited by discworld salamanders was a veritable lighthouse at night.

Rincewind put them down and nodded grimly. With all the octarine light in this magical place the creatures had been gorging themselves, and then nature had taken its course.

the altar.

He looked up at Rincewind and grinned. Rincewind hoped that rictus-strung grimace was a grin.

"Mighty magic," commented the barbarian, pushing down heavily on the complaining blade with a hand the size of a ham. "Now we share the treasure eh?"

Rincewind grunted as something small and hard struck his ear. There was a gust of wind, hardly felt.

"How do you know there's treasure in there?" he said.

Hrun heaved, and managed to hook his fingers under the stone. "You find chokeapples under a chokeapple tree," he said. "You find treasure under altars. Logic."

He gritted his teeth. The stone swung up and landed heavily on the floor.

This time something struck Rincewind's hand heavily. He clawed at the air and looked at the thing he had caught. It was a piece of stone with five-plus-three sides. He looked up at the ceiling Should it be sagging

He tried raising a hand. It was immediately surrounded by a glowing  
ocharine corona as the rising magical wind roared past. The gale  
raced  
through the room without stirring one iota of dust, yet it was  
blowing  
Rincewind's eyelids inside out. It screamed along the tunnels, its  
banshee-wail bouncing madly from stone to stone.

Twoflower staggered up, bent double in the teeth of the astral  
gale.

"What the hell is this?" he shouted.

Rincewind half-turned. Immediately the howling wind caught  
him, nearly  
pitching him over. Poltergeist eddies, spinning in the rushing air,  
snatched at his feet.

Hrun's arm shot out and caught him. A moment later he and  
Twoflower had  
been dragged into the lee of the ravaged altar, and lay panting on  
the  
floor. Beside them the talking sword Kring sparkled, its magical  
field  
boosted a hundredfold by the storm.

"Hold on!" screamed Rincewind.

"The wind!" shouted Twoflower. "Where's it coming from? Where's  
it

spirit of Bel-Shamharoth sank through the deeper chthonic planes his brooding spirit was being sucked out of the very stones into the region which, according to the discworld's most reliable priests, was both under the ground and Somewhere Else. In consequence his temple was being abandoned to the ravages of Time, who for thousands of shame-faced years had been reluctant to go near the place. Now the suddenly released, accumulated weight of all those pent-up seconds was bearing down heavily on the unbraced stones.

Hrun glanced up at the widening cracks and sighed. Then he put two fingers into his mouth and whistled.

Strangely the real sound rang out loudly over the pseudosound of the widening astral whirlpool that was forming in the middle of the great octagonal slab. It was followed by a hollow echo which sounded, he fancied, strangely like the bouncing of strange bones. Then came a noise with no hint of strangeness. it was hollow hoofbeats.

Hrun's warhorse cantered through a creaking archway and reared up by its

pounded

surefooted along the tunnels leaping sudden slides of rubble and adroitly

side stepping huge stones as they thundered down from the straining roof.

Rincewind, clinging on grimly looked behind them.

No wonder the horse was moving so swiftly close behind, speeding through

the flickering violet light, were a large ominous-looking chest and a

picture box that skittered along dangerously on its three legs. So great

was the ability of sapient pearwood to follow its master anywhere, the

grave goods of dead emperors had traditionally been made of it...

They reached the outer air a moment before the octagonal arch finally

broke and smashed into the flags.

The sun was rising. Behind them a column of dust rose as the temple

collapsed in on itself, but they did not look back. That was a shame,

because Twoflower might have been able to obtain pictures unusual even by

discworld standards.

There was movement in the smoking ruins. They seemed to be growing a



But Time, having initially gone for the throat, Was now setting out to complete the job. The boiling interface between decaying magic and ascendant entropy roared down the hill and overtook the galloping horse, whose riders, being themselves creatures of Time, completely failed to notice it. But it lashed into the enchanted forest with the whip of centuries.

"Impressive, isn't it?" observed a voice by Rincewind's knee as the horse cantered through the haze of decaying timber and falling leaves.

The voice had an eerie metallic ring to it.

Rincewind looked down at Kring the sword. It had a couple of rubies set in the pommel. He got the impression they were watching him.

From the moorland rimwards of the wood they watched the battle between the trees and Time, which could only have one ending. It was a sort of cabaret to the main business of the halt, which Was the consumption of quite a lot of a bear which had incautiously come within bowshot of Hrun.

Twoflower was helping the hero sort through the treasure stolen from the temple. It was mostly silver set with unpleasant purple stones. Representations of spiders, octopi and the tree-dwelling octarsier of the hubland wastes figured largely in the heap.

Rincewind tried to shut his ears to the grating voice beside him. It was no use.

"-and then I belonged to the Pasha of Re'durat and played a prominent part in the battle of the Great Nef, which is where I received the slight nick you may have noticed some two-thirds of the way up my blade," Kring was saying from its temporary home in a tussock. "Some infidel was wearing an octiron collar, most unsporting, and of course I was a lot sharper in those days and my master used to use me to cut silk handkerchiefs in mid-air and - am I boring you?"

"Huh? Oh, no, no, not at all. It's all very interesting," said Rincewind, with his eyes still on Hrun. How trustworthy would he be? Here they were, out in the wilds, there were trolls about... "I could see you were a cultured person," Kring went on. " seldom do I get to meet really

"What I'd really like is to be a ploughshare. I don't know what that is,  
but it sounds like an existence with some point to it.

Twoflower hurried over to the wizard

"I had a great idea," he burred.

"Yah," said Rincewind, wearily. "Why don't we get Hrun to accompany us to Quirm?"

Twoflower looked amazed. "How did you know?" he said. "I just thought you'd think it," said Rincewind.

Hrun ceased stuffing silverware into his saddlebags and grinned encouragingly at them. Then his eyes Strayed back to the Luggage.

"If we had him with us, who'd attack us?" said Twoflower.

Rincewind scratched his chin. "Hrun?" he suggested.

"But we saved his life in the Temple!"

"Well, if by attack you mean kill," said Rincewind, "I don't think he'd do that. He's not that sort. He'd just rob us and tie us up and leave us for the wolves, I expect."

Then the answer hit him. He looked from Hrun to the picture box. The picture imp was doing its laundry in a tiny tub, while the salamanders dozed in their cage.

"I've got an idea," he said. "I mean, what is it heroes really want?"

"Gold?" said Twoflower.

"No. I mean really want."

Twoflower frowned. "I don't quite understand he Said. Rincewind picked up the picture box.

"Hrun," he said. "Come over here, will you?"

The days passed peacefully. True, a small band of bridge trolls tried to ambush them on one occasion, and a party of brigands nearly caught them unawares one night (but unwisely tried to investigate the Luggage before slaughtering the sleepers). Hrun demanded, and got, double pay for both occasions.

"If any harm comes to us," said Rincewind, "then there will be no-one to

He carefully wrapped the picture in trolldskin and stowed it in his saddlebag, along with the others.

"It seems to be working," said Twoflower admiringly, as Hrun rode ahead to scout the road.

"Sure," said Rincewind. "What heroes like best is themselves."

"You're getting quite good at using the picture box, you know that?"

"Yar."

"So you might like to have this." Twoflower held out a picture.

"What is it?" asked Rincewind.

"oh, just the picture you took in.the temple."

Rincewind looked in horror. There, bordered by a few glimpses of tentacle, was a huge, whorled, calloused, potion-stained and unfocused thumb.

"That's the story of my life," he said wearily.

"You win," said Fate, pushing the heap of souls across the gaming table.

The assembled gods relaxed. "There will be other games," he added.

is the only friend of the poor and the best doctor for the mortally wounded.

Death, although of course completely eyeless, watched Rincewind

disappearing with what would, had His face possessed any mobility at all,

have been a frown. Death, although exceptionally busy at all times,

decided that He now had a hobby There was something about the wizard that

irked Him beyond measure. He didn't keep appointments for one thing.

I'LL GET YOU YET, CULLY, said Death, in the voice like the slamming of

leaden coffin lids.

### 3. The Lure of the Wyrn

It was called the Wyrnberg and it rose almost one half of a mile above

the green valley; a mountain huge, grey and upside down.

At its base it was a mere score of yards across. Then it rose through

clinging cloud, curving gracefully outward like an upturned trumpet until

it was truncated by a plateau fully a quarter of a mile across. There was

ant's dovecote.

This would mean that the "doves" had a wingspan slightly in excess of  
forty yards.

"I knew it," said Rincewind. "We're in a strong magical field."

Twoflower and Hrun looked around the little hollow where they had made  
their noonday halt. Then they looked at each other.

The horses were quietly cropping the rich grass by the stream. Yellow  
butterflies skittered among the bushes. There was a smell of thyme and a  
buzzing of bees. The wild pigs on the spit sizzled gently.

Hrun shrugged and went back to oiling his biceps. They gleamed.

"Looks alright to me," he said.

"Try tossing a coin," said Rincewind.

"What? Go on. Toss a coin."

"Hokay," Said Hrun. "if it gives you any pleasure."

He reached into his pouch and withdrew a handful of loose  
change  
plundered from a dozen realms.

"Edge," Said Rincewind, without looking at it.

Magic never dies. It merely fades away.

Nowhere was this more evident on the wide blue expanse of the discworld

than in those areas that had been the scene of the great battles of the

Mage Wars, which had happened very shortly after Creation. In those days

magic in its raw state had been widely available, and had been eagerly

utilized by the First Men in their war against the Gods.

The precise origins of the Mage Wars have been lost in the fogs of Time,

but disc philosophers agree that the First Men, shortly after their creation, understandably lost their temper. And great and pyro-technic

were the battles that followed - the sun wheeled across the sky, the seas

boiled, weird Storms ravaged the land, small white pigeons mysteriously

appeared in people's clothing, and the very stability of the disc (carried as it was through space on the backs of four giant turtle-riding

elephants) was threatened. This resulted in Stern action by the Old High

Ones, to whom even the Gods themselves are answerable. The Gods were



Rincewind, Twoflower and Hrun stared at the coin.

"Edge it is," said Hrun. "Well, you're a wizard. So what?"

"I don't do - that sort of spell.

"You mean you can't."

Rincewind ignored this, because it was true. "Try it again," he suggested.

Hrun pulled out a fistful of coins.

The first two landed in the usual manner. So did the fourth. The third  
landed on its edge and balanced there. The fifth turned into a small  
yellow caterpillar and crawled away. The sixth, upon reaching its  
zenith,  
vanished with a sharp "spang!"

A moment later there was a small thunder clap.

"Hey, that one was silver," exclaimed Hrun, rising to his feet and  
staring upwards. "Bring it back!"

"I don't know where it's gone, said Rincewind wearily. "it's  
probably  
still accelerating. The ones I tried this morning didn't come  
down,  
anyway."

generated here, and we're feeling the after-effects."

"Precisely," said a passing bush

Hrun's head jerked down.

"You mean this is one of those places?" he asked.

"Let's get out of here!"

"Right," agreed Rincewind. "if we retrace our steps we might make it. We can stop every mile or so and toss a coin."

He stood up urgently and started stuffing things into his saddlebags.

"What?" Said Twoflower.

Rincewind stopped. "Look," he snapped. "Just don't argue. Come on."

"It looks alright," said Twoflower. "Just a bit underpopulated that's all..."

"Yes," said Rincewind. "Odd, isn't it? Come on!" There was a noise high above them, like a strip of leather being slapped on a wet rock. Something glassy and indistinct passed over Rincewind's head, throwing up

The young woman glanced at the scrying glass. "Heading rim-wards at speed," she reported. "By the way - they've still got that box on legs."

The old man chuckled, an oddly disturbing sound in the dark and dusty crypt. "Sapient pearwood," he said. "Remarkable. Yes, I think we will have that. Please see to it, my dear - before they go beyond your power, perhaps?"

"Silence! Or-"

"Or what, Liessa?" said the old man (in this dim light there was something odd about the way he was Slumped in the stone chair). "You killed me once already, remember?"

She snorted and stood up, tossing back her hair scornfully. It was red, flecked with gold. Erect, Liessa Wyrmbidder was entirely a magnificent sight. She was also almost naked, except for a couple of mere scraps of the lightest chain mail and riding boots of iridescent dragonhide. In one boot was thrust a riding crop, unusual in that it was as long as a spear and tipped with tiny steel barbs.

course, that since he had been dead for three months his eyes were in any case not in the best of condition. The other was that as a wizard - even a dead wizard of the fifteenth grade, his optic nerves had long since become attuned to seeing into levels and dimensions far removed from common reality, and were therefore somewhat inefficient at observing the merely mundane. (During his life they had appeared to others to be eight-faceted and eerily insectile.) Besides, since he was now suspended in the narrow space between the living world and the dark shadow-world of Death he could survey the whole of Causality itself. That was why, apart from a mild hope that this time his wretched daughter would get herself killed, he did not devote his considerable powers to learning more about the three travellers galloping desperately out of his realm.

Several hundred yards away, Liessa was in a strange humour as she strode down the worn steps that led into the hollow heart of the Wyrnberg followed by half a dozen Riders. Would this be the opportunity? Perhaps here was the key to break the deadlock, the key to the throne of the

was told.

The biggest of the three now fleeing the dragonlands might do.  
And if it  
turned out that he wouldn't, then dragons were always hungry  
and needed  
to be fed regularly. She could see to it that they got ugly.

Uglier than usual, anyway.

The stairway passed through a stone arch and ended in a narrow  
ledge near  
the roof of the great cavern where the Wyrms roosted.

Sunbeams from the myriad entrances around the walls cries-  
crossed the  
dusty gloom like amber rods in which a million golden insects  
had been  
preserved. Below, they revealed nothing but a thin haze. Above...

The walking rings started so close to Liessa's head that she could  
reach  
up and touch one. They stretched away in their thousands  
across the  
upturned acres of the cavern roof. It had taken a score of ma-  
sons a score  
of years to hammer the pitons for all those, hanging from their  
work as  
they progressed. Yet they were as nothing compared to the  
eighty-eight  
major rings that clustered near the apex of the dome. A further  
fifty had

The dragons sense Liessa's presence. Air swishes around the cavern as  
eighty-eight pairs of wings unfold like a complicated puzzle. Great heads  
with green, multi-faceted eyes peer down at her. The beasts were still  
faintly transparent. While the men around her take their hookboots from  
the rack. Liessa bends her mind to the task of full visualisation; about  
her in the musty air the dragons become fully visible, bronze scales  
dully reflecting the sunbeam shafts. Her mind throbs, but now that the  
Power is flowing fully she can, with barely a wner of concentration,  
think of other things.

Now she too buckles on the hookboots and turns a graceful cartwheel to  
bring their hooks, with a faint clung, against a couple of the walking  
rings in the ceiling.

Only now it is the floor. The world has changed. Now she is standing on  
the edge of a deep bowl or crater, floored with the little rings across  
which the dragonriders are already strolling with a pendulum grit. In the

joyable,  
he says in her mind.

"I thought I said there were to be no unaccompanied flights?" she snaps.

I was hungry, Liessa.

"Curb your hunger. Soon there will be horses to eat."

The reins stick in our teeth. Are there any warriors? We like warriors.

Liessa swings down the mounting ladder and lands with her legs locked  
around Laolith's leathery neck.

"The warrior is mine. There are a couple of others you can have. One  
appears to be a wizard of sorts," she adds by way of encouragement.

Oh, you know how it is with wizards. Half an hour afterwards  
you could  
do with another one, the dragon grumbles.

He spreads his wings and drops.

"They're gaining," screamed Rincewind. He bent even lower over  
his  
horse's neck and groaned. Twoflower was trying to keep up while  
at the

der those

trees no dragons could fly... He heard the clap of wings before shadows folded around him. Instinctively he rolled in the saddle and felt the white-hot stab of pain as something sharp scored a line across his shoulders.

Behind him Hrun screamed, but it sounded more like a bellow of rage than a cry of pain. The barbarian had vaulted down into the heather and had drawn the black sword, Kring. He flourished it as one of the dragons curved in for another low pass.

"No bloody lizard does that to me!" he roared.

Rincewind leaned over and grabbed Twoflower's reins.

"Come on," he hissed.

"But, the dragons-" said Twoflower, entranced.

"Blast the-" began the wizard, and froze. Another dragon had peeled off from the circling dots overhead and was gliding towards them. Rincewind let go of Twoflower's horse, swore bitterly, and spurred his own mount towards the trees, alone. He didn't look back at the sudden commotion



heard

before the flashing blue lights of unconsciousness closed in was a high reptilian scream of frustration, and the thrashing of talons in the treetops.

When he awoke a dragon was watching him; at least, it was staring in his general direction. Rincewind groaned and tried to dig his way into the moss with his shoulderblades, then gasped as the pain hit him.

Through the mists of agony and fear he looked back at the dragon.

The creature was hanging from a branch of a large dead oak tree, several hundred feet away. Its bronze-gold wings were tightly wrapped around its body but the long equine head turned this way and that at the end of a remarkably prehensile neck. It was scanning the forest.

It was also semi-transparent. Although the sun glinted off its scales,

Rincewind could clearly make out the outlines of the branches behind it.

On one of them a man was sitting, dwarfed by the hanging reptile. He

appeared to be naked except for a pair of high boots, a tiny leather

could do. Would  
it only half-kill him? He decided not to stay and find out.

Moving on heels, fingertips and shoulder muscles, Rincewind  
wriggled  
sideways until foliage masked the oak and its occupants. Then  
he  
scrambled to his feet and hared off between the trees.

He had no destination in mind, no provisions, and no horse. But  
while he  
still had legs he could run. Ferns and brambles whipped at him,  
but he  
didn't feel them at all.

When ,he had put about a mile between him and the dragon he  
Stopped and  
collapsed against a tree, which then spoke to him.

"Psst," it said.

Dreading what he might see, Rincewind let his gaze slide up-  
wards. It  
tried to fasten on innocuous bits of bark and leaf, but the  
scourge of  
curiosity forced it to leave them behind. Finally it fixed on a  
black  
sword thrust straight through the branch above Rincewind's  
head.

"Don't just stand there," said the sword (in a voice like the sound  
of a

"What happened to the others?" said Rincewind, still clutching the tree desperately.

"Oh, the dragons got them. And the horses. And that box thing. Me too, except that Hrun dropped me. What a stroke of luck for you."

"Well-" began Rincewind. Kring ignored him.

"I expect you'll be in a hurry to rescue them," it added.

"Yes, well-"

"So if you'll just pull me out we can be off." Rincewind squinted up at the sword. A rescue attempt had hitherto been so far at the back of his mind that, if some advanced speculations on the nature and shape of the many-dimensional multiplexity of the universe were correct, it was right at the front; but a magic sword was a valuable item...

And it would be a long trek back home, wherever that was...

He scrambled up the tree and inched along the branch. Kring was buried very firmly in the wood. He gripped the pommel and heaved until lights flashed in front of his eyes.

"Ungh?"

"I have had many names, you know."

"Amazing," said Rincewind. He swayed backwards as the blade slid free. It

felt strangely light. back on the ground again he decided to break the

news. "I really don't think rescue is a good idea," he said. "I think we'd better head back to a city, you know. To raise a search party."

"The dragons headed hubwards," said Kring.

"However, I suggest we start with the one in the trees over there."

"Sorry, but--"

"You can't leave them to their fate!"

Rincewind looked surprised. "I can't?" he said.

"No. You can't. Look, I'll be frank. I've worked with better material

than you, but it's either that or--have you ever spent a million years in a coal measure?"

"Look,I--"

"So if you don't stop arguing I'll chop your head off."

Klsdra the dragonrider leaned forward and squinted across the clearing. "I see him," he said. He swung himself down easily from branch to branch and landed lightly on the tussocky grass, drawing his sword. He took a long look at the approaching man, who was obviously not keen on leaving the shelter of the trees. He was armed, but the dragonrider observed with some interest the strange way in which the man held the sword in front of him at arm's length, as though embarrassed to be seen in its company.

Klsdra hefted his own sword and grinned expansively as the wizard shuffled towards him. Then he leapt.

Later, he remembered only two things about the fight. He recalled the uncanny way in which the wizard's sword curved up and caught his own blade with a shock that jerked it out of his grip. The other thing - and it was this, he averred, that led to his downfall - was that the wizard was covering his eyes with one hand.

Klsdra jumped back to avoid another thrust and fell "full length on the

appeared to be singing to itself.

"Psepha!" Klsdra shouted.

The dragon roared in defiance, but pulled out of the dive that would have removed Rincewind's head, and flapped ponderously back to the tree.

"Talk!" screamed Rincewind.

Klsdra squinted at him up the length of the sword.

"What would you like me to say?" he asked.

"What?"

"I said what would you like me to say?"

"Where are my friends? The barbarian and the little man is what I mean."

"I expect they have been taken back to the Wyrnberg."

Rincewind tugged desperately against the surge of the sword, trying to shut his mind to Kring's bloodthirsty humming.

"The Wyrnberg. There is only one. It is Dragonhome."

"And I suppose you were waiting to take me there, eh?"

something

he was really going to have to go through with.

"Right then," he said as diffidently as he could manage. "You'd better take me to this Wyrmberg of yours, hadn't you?"

"I was supposed to take you in dead," muttered K!sdra sullenly.

Rincewind looked down at him and grinned slowly. It was a wide, manic and utterly humourless rictus that was the sort of grin that is normally accompanied by small riverside birds wandering in and out picking scraps out of the teeth.

"Alive will do," said Rincewind. "If we're talking about anyone being dead, remember whose sword is in which hand."

"If you kill me, nothing will prevent Psepha killing you," shouted the prone dragonrider.

"So what I'll do is, I'll chop bits off," agreed the wizard. He tried the effect of the grin again.

"Oh, all right," said K!sdra sulkily. "Do you think I've got an imagination?"

"I mean, there is no other way. It's flying or nothing."

Rincewind looked again at the dragon before him. He could quite clearly

see through it to the crushed grass on which it lay but, when he gingerly

touched a scale that was a mere golden sheen on thin air, it felt solid

enough. Either dragons should exist completely or fail to exist at all,

he felt. A dragon only half-existing was worse than the extremes.

"I didn't know dragons could be seen through," he said.

K!sdra shrugged. "Didn't you?" he said.

He swung himself astride the dragon awkwardly because Rincewind was

hanging on to his belt. Once uncomfortably aboard the wizard moved his

white-knuckle grip to a convenient piece of harness and prodded K!sdra

lightly with the sword.

"Have you ever flown before?" said the dragonrider, without looking

round.

"Not as such, no."

"Would you like something to suck?"



into the air.

Rincewind occasionally had nightmares about teetering on some intangible

but enormously high place, and seeing a blue-distanced, cloud-punctuated

landscape reeling away below him (this usually woke him up with his

ankles sweating; he would have been even more worried had he known that

the nightmare was not, as he thought, just the usual discworld vertigo.

It was a backwards memory of an event in his future so terrifying that it

had generated harmonics of fear all the way along his lifeline).

This was not that event, but it was good practise for it. Psepha clawed

its way into the air with a series of vertebrae-shattering bounds.

At the

top of its last leap the wide wings unfolded with a snap and spread out

with a thump which shook the trees. Then the ground was gone, dropping

away in a series of gentle jerks. Psepha was suddenly rising gracefully,

the afternoon sunlight gleaming off wings that were still no more than a

golden film. Rincewind made the mistake of glancing downwards, and found

himself looking through the dragon to the treetops below. Far below. His

"Behold the Wyrnberg!"

Rincewind turned his head slowly, taking care to keep Kring resting lightly on the dragon's back. His streaming eyes saw the impossibly inverted mountain rearing out of the deep forested valley like a trumpet in a tub of nose. Even at this distance he could make out the faint octarine glow in the air that must be indicating a stable magic aura of at least - he gasped - several milliPrime? At least!

"Oh no," he said

Even looking at the ground was better than that. He averted his eyes quickly, and realized that he could now no longer see the ground through the dragon. As they glided around in a wide circle towards the Wyrnberg it was definitely taking on a more solid form, as if the creature's body was filling with a gold mist. By the time the Wyrnberg was in front of them, swinging wildly across the sky, the dragon was as real as a rock.

Rincewind thought he could see a faint streak in the air, as if something

He made the mistake of following the thread of foaming water with his eyes, and jerked himself back just in time.

The flared plateau of the upturned mountain drifted towards them. The dragon didn't even slow. As the mountain loomed over Rincewind like the biggest fly-swatter in the universe he saw a cave mouth. Psepha skimmed towards it, shoulder muscles pumping.

The wizard screamed as the dark spread and enfolded him. There was a brief vision of rock flashing past, blurred by speed. Then the dragon was in the open again.

It was inside a cave, but bigger than any cave had a right to be. The dragon, gliding across its vast emptiness, was a mere gilded fly in a banqueting hall.

There were other dragons - gold, silver, black, white - flapping across the sun-shafted air on errands of their own or perched on out-crops of rock. high in the domed roof of the cavern scores of others hung from

of what  
to do next.

"Well?" he asked, in a whisper. "Any suggestions?"

"Obviously you attack," said Kring scornfully.

"Why didn't I think of that?" said Rincewind

"Could it be because they all have crossbows?"

"You're a defeatist."

"Defeatist? That's because I'm going to be defeated!"

"You're your own worst enemy, Rincewind," said the sword.

Rincewind looked up at grinning men.

"Bet?" he said wearily.

Before Kring could reply Psepha reared in midair and alighted on  
one of  
the large rings, which rocked alarmingly.

"Would you like to die now, or surrender first?" asked K!sdra  
calmly.

Men were converging on the ring from all directions, walking with  
a  
swaying motion as their hooked boots engaged the ceiling rings.  
There

down faces.

The dragonfolk's taste in clothing didn't run to anything much more

imaginative than a leather harness, studded with bronze ornaments. Knives

and sword sheaths were worn inverted. Those who were not wearing helmets

let their hair flow freely, so that it moved like seaweed in the ventilation breeze near the roof. There were several women among them.

The inversion did strange things to their anatomy. Rincewind stared.

"Surrender," said K!sdra again.

Rincewind opened his mouth to do so. Kring hummed a warning, and

agonising waves of pain shot up his arm. "Never," he squeaked. The pain stopped.

"Of course he won't!" boomed an expansive voice behind him. "He's a hero, isn't he?"

Rincewind turned and looked into a pair of hairy nostrils. They belonged

to a heavily built young" man, hanging nonchalantly from the ceiling by his boots.

think of as a kind of integral punctuation. "You have come to challenge me in mortal combat."

"Well, no, I didn't-"

"You are mistaken. Klsdra, help our hero into a pair of hookboots. I am sure he is anxious to get started."

"No, look, I just came here to find my friends. I'm sure there's no-

Rincewind began, as the dragonrider guided him firmly onto the platform, pushed him onto a seat, and proceeded to strap hookboots to his feet.

"Hurry up, Klsdra. We mustn't keep our hero from his destiny," said  
Liort.

"Look, I expect my friends are happy enough here, so if you could just, you know, set me down somewhere

"You will see your friends soon enough," said the dragonlord airily. "If you are religious, I mean. None who enter the Wyrnberg ever leave again. Except metaphorically, of course. Show him how to reach the rings, Klsdra."

your feet up until the hooks catch." He helped the protesting wizard

climb until he was hanging upside down, robe tucked into his britches,

Kring dangling from one hand. At this angle the dragonfolk looked

reasonably bearable but the dragons themselves, hanging from their

perches, loomed over the scene like immense gargoyles. Their eyes glowed

with interest.

"Attention, please," said Liort. A dragonrider handed him a long shape,

wrapped in red silk.

"We fight to the death," he said. "Yours."

"And I suppose I earn my freedom if I win?" said Rincewind, without much

hope.

Liort indicated the assembled dragonriders with a tilt of his head.

"Don't be naive, he said.

Rincewind took a deep breath "I suppose I should warn you," he said, his

voice hardly quavering at all, "that this is a magic sword."

past his  
guard and, although the dragonlord's sword jerked up to deflect  
most of  
the force, the result was a thin red line across its master's torso.

With a growl he launched himself at the wizard boots clattering  
as he  
slid from ring to ring. The swords met again in another violent  
discharge  
of magic and, at the same time, Liort brought his other hand  
down  
against Rincewind's head, jarring him so hard that one foot  
jerked out of  
its ring and flailed desperately.

Rincewind knew himself to be almost certainly the worst wizard  
on the  
discworld since he knew but one spell; yet for all that he was still  
a  
wizard, and thus by the inexorable laws of magic this meant that  
upon his  
demise it would be Death himself who appeared to claim him (in-  
stead of  
sending one of his numerous servants, as is usually the case).  
Thus it  
was that, as a grinning Liort swung back and brought his sword  
around in  
a lazy arc, time ran into treacle.

To Rincewind's eyes the world was suddenly lit by a flickering  
ocharine



scythe of  
proverbial sharpness...

Rincewind ducked. The blade hissed coldly through the air beside his head and entered the rock of the cavern roof without slowing. Death screamed a curse in his cold crypt voice. The scene vanished. What passed for reality on the discworld reasserted itself with a rush of sound. Lio!rt gasped at the sudden turn of speed with which the wizard had dodged his killing stroke and, with that desperation only available to the really terrified, Rincewind uncoiled like a snake and launched himself across the space between them. He locked both hands around the dragonlord's sword arm, and wrenched.

It was at that moment that Rincewind's one remaining ring, already overburdened, slid out of the rock with a nasty little metal sound.

He plunged down, swung wildly, and ended up dangling over a bone-splintering death with his hands gripping the dragonlord's arm so tightly that the man screamed.

"Shoot him!" bellowed Lio!rt.

Out of the corner of his eye Rincewind saw several crossbows levelled at him. Lio!rt chose that moment to flail down with his free hand, and a fistful of rings stabbed into the wizard's fingers.

He let go.

Twoflower grabbed the bars and pulled himself up.

"See anything?" said Hrun, from the region of his feet.

"Just clouds."

Hrun lifted him down again, and sat on the edge of one of the wooden beds that were the only furnishings in the cell. "Bloody hell," he said.

"Don't despair," said Twoflower.

"I'm not despairing."

"I expect it's all some sort of misunderstanding. I expect they'll release us soon. They seem very civilised."

Hrun stared at him from under bushy eyebrows. He started to say something, then appeared to think better of it. He sighed instead.

"But they carried us up in the air! In that hall there must have been hundreds-"

"I expect it was just magic," said Hrun, dismissively."

"Well, they looked like dragons," said Twoflower, an air of defiance about him. "I always wanted to see dragons, ever since I was a little lad. Dragons flying around in the sky, breathing flames..."

"They just used to crawl around in swamps and stuff, and all they breathed was stink," said Hrun lying down in the bunk. "They weren't very big either. They used to collect firewood."

"I heard they used to collect treasure," said Twoflower.

"And firewood. Hey," Hrun added, brightening "did you notice all those rooms they brought us through? Pretty impressive, I thought. Lot of good stuff about, plus some of those tapestries have got to be worth a fortune." He scratched his chin thoughtfully, making a noise like a porcupine shouldering its way through gorse.

"What happens next?" asked Twoflower.

passage out of the place and we'll liberate a couple of horses and escape with the treasure." Hrun leaned his head back on his hands and looked at the ceiling, whistling tunelessly.

"All that?" said Twoflower.

"Usually."

Twoflower sat down on his bunk and tried to think. This proved difficult, because his mind was awash with dragons.

Dragons!

Ever since he was two years old he had been captivated by the pictures of the fiery beasts in The Octarine Fairy Book. His sister had told him they didn't really exist, and he recalled the bitter disappointment. If the world didn't contain those beautiful creatures, he'd decided, it wasn't half the world it ought to be. And then later he had been bound apprentice to Ninereeds the Masteraccount, who in his grey-mindedness was everything that dragons were not, and there was no time for dreaming.

But there was something wrong with these dragons. They were too small and

"Hrun?" he said.

There was a snore from the other bunk.

Twoflower padded over to the corner, peering gingerly at the stones in case there was a secret panel. At that moment the door was flung back thumping against the wall. Half a dozen guards hurtled through it, spread out and flung themselves down on one knee. Their weapons were aimed exclusively at Hrun. When he thought about this later, Twoflower felt quite offended.

Hrun snored.

A woman strode into the room. Not many women can stride convincingly, but she managed it. She glanced briefly at Twoflower, as one might look at a piece of furniture, then glared down at the man on the bed.

She was wearing the same sort of leather harness that the dragonriders had been wearing but in her case it was much briefer. That, and the magnificent mane of chestnut-red hair that fell to her waist, was her

before it was halfway through its arc Hrun's right hand moved so fast that it appeared to travel between two points in space without at any time occupying the intervening air. It closed around the woman's wrist with a dull smack. His other hand groped feverishly for a sword that wasn't there... Hrun awoke.

"Gngh?" he said, looking up at the woman with a puzzled frown. Then he caught sight of the bowmen.

"Let go," said the woman, in a voice that was calm and quiet and edged with diamonds. Hrun released his grip slowly.

She stepped back, massaging her wrist and looking at Hrun in much the same way that a cat watches a mousehole.

"So," she said at last. "You pass the first test. What is your name, barbarian?"

"Who are you calling a barbarian?" snarled Hrun.

"That is what I want to know."

Hrun counted the bowmen slowly and made a brief calculation. His

course.

There are three of them. You have passed the first."

"What are the other-" Hrun paused, his lips moved soundlessly and then he hazarded, "two?"

"Perilous."

"And the fee?"

"Valuable."

"Excuse me," said Twoflower

"And if I fail these tests?" said Hrun, ignoring him. The air between

Hrun and Liessa crackled with small explosions of charisma as their gazes sought for a hold.

"If you had failed the first test you would now be dead. This may be considered a typical penalty."

"Um, look," began Twoflower. Liessa spared him a brief glance, and appeared actually to notice him for the first time.

"Take that away," she said calmly, and turned back to Hrun. Two of the

straw. The door banged shut, its echoes punctuated by the sound of bolts being slammed home.

In the other cell Hrun had barely blinked.

"Okay," he said, "what is the second test?"

"You must kill my two brothers." Hrun considered this.

"Both at the same time, or one after the other?" he said.

"Consecutively or concurrently," she assured him

"What?"

"Just kill them," she said sharply

"Good fighters, are they?"

"Renowned."

"So in return for all this...?"

"You will wed me and become Lord of the Wyrnberg."

There was a long pause. Hrun's eyebrows twisted themselves in unaccustomed calculation.

"I get you and this mountain?" he said at last.



"So calculating?" she rasped. "Hrun the Barbarian who would boldly walk into the jaws of Death Himself?"

Hrun shrugged. "Sure," he said, "the only reason for walking into the jaws of Death is so's you can steal His gold teeth." He brought one arm around expansively, and the wooden bunk was at the end of it. It cannoned into the bowmen and Hrun followed it joyously, felling one man with a blow and snatching the weapon from another. A moment later it was all over.

Liessa had not moved.

"Well?" she said.

"Well what?" said Hrun, from the carnage

"Do you intend to kill me?"

"What? Oh no. No, this is just, you know, kind of a habit. Just keeping in practice. So where are these brothers?" He grinned.

Twoflower sat on his straw and stared into the darkness. He wondered how

Something was in the cell with him. Something that made small noises, but even in the pitch blackness gave the impression of hugeness. He felt the air move.

When he lifted his arm there was the greasy feel and faint shower of sparks that betokened a localised magical field. Twoflower found himself fervently wishing for light.

A gout of flame rolled past his head and struck the far wall. As the rocks flashed into furnace heat he looked up at the dragon that now occupied more than half the cell.

I obey, lord said a voice in his head.

By the glow of the crackling, spitting stone Twoflower looked into his own reflection in two enormous green eyes. Beyond them the dragon was as multi-hued, horned, spiked and lithe as the one in his memory - a real dragon. Its folded wings were nevertheless still wide enough to scrape the wall on both sides of the room. It lay with him between its talons.

this time, as the dragon's neck muscles contracted, its colour faded from orange to yellow, from yellow to white, and finally to the faintest of blues. By that time the flame was also very thin, and where it touched the wall the molten rock spat and ran. When it reached the door the metal exploded into a shower of hot droplets.

Black shadows arced and jiggered over the walls. The metal bubbled for an eye-aching moment, and then the door fell in two pieces in the passage beyond. The flame winked out with a suddenness that was almost as startling as its arrival.

Twoflower stepped gingerly over the cooling door and looked up and down the corridor. It was empty.

The dragon followed. The heavy door frame caused it some minor difficulty, which it overcame with a swing of its shoulders that tore the timber out and tossed it to one side. The creature looked expectantly at Twoflower, its skin rippling and twitching as it sought to open its wings in the confines of the passage.

"How did you get in there?" said Twoflower.

Yes.

"It was magic?"

Yes.

"But I've thought about dragons all my life."

In this place the frontier between thought and reality is probably  
a little confused. All I know is that once I was not, and then you  
thought of me, and then I was. Therefore, of course, I am yours to com-  
mand.

"Good grief"

Half a dozen guards chose that moment to turn the bend in the  
corridor.

They stopped, openmouthed. Then one remembered himself suf-  
ficiently to raise his crossbow and fire.

The dragon's chest heaved. The quarrel exploded into flaming  
fragments in mid-air. The guards scurried out of sight. A fraction of a second  
later a wash of flame played over the stones where they had been  
standing.

Twoflower looked up in admiration

him.

They padded down a series of passages that crisscrossed like a maze. At

one point Twoflower thought he heard shouts, a long way behind them but

they soon faded away. Sometimes the dark arch of a crumbling doorway

loomed past them in the gloom. Light filtered through dimly from various

shafts and, here and there, bounced off big mirrors that had been

mortared into angles of the passage. Sometimes there was a brighter glow

from a distant light-well.

What was odd, thought Twoflower as he strolled down a wide flight of

stairs and kicked up billowing clouds of silver dust motes, was that the

tunnels here were much wider. And better constructed, too. There were

statues in niches set in the walls, and here and there faded but interesting tapestries had been hung. They mainly showed dragons -

dragons by the hundreds in flight or hanging from their perch rings,

dragons with men on their backs hunting down deer and, sometimes other

men. Twoflower touched one tapestry gingerly. The fabric crumbled

"What is your name, dragon?" said Twoflower.

I don't know.

"I think I shall call you Ninereeds."

That is my name, then.

They waded through the all-encroaching dust in a series of huge, dark-pillared halls which had been delved out of the solid rock.

With

some cunning too, from floor to ceiling the walls were a mass of statues,

gargoyles, bas-reliefs and fluted columns that cast weirdly-moving

shadows when the dragon gave an obliging illumination at Twoflower's

request. They crossed the lengthy galleries and vast carven amphitheatres, all awash with deep soft dust and completely uninhabited.

No-one had come to these dead caverns in centuries.

Then he saw the path, leading away into yet another dark tunnel mouth.

Someone had been using it regularly, and recently. It was a deep narrow

trail in the grey blanket.

Twoflower followed it. It led through still more lofty halls and winding

corridors quite big enough for a dragon (and dragons had come this way

Instantly sparks crackled in Twoflower's hair and there was a sudden gust  
of hot dry wind that didn't disturb the dust in the way that ordinary  
wind should but, instead, whipped it up momentarily into unpleasantly  
half-living shapes before it settled again. In Twoflower's ears came the  
Strange shrill twittering of the Things locked in the distant dungeon  
Dimensions, out beyond the fragile lattice of time and space. Shadows  
appeared where there was nothing to cause them. The air buzzed like a  
hive.

In short, there was a vast discharge of magic going on around him.

The chamber beyond the door was lit by a pale green glow. Stacked around  
the walls, each on its own marble shelf, were tier upon tier of coffins.  
In the centre of the room was a stone chair on a raised dais, and it  
contained a slumped figure which did not move but said, in a brittle old  
voice, "Come in, young man."

Twoflower stepped forward. The figure in the seat was human, as far as he

"Obvious, isn't it?" agreed the voice. "You'd be Twoflower, wouldn't you?"

Or is that later?"

"Later?" said Twoflower. "Later than what?" He stopped."

"Well," said the voice. "You see, one of the disadvantages of being dead

is that one is released as it were from the bonds of time and therefore I

can see everything that has happened or will happen, all at the same time

except that of course I now know that Time does not, for all practical

purposes, exist."

"That doesn't sound like a disadvantage," said Twoflower.

"You don't think so? Imagine every moment being at one and the same time

a distant memory and a nasty surprise and you'll see what I mean. Anyway,

I now recall what it was I am about to tell you. Or have I already done

so? That's a fine looking dragon, by the way. Or don't I say that, yet?"

"It is rather good. It just turned up," said Twoflower.

"It turned up?" said the voice. "You summoned it!



you know."

"I think you already told me that," said Twoflower.

"Did I? I certainly intended to," said the dead man.

"But how does it? I've been thinking about dragons all my life, but this is the first time one has turned up."

"Oh well, you see, the truth of the matter is that dragons have never existed as you (and, until I was poisoned some three months ago,) I understand existence. I'm talking about the true dragon, draconis nobilis, you understand; the swamp dragon, draconis vulgaris, is a base creature and not worth our consideration. The true dragon, on the other hand, is a creature of such refinement of spirit that they can only take on form in this world if they are conceived by the most skilled imagination. And even then the said imagination must be in some place heavily impregnated with magic which helps to weaken the walls between the world of the seen and unseen. Then the dragons pop through, as it were, and impress their form" on this world's possibility matrix. I was

that I have any to speak of now."

Twoflower said hurriedly, "You keep saying you're dead..."

"Well?"

"Well, the dead, er, they, you know, don't talk much. As a rule."

"I used to be an exceptionally powerful wizard. My daughter poisoned me,

of course. It is the generally accepted method of succession in our

family, but," the corpse sighed, or at "least a sigh came from the air a

few feet above it, "it soon became obvious that none of my three children

is sufficiently powerful to wrest the lordship of the Wyrnberg from the

other two. A most unsatisfactory arrangement. A kingdom like ours has to

have one ruler. So I resolved to remain alive in an unofficial capacity,

which of course annoys them all immensely. I won't give my children the

satisfaction of burying me until there is only one of them left to perform the ceremony." There was a nasty wheezing noise. Two-

flower

decided that it was meant to be a chuckle.

"So it was one of them that kidnapped us?" said Twoflower.

"Liessa," said the dead wizard's voice. "My daughter. Her power is

dragons

fly further away they begin to dwindle. Otherwise my little Liessa would

be ruling the whole world by now, if I know anything about it. But I can

see I mustn't keep you. I expect you'll be wanting to rescue your friend."

Twoflower gaped. "Hrun?" he said.

"Not him. The skinny wizard. My son Liort is trying to hack him to pieces. I admired the way you rescued him. Will, I mean."

Twoflower drew himself up to his full height, an easy task. "Where is he?" he said, heading towards the door with what he hoped was an heroic stride.

"Just follow the pathway in the dust," said the voice. "Liessa comes to see me sometimes. She still comes to see her old dad, my little girl. She was the only one with the strength of character to murder me. A chip off the old block. Good luck, by the way. I seem to recall I said that. Will say it now, I mean."

The rambling voice got lost in a maze of tenses as Twoflower ran along

clambered  
quickly on to the beast's neck. Soon they were airborne, the  
dragon  
skimming along easily a few feet from the floor and leaving a bil-  
lowing  
cloud of dust in its wake.

Twoflower hung on as best he could as Ninereeds swooped  
through a  
succession of caverns and soared around a spiral staircase that  
could  
easily have accommodated a retreating army. At the top they  
emerged into  
the more inhabited regions, the mirrors at every corridor corner  
brightly  
polished and reflecting a pale light.

I smell other dragons.

The wings became a blur and Twoflower was jerked back as the  
dragon  
veered and sped off down a side corridor like a gnat-crazed  
swallow.  
Another sharp turn sent them soaring out of a tunnel mouth in  
the side of  
a vast cavern. There were rocks far below, and up above were  
broad shafts  
of light from great holes near the roof. A lot of activity on the  
ceiling, too... as Ninereeds hovered, thumping the air with his  
wings,  
two flower peered up at the shapes of roosting beasts and tiny  
men-shaped

Then he began to tumble in the air and reality took over. He was dropping  
to the distant, guano-speckled rocks.

His brain reeled with the thought. The words of the Spell picked just  
that moment to surface from the depths of his mind, as they always did in  
time of crisis. Why not say us, they seemed to urge. What have you got to  
lose?

Rincewind waved a hand in the gathering slipstream.

"Ashonai," he called. The word formed in front of him in a cold blue  
flame that streamed in the wind.

He waved the other hand, drunk with terror and magic.

"Ebiris," he intoned. The sound froze into a flickering orange word that  
hung beside its companion.

"Urshoring. Kvanti. Pythan. N'gurad. Feringomalee." As the words blazed  
their rainbow colours around him he flung his hands back and prepared to  
say the eighth and final word that would appear in corruscating octarine  
and seal the spell. The imminent rocks were forgotten.

triumphantly.

"Got him!"

And the dragon, curving gracefully at the tip of his hight, gave a lazy flip of his wings and soared through a cavemouth into the morning air.

At noon, in a wide green meadow on the lush tableland that was the top of the impossibly-balanced Wyrnberg, the dragons and their riders formed a wide circle. There was room beyond them for a rabble of servants and slaves and others who scratched a living here on the roof of the world, and they were all watching the figures clustered in the centre of the grassy arena.

The group contained a number of senior dragon lords, and among them were Liolrt and his brother Liartes. The former was still rubbing his legs, with Small grimaces of pain. Slightly to one side stood Liessa and Hrun, with some of the woman's own followers. Between the two factions stood the Wyrnberg's hereditary Loremaster.

"As you know," he said uncertainly, "the not-fully-late Lord of the

The loremaster swallowed. He had never come to terms with his former master's failure to expire properly. Is the old buzzard dead or isn't he? he wondered.

"It is not certain," he quavered, "whether it is allowable to issue a challenge by proxy-"

"It is, it is," snapped Greicha's disembodied voice.

"It shows intelligence. Don't take all day about it."

"I challenge you," said Hrun, glaring at the brothers, "both at once."

Liolt and Liartes exchanged looks.

"You'll fight us both together?" said Liartes, a tall, wiry man with long black hair.

"Yah."

"That's pretty uneven odds, isn't it?"

"Yah. I outnumber you one to two."

Liolt scowled. "You arrogant barbarian-"

"That just about does it," growled Hrun. "I'll-"

"Dragons can be used offensively, therefore they are weapons," said

Liolt firmly. "if you disagree we can fight over it."

"Yah," said his brother, nodding at Hrun.

The Loremaster felt a ghostly finger prod him in the chest "Don't stand

there with your mouth open," said Greicha's graveyard voice. "Just hurry up, will you?"

Hrun stepped back, shaking his head.

"Oh no," he said. "Once was enough. I'd rather be dead than fight on one of those things."

"Die, then," said the Loremaster, as kindly as he could manage.

Liolt and Liartes were already striding back across the turf to where

the servants stood waiting with their mounts. Hrun turned to Liessa. She shrugged.

"Don't I even get a sword?" he pleaded. "A knife, even?"

"No," she said. "I didn't expect this." She suddenly looked smaller, all defiance gone. "I'm sorry."



"NO!"

The Loremaster wiped his nose on a handkerchief, held the little silken square aloft for a moment, then let it fall.

A boom of wings made Hrun spin around.

Liolt's dragon was already airborne and circling around towards them. As it swooped low over the turf a billow of flame shot from its mouth, scoring a black streak across the grass that rushed towards Hrun.

At the last minute he pushed Liessa aside, and felt the wild pain of the flame on his arm as he dived for safety. He rolled as he hit the ground, and flipped on to his feet again while he looked around frantically for the other dragon. It came in from one side, and Hrun was forced to take a badly-judged standing jump to escape the flame. The dragon's tail whipped around as it passed and caught him a stinging blow across the forehead. He pushed himself upright, shaking his head to make the wheeling stars go away. His blistered back screamed pain at him.

Hrun, heaving himself over the dragon's shoulder scales with one hand and beating out his flaming hair with the other, presented himself to his view. Liort's hand flew to his dagger, but pain had sharpened Hrun's normally excellent reflexes to needle point. A backhand blow hammered into the dragonlord's wrist, sending the dagger arcing away towards the ground, and another caught the man full on the chin.

The dragon, carrying the weight of two men, was only a few yards above the grass. This turned out to be fortunate, because at the moment Liort lost consciousness the dragon winked out of existence. Liessa hurried across the grass and helped Hrun stagger to his feet. He blinked at her.

"What happened? What happened?" he said thickly.

"That was really fantastic," she said. "The way you turned that somersault in mid-air and everything."

"Yah, but what happened?"

"It's rather difficult to explain-"

"Like all these imaginary burns on my arm, you mean?"

"Yes. No!" she shook her head violently. "I'll have to tell you later!"

"Fine, if you can find a really good medium," snapped Hrun. He glared up at Liartes, who was beginning to descend in wide sweeps.

"Just listen, will you? Unless my brother is conscious his dragon can't exist, it's got no pathway through to this-"

"Run!" shouted Hrun. He threw her away from him and flung himself flat on the ground as Liartes' dragon thundered by, leaving another smoking scar across the turf.

While the creature sought height for another sweep Hrun scrambled to his feet and set off at a dead run for the woods at the edge of the arena.

They were sparse, little more than a wide and overgrown hedge, but at least no dragon would be able to fly through them.

It didn't try. Liartes brought his mount in to land on the turf a few yards away and dismounted casually. The dragon folded its wings and poked

"I'm sure I can see movement in those ferns."

The ferns became mere skeletons of white ash.

"You're only prolonging it, barbarian. Why not give in now? I've burned lots of people; it doesn't hurt a bit," said Liartes, looking sideways at the bushes.

The dragon continued through the spinney, incinerating every likely-looking bush and clump of ferns. Liartes drew his sword and waited.

Hrun dropped from a tree and landed running. Behind him the dragon roared and crashed through the bushes as it tried to turn around, but Hrun was running, running, with his gaze fixed on Liartes and a dead branch in his hands.

It is a little known but true fact that a two legged creature can usually beat a four legged creature over a short distance, simply because of the time it takes the quadruped to get its legs sorted out. Hrun heard the scrabble of claws behind him and then an ominous thump. The dragon had

tomical  
precision, but managed a wild blow that rebroke the barbarian's  
nose for  
him.

Hrun kicked away and scrambled to his feet, to find himself  
looking up  
into the wild horse-face of the dragon, its nostrils distended.

He lashed out with a foot and caught Liartes, who was trying to  
stand up,  
on the side of his head. The man slumped.

The dragon vanished. The ball of fire that was billowing towards  
Hrun  
faded until, when it reached him, it was no more than a puff of  
warm air.

Then there was no sound but the crackle of burning bushes.

Hrun slung the unconscious dragonlord over his shoulder and  
set off at a  
trot back to the arena. Halfway there he found Liolrt sprawled on  
the  
ground, one leg bent awkwardly. He stooped and, with a grunt,  
hoisted the  
man on to his vacant shoulder.

Liessa and the Loremaster were waiting on a raised dais at one  
end of the  
meadow. The dragonwoman had quite recovered her composure  
now, and looked

essa  
snorted.

"Then I shall banish them," she said. "Once they are beyond the reach of the Wyrnberg's magic then they'll have no Power. They'll be simply brigands. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes."

"I am surprised that you are so merciful, Hrun."

Hrun shrugged. "A man in my position, he can't afford to be anything else, he's got to consider his image." He looked around. "Where's the next test, then?"

"I warn you that it is perilous. If you wish, you may leave now. If you pass the test, however, you will become lord of the Wyrnberg and, of course, my lawful husband."

Hrun met her gaze. He thought about his life, to date. It suddenly seemed to him to have been full of long damp nights sleeping under the stars, desperate fights with trolls, city guards, countless bandits and evil

for his efforts to rescue her sister sufferers. In short, life had really left him with little more than a reputation and a network of scars. Being a lord might be fun. Hrun grinned. With a base like this, all these dragons and a good bunch of fighting men, a man could really be a contender.

Besides, the wench was not uncomely.

"The third test?" she said.

"Am I to be weaponless again?" said Hrun.

Liessa reached up and removed her helmet letting the coils of red hair tumble out. Then she unfastened the brooch of her robe. Underneath, she was naked.

As Hrun's gaze swept over her his mind began to operate two notional counting machines. One assessed the gold in her bangles, the tiger-rubies that ornamented her toe-rings, the diamond spangle that adorned her navel, and two highly individual whirligigs of silver filigree. The other was plugged straight into his libido. Both produced tallies that pleased him mightily.

tilting the world at a dangerous angle. The new knowledge that the scaly  
back he was astride only existed as a sort of threedimensional  
daydream  
did not, he had soon realised, do anything at all for his ankle-  
wrenching  
sensations of vertigo. His mind kept straying towards the possi-  
ble  
results of Twoflower losing his concentration.

"Not even Hrun could have prevailed against those crossbows,"  
said  
Twoflower stoutly.

As the dragon rose higher above the patch of woodland, where  
the three of  
them had slept a damp and uneasy sleep, the sun rose over the  
edge of the  
disc. Instantly the gloomy blues and greys of pre-dawn were  
transformed  
into a bright bronze river that flowed across the world, flaring  
into  
gold where it struck ice or water or a light-dam. (Owing to the  
density  
of the magical field surrounding the disc, light itself moved at  
sub-sonic speeds; this interesting property was well utilized by  
the  
Sorca people of the Great Nef, for example, who over the centu-  
ries had  
constructed intricate and delicate dams, and valleys walled with  
polished  
silica, to catch the slow sunlight and sort of store it. The



Rincewind  
turned his head and saw the mountain's shadow slowly unroll it-  
self across  
the cloudscape of the world...

"What can you see?" said Twoflower to the dragon.

I see fighting on the top of the mountain came the gentle reply.

"See?" said Twoflower. "Hrun's probably fighting for his life at  
this  
very moment."

Rincewind was silent. After a moment Twoflower looked around.  
The wizard  
was staring intently at nothing at all, his lips moving sound-  
lessly.

"Rincewind?"

The wizard made a small croaking noise.

"I'm sorry," said Twoflower. "What did you say?"

"...all the way... the great fall..." muttered Rincewind, His eyes  
focused, looked puzzled for a moment, then widened in terror. He  
made the  
mistake of looking down.

"Aargh," he opined, and began to slide.

Twoflower grabbed him.

The thought of fear hadn't actually occurred to him.

"No," he said. "Why should I? You're just as dead if you fall from  
forty  
feet as you are from four thousand fathoms, that's what I say."

Rincewind tried to consider this dispassionately, but couldn't see  
the  
logic of it. It wasn't the actual falling, it was the hitting he...

Twoflower grabbed him quickly.

"Steady on," he said cheerfully. "We're nearly there."

"I wish I was back in the city," moaned Rincewind. "I wish I was  
back on  
the ground."

"I wonder if dragons can fly all the way to the stars?" mused  
Twoflower.

"Now that would be something..."

"You're mad," said Rincewind flatly. There was no reply from the  
tourist,  
and when the wizard craned around he was horrified to see Two-  
flower  
looking up at the paling stars with an odd smile on his face.

"Don't" you even think about it," added Rincewind, menacingly.

The man you seek is talking to the dragon-woman said the  
dragon.

Perhaps they were blown open - the wind certainly made them impossible to shut.

The flat summit of the Wyrnberg rose up at them, lurched alarmingly, then somersaulted into a green blur that flashed by on either side. Tiny woods and fields blurred into a rushing patchwork. A brief silvery flash in the landscape may have been the little river that overflowed into the air at the plateau's rim. Rincewind tried to force the memory out of his mind, but it was rather enjoying itself there, terrorizing the other occupants and kicking over the furniture.

"I think not," said Liessa.

Hrun took the wine cup, slowly. He grinned like a pumpkin.

Around the arena the dragons started to bay. Their riders looked up. And something like a green blur flashed across the arena, and Hrun had gone.

The winecup hung momentarily in the air, then crashed down on the steps.

Only then did a single drop spill.

This was because, in the instant of enfolding Hrun gently in his claws,

cause

Liessa to scream with rage and summon her dragon. As the gold beast materialised in front of her she leapt astride it, still naked, and snatched a crossbow from one of the guards. Then she was airborne, while the other dragonriders swarmed towards their own beasts.

The Loremaster, watching from the pillar he had prudently slid behind in the mad scramble happened at that moment to catch the cross dimensional echoes of a theory being at the same instant hatched in the mind of an early psychiatrist in an adjacent universe, possibly because the dimension-leak was flowing both ways, and for a moment the psychiatrist saw the girl on the dragon. The loremaster smiled.

"Want to bet that she won't catch him?" said Greicha, in a voice of worms and sepulchres, right by his ear.

The loremaster shut his eyes and swallowed hard.

"I thought that my Lord would now be residing fully in the Dread Land," he managed.

"I am a wizard," said Greicha. "Death Himself must claim a wizard. And, aha, He doesn't appear to be in the neighbourhood..."

sparks  
corruscating from its hooves.

"Lord Greicha!" whispered the old Loremaster, as the universe flickered  
around him.

"That was a mean trick," came the wizard's voice, a mere speck  
of sound  
disappearing into the infinite black dimensions.

"My Lord... what is Death like?" called the old man tremulously.

"When I have investigated it fully, I will let you know," came the faintest of modulations on the breeze.

"Yes," murmured the loremaster. A thought struck him. "During daylight,  
please," he added.

"You clowns," screamed Hrun, from his perch on Ninereed's fore-claws.

"What did he say?" roared Rincewind, as the dragon ripped its way through  
the air in the race for the heights.

"Didn't hear." bellowed Twoflower, his voice torn away by the gale. As  
the dragon banked slightly he looked down at the little toy spinning top

He had to drink in several lungfuls of the strangely distilled air in order to get the words out.

"I could have been a lord, and you clowns had to go and-" Hrun gasped. as the chill thin air drew the life even out of his mighty chest

"Wass happnin to the air?" muttered Rincewind. Blue lights appeared in front of his eyes.

"Unk," said Twoflower, and passed out.

The dragon vanished.

For a few seconds the three men continued upwards. Twoflower and the wizard presenting an odd picture as they sat one in front of the other with their legs astride something that wasn't there, Then what passed for gravity on the Disc recovered from the surprise, and claimed them.

At that moment Liessa's dragon flashed by, and Hrun landed heavily across its neck. Liassa leaned over and kissed him.

This detail was lost to Rincewind as he dropped away, with his arms still

There was a flurry of wings as they plummeted through the host  
of  
pursuing creatures, which fell away and up. Dragons screamed  
and wheeled  
across the sky.

No answer came from Twoflower. Rincewind's robe whipped  
around him, but  
he did not wake. Dragons, thought Rincewind in a panic. He  
tried to  
concentrate his mind, tried to envisage a really lifelike dragon. If  
he  
can do it, he thought, then so can I. But nothing happened.

The disc was bigger now, a cloud-swirled circle rising gently un-  
derneath  
them.

Rincewind tried again, screwing up his eyes and straining every  
nerve in  
his body. A dragon. His imagination, a somewhat battered and  
over-used  
organ, reached out for a dragon... any dragon.

IT WON'T WORK, laughed a voice like the dull tolling of a fune-  
real bell,  
YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN THEM.

Rincewind looked at the terrible mounted apparition grinning at  
him, and  
his mind bolted in terror.

had  
been strapped. They were all shouting at him.

"Wake up," he hissed. "Help me!"

Dragging the still-unconscious tourist with him he backed away  
from the  
mob until his free hand found an oddly-shaped door handle. He  
twisted it  
and ducked through, then slammed it hard. He stared around  
the new room  
in which he found himself and met the terrified gaze of a young  
woman who  
dropped the tray she was holding and screamed.

It sounded like the sort of scream that brings muscular help.  
Rincewind,  
awash with fear-distilled adrenalin, turned and barged past her.  
There  
were more seats here, and the people in them ducked as he  
dragged  
Twoflower urgently along the central gangway. Beyond the rows  
of seats  
were little windows. Beyond the windows, against a background  
of fleecy  
clouds, was a dragon's wing. It was silver.

I've been eaten by a dragon, he thought. That's ridiculous, he re-  
plied,  
you can't see out of dragons. Then his shoulder hit the door at  
the far



folk of the Great Net.

"Where am I?" said the wizard. "in the belly of a dragon?"

The young man crouched back and shoved a small black box in the wizard's face. The men in the chairs ducked down.

"What is it?" said Rincewind. "A picture box?" He reached out and took it, a movement which appeared to surprise the swarthy man, who shouted and tried to snatch it back. There was another shout, this time from one of the men in the chairs. Only now he wasn't sitting. He was standing up, pointing something small and metallic at the young man.

It had an amazing effect. The man crouched back with his hands in the air.

"Please give me the bomb, sir," said the man with the metallic thing.

"Carefully, please."

"This thing?" said Rincewind. "You have it" I don't want it!" the man took it very carefully and put it on the floor. The seated men relaxed, and one of them started speaking urgently to the wall. The wizard watched

"What?"

"What's the matter with your friend?"

"Friend?"

Rincewind looked down at Twoflower, who was still slumbering peacefully.

That was no surprise. What was really surprising was that Twoflower was

wearing new clothes. Strange clothes. His britches now ended just above

his knees. Above that he wore some sort of vest of brightly-striped

material. On his head was a ridiculous little straw hat. With a feather

in it.

An awkward feeling around the leg regions made Rincewind look down. His

clothes had changed too. Instead of the comfortable old robe, so marvellously well-adapted for speed into action in all possible contingencies, his legs were encased in cloth tubes. He was wearing a

jacket of the same grey material...

Until now he'd never heard the language the man with the amulet was

using. It was uncouth and vaguely Hublandish - so why could he understand

every word?

hijacker. Of course. What on earth was "Hublandish"? Dr Rjins-  
wand rubbed  
his forehead. What he could do with was a drink.

Ripples of paradox spread out across the sea of causality.

Possibly the most important point that would have to be borne in  
mind by  
anyone outside the sum totality of the multiverse was that al-  
though the  
wizard and the tourist had indeed only recently appeared in an  
aircraft  
in mid-air, they had also at one and the same time been riding  
on that  
aeroplane in the normal course of things. That is to say: "while it  
was  
true that they had just appeared in this particular set of dimen-  
sions, it  
was also true that they had been living in them all along. It is at  
this  
point that normal language gives up, and goes and has a drink.

The point is that several quintillion atoms had just materialized  
(however, they had not. See below) in a universe where they  
should not  
strictly have been. The usual upshot of this sort of thing is a vast  
explosion but, since universes are fairly resilient things, this  
particular universe had saved itself by instantaneously unravel-  
ling its  
spacetime continuum back to a point where the surplus atoms  
could safely

the sudden double-take bounced to and fro across the face of The Sum of Things, bending whole dimensions and sinking galaxies without a trace.

All this was however totally lost on Dr Rjinswand, 33, a bachelor, born in Sweden, raised in New Jersey, and a specialist in the break-away oxidation phenomena of certain nuclear reactors. Anyway, he probably would not have believed any of it.

Zweiblumen still seemed to be unconscious. The stewardess, who had helped Rjinswand to his seat to the applause of the rest of the passengers, was bering over him anxiously.

"I radioed ahead," she told Rjinswand "there'll be an ambulance waiting when we land Uh, it says on the passenger list that you're a doctor" "I don't know what's wrong with him," said Rincewand hurriedly, it might be a different matter if he was a Magnox reactor of course.

"Is it shock of some kind?"

"I've never-"

hundreds of  
legs. If it was what it seemed - a walking chest of the kind that  
appeared in pirate stories brim full of ill-gotten gold and jewels -  
then  
what would have been its lid suddenly gaped open.

There were no jewels. But there were lots of big square teeth,  
white as  
sycamore, and a pulsating tongue, red as mahogany.

An ancient suitcase was coming to eat him.

Rjinswand clutched at the unconscious  
Zweiblumen for what little comfort there was there, and  
gibbered. He wished fervently that he was  
somewhere else...

There was a sudden darkness.

There was a brilliant flash.

The sudden departure of several quintillion atoms from a uni-  
verse that  
they had no right to be in anyway caused a wild imbalance in the  
harmony  
of the Sum Totality which it tried frantically to retrieve, wiping  
out a  
number of subrealities in the process. Huge surges of raw magic  
boiled  
uncontrolled around the very foundations of the multiverse itself,  
welling up through every crevice into hitherto peaceful dimen-  
sions and

All this was however lost on Rincewind as, clutching the inert Twoflower around the waist, he plunged towards the Disc's sea several hundred feet below. Not even the convulsions of all the dimensions could break the iron Law of the Conservation of Energy, and Rjinswand's brief journey in the plane had sufficed to carry him several hundred miles horizontally and seven thousand feet vertically.

The word "plane" flamed and died in Rincewind's mind.

Was that a ship down there?

The cold waters of the Circle Sea roared up at him and sucked him down into their green, suffocating embrace. A moment later there was another splash as the luggage, still bearing a label carrying the powerful travelling rune TWA, also hit the sea.

Later on, they used it as a raft.

#### 4. Close to the Edge

It had been a long time in the making. Now it was almost" completed, and the slaves hacked away at the last clay remnants of the mantle.

Like a fish, he thought. A great flying fish. And of what seas?

"It is indeed magnificent," he whispered. "A work of true art."

"Craft," said the thickset man by his side. The Arch-astronomer turned

slowly and looked up at the man's impassive face. It isn't particularly

hard for a face to look impassive-when there are two golden spheres

where the eyes should be. They glowed disconcertingly.

"Craft, indeed," said the astronomer, and smiled

"I would imagine that there is no greater craftsman on the entire disc

than you, Goldeneyes. Would I be right?"

The craftsman paused, his naked body - naked at least, were it not for a

toolbelt, a wrist abacus and a deep tan - tensing as he considered the

implications of this last remark. The golden eyes appeared to be looking

into some other world.

"The answer is both yes and no," he said at last. Some of the lesser

astronomers behind the throne gasped at this lack of etiquette, but the

Arch astronomer appeared not to have noticed it.

for  
Pitchiu he loaded me down with gold and then, so that I would  
create no  
other work to rival my work for him, he had my eyes put out."

"Wise but cruel," said the Arch-astronomer sympathetically.

"Yah. So I learned to hear the temper of metals and to see with  
my  
fingers. I learned how to distinguish ores by taste and smell. I  
made  
these eyes, but I cannot make them see.

"Next I was summoned to build the Palace of the Seven Deserts,  
as a  
result of which the Emir showered me with silver and then, not  
entirely  
to my surprise, had my right hand cut off."

"A grave hindrance in your line of business," nodded the Arch-  
astronomer.

"I used some of the silver to make myself this new hand, putting  
to use  
my unrivalled knowledge of levers and fulcrums. It suffices. After  
I  
created the first great Light Dam, which had a capacity of 50,000  
daylight hours, the tribal councils of the Nef loaded me down  
with fine  
silks and then hamstrung me so that I could not escape. As a re-  
sult I was



of being put to death by instalments. Why do you continue in it?  
Goldeneyes Dactylos shrugged.

"I'm good at it," he said.

The Arch-astronomer looked up again bronze fish, shining now  
like a gong  
in the noontime sun.

"Such beauty," he murmured. "And unique. Come, Dactylos. Re-  
call to me  
what it was that I promised should be your reward?"

"You asked me to design a fish that would swim through the seas  
of space  
that lie between the worlds," intoned the master craftsman. "In  
return  
for which - in return-"

"Yes? My memory is not what it used to be," purred the Arch-  
astronomer,  
stroking the warm bronze.

"In return," continued Dactylos, without much apparent hope,  
"you would  
set me free, and refrain from chopping off any appendages. I re-  
quire no  
treasure."

"Ah, yes. I recall now." The old man raised a  
blueveined hand, and added, "I lied."

Dactylos grunted.

"Sloppy workmanship," he said, and toppled backwards.

The Arch-astronomer prodded the body with his toe, and sighed.

"There will be a short period of mourning, as befits a master craftsman,"

he said. He watched a bluebottle alight on one golden eye and fly away

puzzled... "That would seem to be long enough," said the Arch-astronomer,

and beckoned a couple of slaves to carry the corpse away.

"Are the chelonauts ready?" he asked.

The master launchcontroller hustled forward.

"Indeed, your prominence," he said.

"The correct prayers are being intoned?"

"Quite so, your prominence."

"How long to the doorway?"

"The launch window," corrected the master launchcontroller carefully.

"Three days, your prominence. Great A'Tuin's tail will be in an unmatched position."

"If only you could navigate"

"If only you could steer-"

A wave washed over the deck. Rincewind and Twoflower looked at each other. "Keep bailing!" they screamed in unison, and reached for the buckets.

After a while Twoflower's peevish voice filtered up from the waterlogged cabin.

"I don't see how it's my fault," he said. He handed up another bucket, which the wizard tipped over the side.

"You were supposed to be on watch," snapped Rincewind.

"I saved us from the slavers, remember," said Twoflower.

"I'd rather be a slave than a corpse," replied the wizard. He straightened up and looked out to sea. He appeared puzzled.

He was a somewhat different Rincewind from the one that escaped the fire of Ankh-Morpork six months before. More scarred, for one thing. And much more travelled. He had visited the Hublands, discovered the curious

-there was definitely less horizon than there ought to be.

"Hmm" Said Rincewind.

"I said nothing's worse than slavery," said Twoflower. His mouth opened as the wizard flung his bucket far out to sea and sat down heavily on the waterlogged deck, his face a grey mask.

"Look, I'm sorry I steered us into the reef, but this boat doesn't seem to want to sink and we're bound to strike land sooner or later," said Twoflower comfortingly. "This current must go somewhere."

"Look at the horizon," Said Rincewind, in a monotone.

Twoflower squinted.

"It looks all right," he said after a while.

"Admittedly, there seems to be less than there usually is, but-"

"That's because of the Rimfall," said Rincewind.

"We're being carried over the edge of the world."

There was a long silence, broken only by the lapping of the waves as the

"Don't you understand?" snarled Rincewind. "We are going over the Edge, godsdammit!"

"Can't we do anything about it?"

"No!"

"Then I can't see the sense in panicking," said Twoflower calmly.

"I knew we shouldn't have come this far Edgewise," complained Rincewind to the skye "I wish-"

"I wish I had my picture-box," said Twoflower, "but it's back on that slaver ship with the rest of the Luggage and-"

"You won't need luggage where we're going," said Rincewind. He sagged, and stared moodily at a distant whale that had carelessly strayed into the rimward current and was now struggling against it.

There was a line of white on the foreshortened horizon, and the wizard fancied he could hear a distant roaring.

"What happens after a ship goes over the Rimfall?" said Twoflower.

"Who knows?"

Edge. They stood with their backs against the mast, busy with their own thoughts. Every so often one or other would pick up a bucket and do a bit of desultory bailing, for no very intelligent reason.

The sea around them seemed to be getting crowded. Rincewind noticed several tree trunks keeping station with them, and just below the surface the water was alive with fish of all sorts. Of the current must be teeming with food washed "from the continents near the Hub. He wondered what kind of life it would be, having to keep swimming all the time to stay exactly in the same place. Pretty similar to his own, he decided. He spotted a small green frog which was paddling desperately in the grip of the inexorable current. To Twoflower's amazement he found a paddle and carefully extended it towards the little amphibian, which scrambled onto it gratefully. A moment later a pair of jaws broke the water and snapped impotently at the spot where it had been swimming.

The frog looked up at Rincewind from the cradle of his hands, and then bit him thoughtfully on the thumb. Twoflower giggled. Rincewind tucked the frog away in a pocket, and pretended he hadn't heard.

hot golden haze on the sea.

The roaring was louder now. A squid bigger than anything Rincewind had seen before broke the surface a few hundred yards away and thrashed madly with its tentacles before sinking away. Something else that was large and fortunately unidentifiable howled in the mist. A whole squadron of flying fish tumbled up in a cloud of rainbowedged droplets and managed to gain a few yards before dropping back and being swept in an eddy.

They were running out of world. Rincewind dropped his bucket and snatched at the mast as the roaring, final end of everything raced towards them.

"I must see this" said Twoflower, half falling and half diving towards the prow.

Something hard and unyielding smacked into the hull, which spun ninety degrees and came side on to the invisible obstacle. Then it stopped suddenly and a wash of cold sea foam cascaded over the deck, so that for a few seconds Rincewind was under several feet of boiling green water. He

ing down at  
him with an expression of deep concern. Rincewind groaned and  
sat up.

This turned out to be a mistake. The edge of the world was a few  
feet  
away.

Beyond it, at a level just below that of the lip of the endless  
Rimfall,  
was something altogether magical.

Some seventy miles away, and well beyond the tug of the rim  
current, a  
scow with the red sails typical of a freelance slaver drifted aim-  
lessly  
through the velvety twilight. The crew - such as remained were  
clustered  
on the foredeck, surrounding the men working feverishly on the  
raft.

The captain, a thickset man who wore the elbowturbans typical  
of a Great  
Nef tribesman, was much travelled and had seen many strange  
peoples and  
curious things, many of which he had subsequently enslaved or  
stolen. He  
had begun his career as a sailor on the Dehydrated Ocean in the  
heart of  
the disc's driest desert. (Water on the disc has an uncommon  
fourth



"I can't hear anything," he muttered to the first mate. The mate peered into the gloom.

"Perhaps it fell overboard?" he suggested hopefully. As if in answer there came a furious pounding from the oar deck below their feet, and the sound of splintering wood. The crewmen drew together fearfully, brandishing axes and torches.

They probably wouldn't dare to use them, even if the Monster came rushing towards them. Before its terrible nature had "been truly understood several men had attacked it with axes, whereupon it had turned aside from its single-minded searching of the ship and had either chased them overboard or had - eaten them? The captain was not quite certain. The Thing looked like an ordinary wooden sea chest. A bit larger than usual, maybe, but not suspiciously so. But while it sometimes seemed to contain things like old socks and miscellaneous luggage, at other times - and he shuddered - it seemed to be, seemed to have... He tried not to think about it. It was just that the men who had been drowned overboard had

wasn't it? And then they had escaped and when his sailors had investigated their big chest - how had they appeared in the middle of an untroubled ocean sitting on a big chest, anyway? - and it had bitt... He tried not to think about it again, but he found himself wondering what would happen when the damned thing realized that its owner wasn't on hoard any longer...

"Raft's ready, lord," said the first mate.

"Into the water with it," shouted the captain, and "Get aboard!" and "Fire the ship!"

After all, another ship wouldn't be too hard to come by, he philosophised, but a man might have to wait a long time in that Paradise the mullahs advertised before he was granted another life. Let the magical box eat lobsters.

Some pirates achieved immortality by great deeds of cruelty or derring-do. Some achieved immortality by amassing great wealth. But the captain had long ago decided that he would, on the whole, prefer to achieve immortality by not dying.

"What the hell is that?" demanded Rincewind.

"Twoflower?" he said.

"Yes?"

"If I turn around, what will I see?"

"His name is Tethis. He says he's a sea troll. This is his boat. He rescued us," explained Twoflower

"Will you look around now?"

"Not just at the moment,, thank you. So why aren't we going over the Edge, then?" asked Rincewind with glassy calmness.

"Because your boat hit the Circumfence," said the voice behind him (in tones that made Rincewind imagine Submarine chasms and lurking Things in coral reefs).

"The Circumfence?" he repeated.

"Yes. It runs along the edge of the world," said the unseen troll. Above the roar of the waterfall Rincewind thought he could make out the splash of oars. He hoped they were oars.

"Ah. You mean the circumference," said Rincewind. "The circumference

by a complicated arrangement of pulleys and little wooden wheels. They ran along the rope as the unseen rower propelled the craft along the very lip of the Rimfall. That explained one mystery - but what supported the rope?

Rincewind peered along its length and saw a stout wooden post sticking up out of the water a few yards ahead. As he watched the boat neared it and then passed it, the little wheels clacking neatly around it in a groove obviously cut for the purpose. Rincewind also noticed that smaller ropes hung down from the main rope at intervals of a yard or so.

He turned back to Twoflower.

"I can see what it is," he said, "But what is it?"

Twoflower shrugged. Behind Rincewind the sea troll said, "Up ahead is my house. We will talk more when we are there. Now I must row."

Rincewind found that looking ahead meant that he would have to turn and find out what a sea troll actually looked like, and he wasn't sure he wanted to do that yet. He looked at the Rimbow instead. It hung in the

of the dying seas.

But they were pale in comparison to the wider band that floated beyond

them, not deigning to share the same spectrum. It was the King Colour, of

which all the lesser colours are merely partial and wishy-washy reflections. It was octarine, the colour of magic. It was alive and glowing and vibrant and it was the undisputed pigment of the imagination,

because wherever it appeared it was a sign that mere matter was a servant

of the powers of the magical mind. It was enchantment itself. But Rincewind always thought it looked a sort of greenish-purple.

After a while a small speck on the rim of the world resolved itself into

a eyot or crag, so perilously perched that the waters of the fall swirled

around it at the start of their long drop. A driftwood shanty had been

built on it, and Rincewind saw that the top rope of the Circumfence

climbed over the rocky island on a number of iron stakes and actually

passed through the shack by a small round window. He learned later that

this was so that the troll could be alerted to the arrival of any salvage

on his stretch of the Circumfence by means of a series of small bronze

bells, balanced delicately on on the rope."

self.

With a last few squeaky jerks the boat slid up against a small driftwood

jetty. As it grounded itself and formed a circuit Rincewind felt all the

familiar sensations of a huge occult aura - oily, bluish-tasting, and

smelling of tin. All around them pure, unfocused magic was sleet

soundlessly into the world.

The wizard and Twoflower scrambled onto the planking and for the first

time Rincewind saw the troll.

It wasn't half so dreadful as he had imagined. Umm, said his imagination

after a while.

It wasn't that the troll was horrifying. Instead of the rotting, betentacled monstrosity he had been expecting Rincewind found himself

looking at a rather Squat but not particularly ugly old man who would

quite easily have passed for normal on any city street, always provided

that other people on the street were used to seeing old men who were

apparently composed of water and very little else. It was as if the ocean

had decided to create life without going through all that tedious

"Is it? Why?" asked Rincewind. How does he hold himself together, his mind screamed at him. Why doesn't he spill?

"If you will follow me to my house I will find you food and a change of clothing," said the troll solemnly. He set off over the rocks without turning to see if they would follow him. After all, where else could they go? It was getting dark, and a chilly damp breeze was blowing over the edge of the world. Already the transient Rimbow had faded and the mists above the waterfall were beginning to thin.

"Come on," said Rincewind, grabbing Twoflower's elbow. But the tourist didn't appear to want to move.

"Come on," the wizard repeated.

"When it gets really dark, do you think we'll be able to look down and see Great A'tuin the World Turtle?" asked Twoflower, staring at the rolling clouds.

"I hope not," said Rincewind, "I really do. Now let's go, shall we?"

Most of the furniture in the room appeared to be boxes.

"Uh. Really great place you've got here," said Rincewind. "Ethnic."

He reached for a cup and looked at the green pool shimmering inside it.

It'd better be drinkable. he thought. Because I'm going to drink it. He swallowed.

It was the same stuff Twoflower had given him in the rowing boat but, at the time, his mind had ignored it because there were more pressing matters. Now it had the leisure to savour the taste.

Rincewind's mouth twisted. He whimpered a little. One of his legs came up convulsively and caught him painfully in the chest.

Twoflower swirled his own drink thoughtfully while he considered the flavour.

"Ghlen Livid," he said. "The fermented vul nut drink they freeze-distil in my home country. A certain smokey quality... Piquant. From the western plantations in, ah, Rehigreed Province, yes? Next year's harvest,



planted

this year to come up last year. The Vul nut vine was particularly exceptional in that it could flourish as many as eight years prior to its

seed actually being sown. Vul nut wine was reputed to give certain

drinkers an insight into the future which was, from the nut's point of

view, the past. Strange but true.)

"All things drift into the Circumfence in time," said the troll, gnomically, gently rocking in his chair. "My job is to recover the flotsam. Timber, of course, and ships. Barrels of wine. Bales of cloth.

You."

Light dawned inside Rincewind's head.

"It's a net, isn't it? You've got a net right on the edge of the Sea!"

"The circumference," nodded the troll. Ripples radiating across his chest.

Rincewind looked out into the phosphorescent darkness that surrounded the island, and grinned inanely.

"Of course," he said. "Amazing! You could sink piles and attach it to reefs and - good grief The net would have to be very strong."

"It is," said Tethis.

themselves to some more of the green wine, he told them about  
the  
Circumfence, the great effort that had been made to build it, and  
the  
ancient and wise Kingdom of Krull which had constructed it sev-  
eral  
centuries before, and the seven navies that patrolled it con-  
stantly to  
keep it in repair and bring its salvage back to Krull, and the  
manner in  
which Krull had become a land of leisure ruled by the most  
learned  
seekers after knowledge, and the way in which they sought con-  
stantly to  
understand in every possible particular the wondrous complexity  
of the  
universe, and the way in which sailors marooned on the Cir-  
cumfence were  
turned into slaves, and usually had their tongues cut out. After  
some  
interjections at this point he spoke, in a friendly way, on the fu-  
tility  
of force, the impossibility of escaping from the island except by  
boat to  
one of the other three hundred and eighty isles that lay between  
the  
island and Krull itself, or by leaping over the Edge and the high  
merit  
of muteness in comparison to for example, death.

There was a pause. The muted night-roar of the Rimfall only  
served to

Rincewind looked at the shimmering fists that rested lightly in the troll's lap. He suspected they could strike with all the force of a tsunami.

"I don't think you understand," explained Twoflower. "I am a citizen of the Golden Empire. I'm sure Krull would not wish to incur the displeasure of the Emperor."

"How will the emperor know?" asked the troll.

"Do you think you're the first person from the Empire who has ended up on the Circumference?"

"I won't be a slave," shouted Rincewind. "I'd - I'd jump over the Edge first!" He was amazed at the sound in his own voice.

"Would you, though?" asked the troll. The rocking chair flicked back against the wall and one blue arm caught the wizard around the waist. A moment later the troll was striding out of the shack with Rincewind gripped carelessly in one fist.

He did not stop until he came to the Rimward edge of the island. Rincewind squealed.

It was midnight on the Disc and so, therefore, the sun was far,  
far

below, swinging slowly under Great A'Tuin's vast and frosty  
plastron.

Rincewind tried a last attempt to fix his gaze on the tips of his  
boots,

which were protruding over the rim of the rock, but the sheer  
drop  
wrenched it away.

On either side of him two glittering curtains of water hurtled to-  
wards

infinity as the sea swept around the island on its way to the long  
fall.

A hundred yards below the wizard the largest sea salmon he had  
ever seen

flicked itself out of the foam in a wild, jerky and ultimately  
hopeless

leap. Then it fell back, over and over, in the golden underworld  
light.

Huge shadows grew out of that light like pillars supporting the  
roof of

the universe. Hundreds of miles below him the wizard made out  
the shape

of something, the edge of something-

Like those curious little pictures where the silhouette of an or-  
nate

glass suddenly becomes the outline of two faces, the scene be-  
neath him

Below the elephant-Rincewind swallowed and tried not to think-  
Below the  
elephant there was nothing but the distant, painful disc of the  
sun. And,  
sweeping slowly past it, was something that for all its city-sized  
scales, its crater-pocks, its lunar cragginess, was indubitably a  
flipper.

"Shall I let go?" suggested the troll

"Gnah," said Rincewind, straining backwards.

"I have lived here on the Edge for five years and I have not had  
the  
courage," boomed Tethis. "Nor have you, if I'm any judge." He  
stepped  
back, allowing Rincewind to fling himself onto the ground.

Twoflower strolled up to the rim and peered over.

"Fantastic," he said. "If only I had my picture box."

"What else is down there? I mean, if you fell off, what would you  
see?"

Tethis sat down on an outcrop. High over the disc the moon  
came out from  
behind a cloud, giving him the appearance of ice.

"My home is down there, perhaps," he said slowly. "Beyond your  
silly

Twoflower standing unconcernedly at the very lip of the rock.  
"Gnah, he  
said, and tried to burrow into the stone.

"There's another world down there?" said Twoflower, peering  
over. "Where,  
exactly?"

The troll waved an arm vaguely. "Somewhere," he said. "That's all  
I know.  
It was quite a small world. Mostly blue."

"So why are you here?" said Twoflower.

"Isn't it obvious?" snapped the troll. "I fell off the edge!"

He told them of the world of Bathys, somewhere among the  
Stars, where the  
seafolk had built a number of thriving civilisations in the three  
large  
oceans that sprawled across its disc. He had been a meatman,  
one of the  
caste which earned a perilous living in large, sail-powered land  
yachts  
that ventured far out to land and hunted the shoals of deer and  
buffalo  
that abounded in the stormhaunted continents. His particular  
yacht had  
been blown into uncharted lands by a freak gale. The rest of the  
crew had  
taken the yacht's little rowing trolley and had struck out for a  
distant

"What happened next?" said Twoflower breathlessly, glancing towards the misty universe.

"I froze solid," said Tethis simply. "Fortunately it is something my race can survive. But I thawed out occasionally when I passed near other worlds. There was one, I think it was the one with what, I thought was this strange ring of mountains around it that turned out to be the biggest dragon you could ever imagine, covered in snow and glaciers and holding its tail in its mouth - well, I came within a few leagues of that, I shot over the landscape like a comet, in fact, and then I was off again. Then there was a time I woke up and there was your world coming at me like a custard pie thrown by the Creator and, well, I landed in the sea not far from the Circumference widdershins of Krull. All sorts of creatures get washed up against the Fence, and at the time they were looking for slaves to man the way stations, and I ended up here." He stopped and stared intently at Rincewind. "every night I come out here and look down." he finished "and I never jump. Courage is hard to come

"Quite a number, I imagine," said the troll.

"I suppose one could contrive some sort of, I don't know, some sort of a

thing that could preserve one against the cold," said the little man

thoughtfully. "Some sort of a ship that one could sail over the Edge and

sail to far-off worlds, too. I wonder..."

"Don't even think about it!" moaned Rincewind.

"Stop talking like that, do you hear?"

"They all talk like that in Krull," said Tethis. "Those with tongues, of

course," he added.

"Are you awake?"

Twoflower snored on. Rincewind jabbed him viciously in the ribs.

"I said, are you awake?" he snarled.

"Scrdfngh..."

"We've got to get out of here before this salvage fleet comes!"

The dishwater light of dawn oozed through the shack's one window,

slopping across the piles of salvaged boxes and bundles that were strewn



how, it's  
a bit ungracious isn't it?"

"Tough buns," snapped Rincewind. "This is a rough universe."

He rummaged through the piles around the walls and selected a heavy,  
wavy-bladed scimitar that had probably been some pirate's pride  
and joy.

It looked the sort of weapon that relied as much on its weight as  
its  
edge to cause damage. He raised it awkwardly.

"Would he leave that sort of thing around if it could hurt him?"  
Twoflower wondered aloud.

Rincewind ignored him and took up a position beside the door.  
When it  
opened some ten minutes later he moved unhesitatingly, swing-  
ing it across  
the opening at what he judged was the troll's head height. It  
swished  
harmlessly through nothing at all and struck the doorpost, jerk-  
ing him  
off his feet and on to the floor.

There was a sigh above him. He looked up into Tethis' face,  
which was  
shaking sadly from side to side.

"It wouldn't have harmed me," said the troll,"but nevertheless, I  
am

door and  
tossed a sack towards Twoflower.

"It's the carcass of a deer that is just about how you humans like  
it,  
and a few lobsters, and a sea salmon. The Circumference provides," he said  
casually.

He looked hard at the tourist, and then down again at Rincewind.

"What are you staring at?" he said.

"It's just that-" said Twoflower.

"-compared to last night-" said Rincewind.

"You're so small," finished Twoflower.

"I see, said the troll carefully."Personal remarks now." He drew himself  
up to his full height, which was currently about four feet. "Just  
because  
I'm made of water doesn't mean I'm made of wood, you know."

"I'm sorry," said Twoflower, climbing hastily out of the furs.

"You're made of dirt," said the troll,"but I didn't pass comments  
about  
things you can't help, did I? Oh, no. We can't help the way the  
Creator

creaking floor to the complicated devices of levers, strings and bells  
that was mounted on the Circumference's topmost strand where it passed  
through the hut.

The bell rang again, and then started to clang away in an odd jerky  
rhythm for several minutes. The troll stood with his ear pressed close to  
it.

When it stopped he turned slowly and looked at them with a worried frown.

"You're more important than I thought," he said.

"You're not to wait for the salvage fleet. You're to be collected by a  
flyer. That's what they say in Krull." He shrugged. "And I hadn't even  
sent a message that you're here, yet. Someone's been drinking vul nut  
wine again."

He picked up a large mallet that hung on a pillar beside the bell and  
used it to tap out a brief carillon.

"That'll be passed from lengthman to lengthman all the way back to  
Krull," he said. "Marvellous really, isn't it?"

Eight Great Spells, he would be claimed by Death himself when he died  
and he recognized really finely honed magic when he saw it.

The lens skimming towards the island was perhaps twenty feet across, and  
totally transparent. Sitting around its circumference were a large number  
of black-robed men, each one strapped securely to the disc by a leather  
harness and each one staring down at the waves with an expression so  
tormented, so agonising, that the transparent disc seemed to be ringed  
with gargoyles.

Rincewind sighed with relief. This was such an unusual sound that it made  
Twoflower take his eyes off the approaching disc and turn them on him.

"We're important, no lie," explained Rincewind.

"They wouldn't be wasting all that magic on a couple of potential slaves." He grinned.

"What is it?" said Twoflower.

"Well, the disc itself would have been created by Fresnel's Wonderful  
Concentrator," said Rincewind, authoritatively. "That calls for many rare

them.

A really good hydrophobe has to be trained on dehydrated water from birth. I mean, that costs a fortune in magic alone. But they make great weather magicians. Rain clouds just give up and go away."

"It sounds terrible," said the water troll behind them.

"And they all die young," said Rincewind, ignoring him. "They just can't live with themselves."

"Sometimes I think a man could wander across the disc all his life and not see everything there is to see," said Twoflower. "And now it seems there are lots of other worlds as well. When I think I might die without seeing a hundredth of all there is to see it makes me feel," he paused, then added, "well, humble, I suppose. And very angry, of course."

The flyer halted a few yards hubward of the island, throwing up a sheet of spray. It hung there, spinning slowly. A hooded figure standing by the stubby pillar at the exact centre of the lens beckoned to them.

"You'd better wade out," said the troll. "It doesn't do to keep them waiting. It has been nice to make your acquaintance." He shook them both,

first impression was reinforced when the figure raised the stick  
and

waved it carelessly towards the shore. A section of rock vanished,  
leaving a small grey haze of nothingness.

"That's so you don't think I'm afraid to use it," said the figure.

"Don't think you're afraid?" said Rincewind. The hooded figure  
snorted.

"We know all about you, Rincewind the magician. You are a man  
of great  
cunning and artifice. You laugh in the face of Death. Your af-  
fected air  
of craven cowardice does not fool me."

It fooled Rincewind. "I-" he began, and paled as the nothingness-  
stick  
was turned towards him. "I see you know all about me," he fin-  
ished  
weakly, and sat down heavily on the slippery surface. He and  
Twoflower,  
under instructions from the hooded commander, strapped them-  
selves down to  
rings set in the transparent disc.

"If you make the merest suggestion of weaving a spell," said the  
darkness  
under the hood, "you die. Third quadrant reconcile, ninth quad-  
rant  
redouble, forward all!"

"Well, off again then," said Twoflower cheerfully. He turned and waved at the troll, now no more than a speck on the edge of the world.

Rincewind glared at him. "Doesn't anything ever worry you?" he asked.

"We're still alive, aren't we?" asked Twoflower. "And you yourself said they wouldn't be going to all this trouble if we were just going to be slaves. I expect Tethis was exaggerating. I expect it's all a misunderstanding. I expect we'll be sent home. After we've seen Krull, of course. And I must say it all sounds fascinating."

"Oh yes," said Rincewind, in a hollow voice. "Fascinating." He was thinking: I've seen excitement, and I've seen boredom. And boredom was best.

Had either of them happened to look down at that moment they would have noticed a strange v-shaped wave surging through the water far below them, its apex pointing directly at Tethis' island. But they weren't looking.

The twenty-four hydrophobic magicians were looking, but to them it was just another piece of dreadfulness, not really any different from the

fearfully,  
and in pairs. In less reputedly evil chasms the fish went about  
with  
natural lights on their heads and on the whole managed quite  
well. In  
Gorunna they left them unlit and, insofar as it is possible for  
something  
without legs to creep, they crept; they tended to bump into  
things, too.  
Horrible things.

The water around the ship turned from green to purple, from  
purple to  
black, from black to a darkness so complete that blackness itself  
seemed  
merely grey by comparison. Most of its timbers had already been  
crushed  
into splinters under the intense pressure.

It spiralled past groves of nightmare polyps and drifting forests of  
seaweed which glowed with faint, diseased colours. Things  
brushed it  
briefly with soft, cold tentacles as they darted away into the  
freezing  
silence.

Something rose up from the murk and ate it in one mouthful.

Some time later the islanders on a little rimward atoll were  
amazed to  
find, washed into their little local lagoon, the wave-rocked corpse  
of a



a net for the ferocious free-swimming oysters which abounded in those seas, caught something that dragged both vessels for several miles before one captain had the presence of mind to sever the lines.

But even his bewilderment was as nothing compared to that of the islanders on the last atoll in the archipelago. During the following night they were awakened by a terrific crashing and splintering noise coming from their minute jungle; when some of the bolder spirits went to investigate in the morning they found that the trees had been smashed in a broad swathe that started on the hubmost shore of the atoll and made a line of total destruction pointing precisely Edgewise, littered with broken lianas, crushed bushes and a few bewildered and angry oysters.

They were high enough now to see the wide curve of the Rim sweeping away from them, lapped by the fluffy clouds that mercifully hid the waterfall for most of the time. From up here the sea, a deep blue dappled with cloud-shadows, looked almost inviting. Rincewind shuddered.

"Excuse me," he said. The hooded figure turned from its contemplation of

wand's  
glittering point. "I mean, it's all very flattering, all this magic be-  
ing  
used just for our benefit, but there's no need to go quite that far.  
And-"

"Shut up." The figure reached up and pulled back its hood, re-  
vealing  
itself to be a most unusually tinted young woman. Her skin was  
black. Not  
the dark brown of Urabewe, or the polished blue-black of mon-  
soon-haunted  
Klatch, but the deep black of midnight at the bottom of a cave.  
Her hair  
and eyebrows were the colour of moonlight. There was the same  
pale sheen  
around her lips. She looked about fifteen, and very frightened.

Rincewind couldn't help noticing that the hand holding the wand  
was  
shaking, this was because a piece of sudden death, wobbling un-  
certainly  
a-mere five feet from your nose, is very hard to miss. It dawned  
on him -  
very slowly, because it was a completely new sensation - that  
someone in  
the world was frightened of him. The complete reverse was so  
often the  
case that he had come to think of it as a kind of natural law.

"What is your name?" he said, as reassuringly as he could man-  
age. She

"You are being brought to Krull," said the girl. "And don't mock me, hublander. Else I'll use the wand. I must bring you in alive, but no-one said anything about bringing you in whole. My name is Marchesa, and I am a wizard of the fifth level. Do you understand?"

"Well, since you know all about me then you know that I never even made it to Neophyte," said Rincewind. "I'm not even a wizard, really." He caught Twoflower's astonished expression, and added hastily, "Just a wizard of sorts."

"You can't do magic because one of the Eight Great Spells is indelibly lodged in your mind," said Marchesa, shifting her balance gracefully as the great lens described a wide arc over the sea. "That's why you were thrown out of Unseen University. We know."

"But you said just now that he was a magician of great cunning and artifice," protested Twoflower.

"Yes, because anyone who survives all that he has survived - most of which was brought on himself by his tendency to think of himself as a

"I mean, thanks for rescuing us and everything, so , if you'd just let us get on with leading our lives I'm sure we'd all-

"I hope you're not proposing to enslave us," said Twoflower."

Marchesa looked genuinely shocked. "Certainly not! Whatever could have given you that idea? Your lives in Krull will be rich, full and comfortable-

"Oh, good," said Rincewind.

"-just not very long."

Krull turned out to be a large island, quite mountainous and heavily wooded, with pleasant white buildings visible here and there among the trees. The land sloped gradually up towards the rim, so that the highest point in Krull in fact slightly overhung the Edge. Here the Krullians had built their major city, also called Krull, and since so much of their building material had been salvaged from the Circumfence the houses of Krull had a decidedly nautical persuasion.

To put it bluntly, entire ships had been mortic artfully together and

the Edge, the eight colours of the Rimbow reflected in every window and  
in the many telescope lenses of the city's multitude of astronomers.

"It's absolutely awful," said Rincewind gloomily

The lens was approaching now along the very lip of the rimfall. The  
island not only got higher as it neared the Edge. It got narrower too, so  
that the lens was able to remain over water until it was very near the  
city. The parapet along the edgewise cliff was dotted with gantries  
projecting into nothingness . The lens glided smoothly towards one of  
them and docked with it as smoothly as a boat might glide up to a quay.

Four guards, with the same moonlight hair and nightblack faces as  
Marchesa, were waiting. They did not appear to be armed, but as Twoflower  
and Rincewind stumbled on to the parapet they were each grabbed by the  
arms and held quite firmly enough for any thought" of escape to be  
instantly dismissed.

Then Marchesa and the watching hydrophobic wizards were quickly left

interest as the sextet passed. Several times Rincewind noticed hydrophobes - their ingrained expressions of self-revulsion at their own

body-fluids was distinctive- and here and there trudging men who could

only be slaves. He didn't have much time to reflect on all this before a

door was opened ahead of them and they were pushed, gently but firmly,

into a room. Then the door slammed behind them.

Rincewind and Twoflower regained their balance and stared around the room

in which they now found themselves.

"Gosh," said Twoflower ineffectually, after a pause during which he had

tried unsuccessfully to find a better word.

"This is a prison cell?" wondered Rincewind aloud.

"All that gold and silk and stuff," Twoflower added. "I've never seen

anything like it!"

In the centre of the richly decorated room, on a carpet that was so deep

and furry that Rincewind trod on it gingerly lest it be some kind of

shaggy, floor-loving beast, was a long gleaming table laden with food.

"A great delicacy."

He dropped it quickly and turned around. An old man had stepped out from

behind the heavy curtains. He was tall, thin and looked almost benign

compared to some of the faces Rincewind had seen recently.

"The puree of sea cucumbers is very good too," said the face, conversationally. "Those little green bits are baby starfish."

"Thank you for telling me," said Rincewind weakly.

"Actually, they're rather good," said Twoflower, his mouth full. "I thought you liked seafood?"

"Yes, I thought I did," said Rincewind. "What's this wine- crushed octopus eyeballs?"

"Sea grape," said the old man.

"Great," said Rincewind, and swallowed a glassful. "Not bad. A bit salty, maybe."

"Sea grape is a kind of small jellyfish," explained the stranger. "And

now I really think I should introduce myself. Why has your friend gone

that strange colour?"

glass of  
oily wine in one hand and a crystallised squid in the other. He  
frowned.

"I think I've missed something along the way," he said. "First we  
were  
told we were going to be slaves-"

"A base canard!" interrupted Garhartra.

"What's a canard?" said Twoflower.

"I think it's a kind of duck," said Rincewind from the far end of  
the  
long table. "Are these biscuits made of something really nause-  
ating, do  
you suppose?"

"-and then we were rescued at great magical expense-"

"They're made of pressed seaweed," snapped the Guestmaster.

"-but then we're threatened, also at a vast expenditure of magic-"

"Yes, I thought it would be something like seaweed," agreed  
Rincewind.

"They certainly taste like seaweed would taste if anyone was  
masochistic  
enough to eat seaweed."

"-and then we're manhandled by guards and thrown in here-"



generally unpleasant again? Is this just a break for lunch?"

Garhartra held up his hands reassuringly.

"Please, please," he protested. "It was just necessary to get you here as soon as possible. We certainly do not want to enslave you. Please be reassured on that score."

"Well, fine," said Rincewind.

"Yes, you will in fact be sacrificed," Garhartra continued placidly.

"Sacrificed? You're going to kill us?" shouted the wizard.

"Kill? Yes, of course. Certainly! It would hardly be a sacrifice if we didn't, would it? But don't worry - it'll be comparatively painless."

"Comparatively? Compared to what?" said Rincewind. He picked up a tall green bottle that was full of sea grape jellyfish wine and hurled it hard at the Guestmaster, who flung up a hand as if to protect himself.

There was a crackle of ocarine flame from his fingers and the air suddenly took on the thick, greasy feel that indicated a powerful magical discharge. The flung bottle slowed and then stopped in mid-air, rotating

"I didn't enjoy doing that, you know," he said.

"I could tell," muttered Rincewind.

"But what do you want to sacrifice us for?" asked Twoflower. "You hardly know us!"

"That's rather the point, isn't it? It's not very good manners to sacrifice a friend. Besides, you were, um, specified. I don't know a lot about the god in question, but He was quite clear on that point. Look, I must be running along now. So much to organise, you know how it is," the Guestmaster opened the door, and then peered back around it. "Please make yourselves comfortable, and don't worry."

"But you haven't actually told us anything!" wailed Twoflower.

"It's not really worth it, is it? What with you being sacrificed in the morning," said Garhartra. "It's hardly worth the bother of knowing, really. Sleep well. Comparatively well, anyway."

He shut the door. A brief octarine flicker of balefire around it suggested that it had now been sealed beyond the skills of any earthly locksmith.

Length had been built on wooden piles driven into the sea bed,  
and stared  
into the darkness. Once or twice he thought he could see move-  
ment, far  
off. Strictly speaking, he should row out to see what was causing  
the din  
But here in the clammy darkness it didn't seem like an as-  
toundingly good  
idea, so he slammed the door, wrapped some sacking around the  
madly  
jangling bells, and tried to get back to sleep.

That didn't work, because even the top strand of the Fence was  
thrumming  
now, as if something big and heavy was bouncing on it. After  
staring at  
the ceiling for a few minutes, and trying hard not to think of  
great long  
tentacles and pond-sized eyes, Terton blew out the lantern and  
opened the  
door a crack.

Something was coming along the Fence, in giant loping bounds  
that covered  
metres at a time. It loomed up at him and for a moment Terton  
saw  
something rectangular, multi-legged, shaggy with seaweed and -  
although  
it had absolutely no features from which he could have deduced  
this - it  
was also very angry indeed.

rainfall, which he nevertheless considered uncomfortably damp.

"Have you tried the door?"

"Yes," said Twoflower. "And it isn't any less locked than it was last time you asked. There's the window, though."

"A great way of escape," muttered Rincewind, from his perch halfway up the wall. "You said it looks out over the Edge. Just step out, eh, and plunge through space and maybe freeze solid or hit some other world at incredible speeds or plunge wildly into the burning heart of a sun?"

"Worth a try," said Twoflower. "Want a seaweed biscuit?"

"No!"

"When are you coming down?"

Rincewind snarled. This was partly in embarrassment. Garhartra's spell had been the little-used and hard-to-master Atavarr's Personal Gravitational Upset, the practical result of which was that until it wore off Rincewind's body was convinced that "down" lay at ninety degrees to that direction normally accepted as of a downward persuasion by the

were concerned. The glass gleamed in the moonlight. Rincewind sighed and tried to make himself comfortable on the wall.

"Why don't you ever worry?" he demanded petulantly. "Here we are, going to be sacrificed to some god or other in the morning, and you just sit there eating barnacle canapes."

"I expect something will turn up," said Twoflower.

"I mean, it's not as if we know why we're going to be killed," the wizard went on.

You'd like to, would you?

"Did you say that?" asked Rincewind.

"Say what?"

Twoflower gave him a worried look.

"I'm Twoflower," he said. "surely you remember?"

Rincewind put his head in his hands.

"It's happened at last," he moaned. "I'm going out of my mind."

Good idea said the voice. It's getting pretty crowded in here

"Yes?" said Rincewind.

Put me down on the floor and stand back.

The frog blinked.

The wizard did so, and dragged a bewildered Twoflower out of the way.

The room darkened. There was a windy, roaring sound. Streamers of green, purple and ocarine cloud appeared out of nowhere and began to spiral rapidly towards the recumbent amphibian, shedding small bolts of lightning as they whirled. Soon the frog was lost in a golden haze which began to elongate upwards, filling the room with a warm yellow light.

Within it was a darker, indistinct shape, which wavered and changed even as they watched. And all the time there was the high, brain-curdling whine of a huge magical field...

As suddenly as it had appeared, the magical tornado vanished. And there, occupying the space where the frog had been, was a frog.

"Fantastic," said Rincewind.

voice at

all. They managed to turn without really moving, like a couple of statues revolving on plinths.

There was a woman standing in the pre-dawn light. She looked - she was - she had a - in point of actual fact she...

Later Rincewind and Twoflower couldn't quite agree on any single fact

about her, except that she had appeared to be beautiful (precisely what

physical features made her beautiful they could not, definitively, state)

and that she had green eyes. Not the pale green of ordinary eyes, either these were the green of fresh emeralds and as iridescent as a

dragonfly. And one of the few genuinely magical facts that Rincewind knew

was that no god or goddess, contrary and volatile as they might be in all

other respects, could change the colour or nature of their eyes...

"L-"he began. She raised a hand.

"You know that if you say my name I must depart," she hissed. "surely you

recall that I am the one goddess who comes only when not invoked?"

Lady  
merely smiled.

"Your friend the wizard should introduce us," she said.

Rincewind coughed. "Uh, yar," he said. "This is Twoflower, Lady, he's a tourist-"

"-I have attended him on a number of occasions-"

"And, Twoflower, this is the Lady. Just the Lady, right? Nothing else.

Don't try and give her any other name, okay?" he went on desperately, his eyes darting meaningful glances that were totally lost on the little man.

Rincewind shivered. He was not, of course, an atheist; on the Disc the gods dealt severely with atheists. On the few occasions when he had some spare change he had always made a point of dropping a few coppers into a temple coffer somewhere, on the principle that a man needed all the friends he could get. But usually he didn't bother the Gods, and he hoped the Gods wouldn't bother him. Life was quite complicated enough.



ples at

all to the Lady, although she was arguably the most powerful goddess in

the entire history of Creation. A few of the more daring members of the

Gamblers" Guild had once experimented with a form of worship, in the

deepest cellars of Guild headquarters, and had all died of penury, murder

or just Death within the week. She was the Goddess Who Must Not Be Named;

those who sought her never found her, yet she was known to come to the

aid of those in greatest need. And, then again, sometimes she didn't. She

was like that. She didn't like the clicking of rosaries, but was attracted to the sound of dice. No man knew what She looked like,

although there were many times when a man who was gambling his life on

the turn of the cards would pick up the hand he had been dealt and stare

Her full in the face. Of course, sometimes he didn't. Among all the gods

she was at one and the same time the most courted and the most cursed.

"We don't have gods where I come from," said Twoflower.

"You do, you know," said the Lady."Everyone has gods. You just don't

think they're gods."

"I suppose you wouldn't tell us why?" said Twollower.

"Yes," said the Lady. "The Krullians intend to launch a bronze vessel over the edge of the Disc. Their prime purpose is to learn the sex of A'tuin the World Turtle."

"Seems rather pointless," said Rincewind.

"No. Consider. One day Great A'tuin may encounter another member of the species *chelys galactica*, somewhere in the vast night in which we move.

Will they fight? Will they mate? A little imagination will show you that the sex of Great A'tuin could be very important to us. At least, so the Krullians say."

Rincewind tried not to think of World Turtles mating. It wasn't completely easy.

"So," continued the goddess, "they intend to launch this ship of space, with two voyagers aboard. It will be the culmination of decades of research. It will also be very dangerous for the travellers. And so, in an attempt to reduce the risks, the Arch-astronomer of Krull has bargained with Fate to sacrifice two men at the moment of launch. Fate,

"Normally, yes. But you two have been thorns in his side for some time.

He specified that the sacrifices should be you. He allowed you to escape

from the pirates. He allowed you to drift into the Circumfence. Fate can

be one mean god at times."

There was a pause. The frog sighed and wandered off under the table.

"But you can help us?" prompted Twoflower.

"You amuse me," said the Lady. "I have a sentimental streak. You'd know

that, if you were gamblers. So for a little while I rode in a frog's mind

and you kindly rescued me, for, as we all know, no-one likes to see

pathetic and helpless creatures swept to their death."

"Thank you," said Rincewind.

"The whole mind of Fate is bent against you," said the Lady. "But all I

can do is give you one chance. Just one, small chance. The rest is up to

you."

She vanished.

Ready, said a voice inside Rincewind's head.

The bottle that the wizard had flung some eight hours earlier had been

hanging in the air, imprisoned by magic in its own personal time-field.

But during all those hours the original mane of the spell had been slowly

leaking away until the total magical energy was no longer sufficient to

hold it against the Universe's own powerful normality field, and when

that happened Reality snapped back in a matter of microseconds. The

visible sign of this was that the bottle suddenly completed the last part

of its parabola and burst against the side of the Guestmaster's head,

showering the guards with glass and jellyfish wine.

Rincewind grabbed Twoflower's arm, kicked the nearest guard in the groin,

and dragged the startled tourist into the corridor. Before the stunned

Garhartra had sunk to the floor his two guests were already pounding

across distant flagstones.

Rincewind skidded around a corner and found himself on a balcony that ran

around the four sides of a courtyard. Below them, most of the floor of

There was a short sharp noise by Rincewind's side. Twoflower had spat.

The hydrophobe screamed and dropped his hand as though it had been stung.

The other didn't have time to move before Rincewind was on him, fists

swinging wildly. One stiff punch with the weight of terror behind it sent

the man tumbling over the balcony rail and into the pond, which did a

very strange thing; the water smacked aside as though a large invisible

balloon had been dropped into it, and the hydrophobe hung screaming in

his own revulsion field.

Twoflower watched him in amazement until Rincewind snatched at his

shoulder and indicated a likely looking passage. They hurried down it,

leaving the remaining hydrophobe writhing on the floor and snatching at

his damp hand. For a while there was some shouting behind them, but they

scuttled along a cross corridor and another courtyard and soon left the

sounds of pursuit behind. Finally Rincewind picked a safe looking door,

peered around it, found the room beyond to be unoccupied, dragged

Because what was so odd about the room was, it contained the whole  
Universe.

Death sat in His garden, running a whetstone along the edge of His  
scythe. It was already so sharp that any passing breeze that blew across  
it was sliced smoothly into two puzzled zephyrs, although breezes were  
rare indeed in Death's silent garden. It lay on a sheltered plateau  
overlooking the Disc world's complex dimensions, and behind it loomed the  
cold, still, immensely high and brooding mountains of Eternity.

Swish! went the stone. Death hummed a dirge, and tapped one bony foot on  
the frosty flagstones.

Someone approached through the dim orchard where the nightapples grew,  
and there came the sickly sweet smell of crushed lilies. Death looked up  
angrily, and found Himself staring into eyes that were black as the  
inside of a cat and full of distant stars that had no counterpart among  
the familiar constellations of the Realtime universe.

Death and Fate looked at each other. Death grinned - He had no alternative, of course, being made of implacable bone. The whetstone sang

GRASP. SUCH A ONE HAS  
NOT BEEN SEEN THESE HUNDRED YEARS. I AM EXPECTED  
TO STALK THE STREETS, AS  
IS MY DUTY.

"I refer to the matter of the little wanderer and the rogue wizard,"  
said

Fate softly, seating himself beside Death's black-robed form and  
staring

down at the, distant, multifaceted jewel which was the Disc uni-  
verse as  
seen from this extra-dimensional vantage point.

The scythe ceased its song.

"They die in a few hours," said Fate. "It is fated."

Death stirred, and the stone began to move again.

"I thought you would be pleased," said Fate.

Death shrugged, a particularly expressive gesture for someone  
whose  
visible shape was that of a skeleton.

I DID INDEED CHASE THEM MIGHTILY. ONCE, he said, BUT AT  
LAST THE THOUGHT

CAME TO ME THAT SOONER OR LATER AIL MEN MUST DIE.  
EVERYTHING DIES IN THE

END. I CAN BE ROBBED BUT NEVER DENIED, I TOLD  
MYSELF. WHY WORRY?

stood up  
and levelled the scythe at the fat and noisome candle that  
burned on the  
edge of the bench and then, with two deft sweeps, cut the flame  
into  
three bright slivers. Death grinned.

A short while later he was saddling his white stallion, which lived  
in a  
stable at the back of Death's cottage. The beast snuffled at him  
in a  
friendly fashion; though it was crimson-eyed and had flanks like  
oiled  
silk, it was nevertheless a real flesh-and-blood horse and, in-  
deed, was  
in all probability better treated than most beasts of burden on  
the Disc.

Death was not an unkind master. He weighed very little and, al-  
though He  
often rode back with His saddlebags bulging, they weighed  
nothing  
whatsoever.

"All those worlds!" said Twoflower. "It's fantastic!"

Rincewind grunted, and continued to prowl warily around the  
star-filled  
room. Twoflower turned to a complicated astrolabe, in the centre  
of which  
was the entire Great A'Tuin-Elephant-Disc system wrought in  
brass and



sketches of

Great A'Tuin as viewed from various parts of the Circumfence,  
with every

mighty scale and cratered pock-mark meticulously marked in.  
Twoflower

stared about him with a faraway look in his eyes.

Rincewind was deeply troubled. What troubled him most of all  
were the two

suits that hung from supports in the centre of the room. He cir-  
cled them  
uneasily.

They appeared to be made of fine white leather, hung about with  
straps

and brass nozzles and other highly unfamiliar and suspicious  
contrivances. The leggings ended in high, thick-soled boots, and  
the arms

were shoved into big supple gauntlets. Strangest of all were the  
big

copper helmets that were obviously supposed to fit on heavy  
collars

around the neck of the suits. The helmets were almost certainly  
useless

for protection a light sword would have no difficulty in splitting  
them,

even if it didn't hit the ridiculous little glass windows in the  
front.

Each helmet had a crest of white feathers on top, which went ab-  
solutely

no way at all towards improving their overall appearance.

boldly gone  
before, and he was now beginning to get not just a suspicion but  
a  
horrible premonition.

He turned round and found Twoflower looking at him with a  
speculative  
expression.

"No-" began Rincewind, urgently. Twoflower ignored him.

"The goddess said two men were going to be sent over the Edge,"  
he said,  
his eyes gleaming, "and you remember Tethis the troll saying  
you'd need  
some kind of protection? The Krullians have got over that. These  
are  
suits of space armour."

"They don't look very roomy to me," said Rincewind hurriedly,  
and grabbed  
the tourist by the arm, "so if you'd just come on, no sense in  
staying  
here-"

"Why must you always panic?" asked Twoflower petulantly.

"Because the whole of my future life just flashed in front of my  
eyes,  
and it didn't take very long, and if you don't move now I'm going  
to

surprise.

The taller of the two men sat down on one of the benches in front of the seats. He beckoned to Rincewind, and said:

"?Tyo yur atl ho sooten gatrunen?"

And this was awkward, because although Rincewind considered himself an expert in most of the tongues of the western segments of the Disc it was the first time that he had ever been addressed in Krullian, and he did not understand one word of it. Neither did Twoflower, but that did not stop him stepping forward and taking a breath.

The speed of light through a magical aura such as the one that surrounded the Disc was quite slow, being not much faster than the speed of sound in less highly-tuned universes. But it was still the fastest thing around with the exception, in moments like this, of Rincewind's mind.

In an instant he became aware that the tourist was about to try his own peculiar brand of linguistics, which meant that he would speak loudly and slowly in his own language.

the chart  
table and watched this in puzzlement. His big heroic brow wrinkled with  
the effort of speech.

"?Hor yu latruin nor u?" he said.

Rincewind smiled and nodded and pushed Twoflower in his general  
direction. With an inward sigh of relief he saw the tourist pay sudden  
attention to a big brass telescope that lay on the table.

"! Sooten u!" commanded the seated chelonaut. Rincewind nodded and  
smiled and took one of the big copper helmets from the rack and brought  
it down on the man's head as hard as he possibly could. The chelonaut  
fell forward with a soft grunt.

The other man took one startled step before Twoflower hit him amateurishly but effectively with the telescope. He crumpled on top of  
his colleague.

Rincewind and Twoflower looked at each other over the carnage.

"All right!" snapped Rincewind, aware that he had lost some kind of  
contest but not entirely certain what it was. "Don't bother to say it.

I'd end up wearing one. Don't ask me how I knew - I suppose it was because it was just about the worst possible thing that was likely to happen."

"Well, you said yourself we have no way of escaping," said Two-flower, his voice muffled as he pulled the top half of a suit over his head. "Anything's better than being sacrificed."

"As soon as we get a chance we run for it," said Rincewind. "Don't get any ideas."

He thrust an arm savagely into his suit and banged his head on the helmet. He reflected briefly that someone up there was watching over him.

"Thanks a lot," he said bitterly.

At the very edge of the city and country of Krull was a large semicircular amphitheatre, with seating for several tens of thousands of people. The arena was only semi-circular for the very elegant reason that it overlooked the cloud sea that boiled up from the Rimfall, far below, and now every seat was occupied. And the crowd was growing restive. It

"No news, lord," said the Launchcontroller, and added with a brittle

brightness, "except that your prominence will be pleased to hear that

Garhartra has recovered."

"That is a fact he may come to regret," said the Arch-astronomer.

"Yes, lord."

"How much longer do we have?"

The Launchcontroller glanced at the rapidly-climbing sun.

"Thirty minutes, your prominence. After that Krull will have revolved

away from Great A'Tuin's tail and the Potent Voyager will be doomed to

spin away into the interterrapene gulf. I have already set the automatic

controls, so-

"All right, all right," the Arch-astronomer said, waving him away. "The

launch must go ahead. Maintain the watch on the harbour, of course. When

the wretched pair are caught I will personally take a great deal of pleasure in executing them myself."

"Yes, lord. Er-

in the  
harbour," he said. "A runner just arrived from there."

"A big monster?" said the Arch-astronomer.

"Not particularly, although it is said to be exceptionally fierce,  
lord."

The ruler of Krull and the Circumfence considered this for a  
moment, then  
shrugged.

"The sea is full of monsters," he said."It is one of its prime  
attributes. Have it dealt with. And--Master Launchcontroller?"

"Lord?"

"If I am further vexed, you will recall that two people are due to  
be  
sacrificed. I may feel generous and increase the number."

"Yes, lord."The Master Launchcontroller scuttled away, relieved  
to be out  
of the autocrat's sight.

The Potent Voyager, no longer the blank bronze shell that had  
been  
smashed from the mould a few days earlier, rested in its cradle  
on top of  
a wooden tower in the centre of the arena. In front of it a railway  
ran

cause of

that little twitch in the track, leap like a salmon and shine theatrically in the sunlight before disappearing into the cloud sea.

There was a fanfare of trumpets at the edge of the arena. The chelonauts'

honour guard appeared, to much cheering from the crowd. Then the

whitesuited explorers themselves stepped out into the light.

It immediately dawned on the Arch-astronomer that something was wrong.

Heroes always walked in a certain way, for example. They certainly didn't

waddle, and one of the chelonauts was definitely waddling.

The roar of the assembled people of Krull was deafening. As the chelonauts and their guards crossed the great arena, passing between the

many altars that had been set up for the various wizards and priests of

Krull's many sects to ensure the success of the launch, the

Arch-astronomer frowned. By the time the party was halfway across the

floor his mind had reached a conclusion. By the time the chelonauts were

standing at the foot of the ladder that led to the ship- and was there

more than a hint of reluctance about them? - the Arch-astronomer was on



Its final words remained unsaid, however. The Arch-astronomer turned in astonishment as a commotion broke out around the big arched entrance to the arena. Guards were running out into the daylight, throwing down their weapons as they scuttled among the altars or vaulted the parapet into the stands.

Something emerged behind them, and the crowd around the entrance ceased its raucous cheering and began a silent, determined scramble to get out of the way.

The something was a low dome of seaweed, moving slowly but with a sinister sense of purpose. One guard overcame his horror sufficiently to stand in its path and hurl his spear, which landed squarely among the weeds. The crowd cheered then went deathly silent as the dome surged forward and engulfed the man completely.

The Arch-astronomer dismissed the half-formed shape of Vestcake's famous Curse with a sharp wave of his hand, and quickly spoke the words of one of the most powerful spells in his repertoire: the Infernal Combustion

way. A cloud  
of smoke and steam concealed the monster for several minutes,  
and when it  
cleared the dome had completely disappeared.

There was a large charred circle on the flagstones, however, in  
which a  
few clumps of kelp and bladderwrack still smouldered.

And in the centre of the circle was a perfectly ordinary, if some-  
what  
large, wooden chest. It was not even scorched. Someone on the  
far side of  
the arena started to laugh, but the sound was broken off  
abruptly as the  
chest rose up on dozens of what could only be legs and turned to  
face the  
Arch-astronomer. A perfectly ordinary if somewhat large wooden  
chest does  
not, of course, have a face with which to face, but this one was  
quite  
definitely facing. In precisely the same way as he understood  
that, the  
Arch-astronomer was also horribly aware that this perfectly  
normal box  
was in some indescribable way narrowing its eyes.

It began to move resolutely towards him. He shuddered.

"Magicians!" he screamed. "Where are my magicians?"

Krull to leap up eagerly and, under the terrified eyes of their master,  
unleash the first spell that came to each desperate mind. Charms curved  
and whistled through the air.

Soon the chest was lost to view again in an expanding cloud of magical  
particles, which billowed out and wreathed it in twisting, disquieting  
shapes. Spell after spell screamed into the melee. Flame and lightning  
bolts of all eight colours stabbed out brightly from the seething  
thing  
that now occupied the space where the box had been.

Not since the Mage Wars had so much magic been concentrated on one small  
area. The air itself wavered and glittered. Spell ricocheted off spell,  
creating short-lived wild spells whose brief half-life was both weird and  
uncontrolled. The stones under the heaving mass began to buckle and  
split. One of them in fact turned into something best left undescribed  
and slunk off into some dismal dimension. Other strange side-effects  
began to manifest themselves. A shower of small lead cubes bounced out of  
the storm and rolled across the heaving floor, and eldritch shapes

their  
thickest near the Edge of the Disc. Throughout the island of  
Krull every  
magical activity failed as all the available mana in the area was  
sucked  
into the cloud, which was already a quarter of a mile high and  
streaming  
out into mind-curdling shapes; hydrophobes on their seaskim-  
ming lenses  
crashed screaming into the waves, magic potions turned to mere  
impure  
water in their phials, magic swords melted and dripped from  
their  
scabbards.

But none of this in any way prevented the thing at the base of  
the cloud,  
now gleaming mirrorbright in the intensity of the power storm  
around it,  
from moving at a steady walking pace towards the Arch-  
astronomer.

Rincewind and Twoflower watched in awe from the shelter of  
Potent  
Voyager's launch tower. The honour party had long since van-  
ished, leaving  
their weapons scattered behind them.

"Well," sighed Twoflower at last, "there goes the Luggage." He  
sighed.

Rincewind picked up a crossbow and a handful of quarrels.  
"Anywhere that  
isn't here," he said.

"What about the Luggage?"

"Don't worry. When the storm has used up all the free magic in  
the  
vicinity it'll just die out."

In fact that was already beginning to happen. The billowing cloud  
was  
still flowing up from the area but now it had a tenuous, harmless  
look  
about it. Even as Twoflower stared, it began to flicker uncer-  
tainly.

Soon it was a pale ghost. The luggage was now visible as a squat  
shape  
among the almost invisible flames. Around it the rapidly cooling  
stones  
began to crack and buckle.

Twoflower called softly to his luggage. It stopped its stolid pro-  
gression  
across the tortured flags and appeared to be listening intently;  
then,  
moving its dozens of feet in an intricate pattern, it turned on its  
length and headed towards the Potent Voyager. Rincewind  
watched it

"This is a fine time to change your underwear," snarled Rincewind. "In a minute all those guards and priests are going to come back, and they're going to be upset, man!"

"Water," murmured Twoflower. "The whole box is full of water!"

Rincewind peered over his shoulder. There was no sign of clothes, moneybags, or any other of the tourist's belongings. The whole box was full of water.

A wave sprang up from nowhere and lapped over the edge. It hit the flagstones but, instead of spreading out, began to take the shape of a foot. Another foot and the bottom half of a pair of legs followed as more water streamed down as if filling an invisible mould. A moment later Tethis the sea troll was standing in front of them, blinking.

"I see," he said at last. "You two. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised."

He looked around, ignoring their astonished expressions.

"I was just sitting outside my hut, watching the sun set, when this thing

agely he  
wrenched the lid up. There was nothing inside but Twoflower's  
laundry. It  
was perfectly dry.

"Well, well," said Tethis. He looked up.

"Hey!" he said. "Isn't this the ship they're going to send over the  
Edge?  
Isn't it? It must be!"

An arrow zipped through his chest, leaving a faint ripple. He didn't  
appear to notice. Rincewind did. Soldiers were beginning to appear at the  
edge of the arena, and a number of them were peering around the  
entrances.

Another arrow bounced off the tower behind Twoflower. At this  
range the  
bolts did not have a lot of force, but it would only be a matter of  
time...

"Quick!" said Twoflower. "Into the ship! They won't dare fire at  
that!"

"I knew you were going to suggest that," groaned Rincewind. "I  
just knew  
it!"

catwalk  
that led along the spine of the Potent Voyager. Twoflower led the  
way,  
jogging along with what Rincewind considered to be too much  
suppressed  
excitement.

Atop the centre of the ship was a large round bronze hatch with  
hasps  
around it. The troll and the tourist knelt down and started to  
work on  
them.

In the heart of the Potent Voyager fine sand had been trickling  
into a  
carefully designed cup for several hours. Now the cup was filled  
by  
exactly the right amount to dip down and upset a carefully-  
balanced  
weight. The weight swung away, pulling a pin from an intricate  
little  
mechanism. A chain began to move. There was a clonk...

"What was that?" said Rincewind urgently. He looked down.

The hail of arrows had stopped. The crowd of priests and soldiers  
were  
standing motionless, staring intently at the ship. A small worried  
man  
elbowed his way through them and started to shout something.

"What was what?" said Twoflower, busy with a wing-nut.



Several muscular men were swarming up the ladder to the ship. Rincewind recognized the two chelonauts among them. They were carrying swords.

"I-" he began.

The ship lurched. Then, with infinite slowness, it began to move along the rails.

In that moment of black horror Rincewind saw that Twoflower and the troll had managed to pull the hatch up. A metal ladder inside led into the cabin below. The troll disappeared.

"We've got to get off," whispered Rincewind.

Twoflower looked at him, a strange mad smile on his face. "Stars," said the tourist. "Worlds. The whole damn sky full of worlds. Places no-one will ever see. Except me." He stepped through the hatchway.

"You're totally mad," said Rincewind hoarsely, trying to keep his balance as the ship began to speed up. He turned as one of the chelonauts tried to leap the gap between the Voyager and the tower, landed on the curving

He also saw a gang of men climbing desperately over the lower slopes of the launching ramp and manhandling a large baulk of timber on to the track, in a frantic attempt to derail the ship before it vanished over the Edge. The wheels slammed into it, but the only effect was to make the ship rock, Twoflower to lose his grip on the ladder and fall into the cabin, and the hatch to slam down with the horrible sound of a dozen fiddly little catches snapping into place. Rincewind dived forward and scrabbled at them, whimpering.

The cloud sea was much nearer now. The Edge itself, a rocky perimeter to the arena, was startlingly close.

Rincewind stood up. There was only one thing to do now, and he did it. He panicked blindly, just as the ship's bogeys hit the little upgrade and flung it sparkling like a salmon, into the sky and over the Edge.

A few seconds later there was a thunder of little feet and the Luggage cleared the rim of the world, legs still pumping determinedly, and plunged down into the Universe.

in the encircling--hang on a minute...

Surely Hades wasn't this uncomfortable? And he was very uncomfortable

indeed. His back ached where a branch was pressing into it, his legs and

arms hurt where the twigs had lacerated them and, judging by the way his

head was feeling, something hard had recently hit it. If this was Hades

it sure was hell-hang on a minute...

Tree. He concentrated on the word that floated up from his mind, although

the buzzing in his ears and the flashing lights in front of his eyes made

this an unexpected achievement. Tree. Wooden thing. That was it. Branches

and twigs and things. And Rincewind, lying in it. Tree. Dripping wet.

Cold white cloud all around. Underneath, too. Now that was odd.

He was alive and lying covered in bruises in a small thorn tree that was

growing in a crevice in a rock that projected out of the foaming white

wall that was the Rimfall. The realization hit him in much the same way

as an icy hammer. He shuddered. The tree gave a warning creak.

Something blue and blurred shot past him, dipped briefly into the

They hovered, darted and swooped easily across the face of the water, and every so often one would raise an extra plume of spray as it stole another doomed morsel from the waterfall. Several of them were perching in the tree. They were as iridescent as jewels. Rincewind was entranced.

He was in fact the first man ever to see the rimfishers, the tiny creatures who had long ago evolved a lifestyle quite unique even for the Disc. long before the Krullians had built the Circumfence the rimfishers had devised their own efficient method of policing the edge of the world for a living.

They didn't seem bothered about Rincewind. He had a brief but chilling vision of himself living the rest of his life out in this tree, subsisting on raw birds and such fish as he could snatch as they plummeted past.

The tree moved distinctly. Rincewind gave a whimper as he found himself sliding backwards, but managed to grab a branch. Only, sooner or later, he would fall asleep...

There was a subtle change of scene, a slight purplish tint to the sky. A tall, black-cloaked figure

off Rincewind's helmet as one root tore loose from the rock.

Death Himself always came in person to harvest the souls of wizards.

"What am I going to die of?" said Rincewind.

The tall figure hesitated.

PARDON? it said.

"Well, I haven't broken anything, and I haven't drowned, so what am I

about to die of-? You can't just be killed by Death; there has to be a

reason," said Rincewind. To his utter amazement he didn't feel terrified

any more. For about the first time in his life he wasn't frightened. Pity

the experience didn't look like lasting for long.

Death appeared to reach a conclusion.

YOU COULD DIE OF TERROR, the hood intoned. The voice still had its

graveyard ring, but there was a slight tremor of uncertainty.

"Won't work," said Rincewind smugly.

THERE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A REASON, said Death, I CAN JUST KILL YOU.

'Scrofula."

'Scrofula?"

"Death couldn't come," said the demon wretchedly. "There's a big plague on in Pseudopolis. He had to go and stalk the streets. So he sent me."

"No-one dies of scrofula! I've got rights. I'm a wizard!"

"All right, all right. This was going to be my big chance," said Scrofula, "but look at it this way - if I hit you with this scythe you'll be just as dead as you would be if Death had done it. Who'd know?"

"I'd know!" snapped Rincewind.

"You wouldn't. You'd be dead," said Scrofula logically.

"Piss off," said Rincewind.

"That's all very well," said the demon, hefting the scythe, "but why not try to see things from my point of view? This means a lot to me, and you've got to admit that your life isn't all that wonderful. Reincarnation can only be an improvement- uh."

"Please yourself," replied the demon. He raised the scythe. It whistled

down in quite a professional way, but Rincewind wasn't there. He was in

fact several metres below, and the distance was increasing all the time,

because the branch had chosen that moment to snap and send him on his

interrupted journey towards the interstellar gulf.

"Come back!" screamed the demon.

Rincewind didn't answer. He was lying belly down in the rushing air,

staring down into the clouds that even now were thinning.

They vanished.

Below, the whole Universe twinkled at Rincewind. There was Great A'Tuin,

huge and ponderous and pocked with craters. There was the little Disc

moon. There was a distant gleam that could only be the Potent Voyager.

And there were all the stars, looking remarkably like powdered diamonds

spilled on black velvet, the stars that lured and ultimately called the

boldest towards them...

