

stem of his boat, they started to become curious about the way in which various of their number suddenly vanished skywards with a splash. Some of them even became curious – very briefly curious about the sharp barbed thing that was coming very quickly towards them. The Curious Squid were extremely curious. Unfortunately, they weren't very good at making connections.

It was a very long way to this fishing ground, but for Solid the trip was usually well worth it. The Curious Squid were very small, harmless, difficult to find and reckoned by connoisseurs to have the foulest taste of any creature in the world. This made them very much in demand in a certain kind of restaurant where highly skilled chefs made, with great care, dishes containing no trace of the squid whatsoever.

Solid Jackson's problem was that tonight, a moonless night in the spawning season, when the squid were especially curious about everything, the chef seemed to have been at work on the sea itself.

There was not a single interested eyeball to be seen. There weren't any other fish either, and usually there were a few attracted to the light. He'd caught sight of one. It had been making through the water extremely fast in a straight line.

He laid down his trident and walked to the other end of the boat, where his son

Les was also gazing intently at the torchlit sea. 'Not a thing in half an hour,' said Solid.

it felt as if there was going to be a storm. But the stars twinkled softly and there was not a cloud in the sky.

The stars twinkled on the surface of the water, too. Now that was something you didn't often see.

'I reckon we ought to be getting out of here,' Solid said.

Les pointed at the slack sail. 'What're we going to use for wind, Dad?'

It was then that they heard the splash of oars,

Solid, squinting hard, could just make out the shape of another boat, heading towards him. He grabbed his boathook.

'I knows that's you, you thieving foreign bastard!'

The oars stopped. A voice sang over the water.

'May you be consumed by a thousand devils, you damned person!'

The other boat glided closer. It looked foreign, with eyes painted on the prow,

'Fished 'ern all out, have you? I'll take my trident to you, you bottom-feedin' scum that y'are!'

'My curvy sword at your neck, you unclean son of a dog of the female persuasion!'

Les looked over the side. Little bubbles fizzed on the surface of the sea.

'Dad?' he said.

'That's Greasy Arif out there!' snapped his father, 'You take a good look at him! He's been coming out here for years, stealing our squid, the evil lying little devil!'

'Dad, there's—'

'You get on them oars and I'll knock his black teeth out!'

Les could hear a voice saying from the other boat, '—see, my son, how the underhanded fish thief—'

'Row!' his father shouted.

'To the oars!' shouted someone in the other boat.

'Whose squid are they, Dad?' said Les.

'Ours!'

'What, even before we've caught them?'

Solid scrambled to the rear of the boat.

It was a chicken, made of iron. Seaweed and shells covered it and water dripped

off it as it rose against the stars.

It stood on a cross-shaped perch.

There seemed to be a letter on each of the four ends of the cross.

Solid held the torch closer.

'What the—'

Then he pulled the oar free and sat down beside his son.

'Row like the blazes, Les!'

'What's happening, Dad?'

'Shut up and row! Get us away from it!'

'Is it a monster, —Dad?'

'It's worse than a monster, son!' shouted Solid, as the oars bit into the water.

The thing was quite high now, standing on some kind of tower...

'What is it, Dad! What is it?'

'It's a damned weathercock!'

There was not, on the whole, a lot of geological excitement. The sinking of continents is usually accompanied by volcanoes, earthquakes and armadas of

little boats containing old men anxious to build pyramids and mystic stone circles in sonic new land where

being the possessor of genuine ancient occult wisdom might be expected to

attract girls. But the rising of this one caused barely a ripple in the purely physical scheme of things. It more or less sidled back, like a cat who's been away for a few days and knows you've been worrying.

Around the shores of the Circle Sea a large wave, only five or six feet high by

the time it reached them, caused some comment. And in some of the very low-lying

Father and son fought to keep some way on the boat as it was dragged along. And, since lesson one in the art of rowing is that you do it while looking the wrong way, they didn't see the other boat...

'You lunatic!'

'Foolish man!'

'Don't you touch that building! This country belongs to Ankh–Morpork!'

The two boats spun in a temporary whirlpool.

'I claim this land in the name of the Seriph of Al–Khali!'

'We saw it first! Les, you tell him we saw it first!'

'We saw it first before you saw it first!'

'Les, you saw him, he tried to hit me with that oar!'

'But Dad, you're waving that trident–'

'See the untrustworthy way he attacks us, Akhan!'

There was a grinding noise from under the keel of both boats and they began to

tip as they settled into the sea–bottom ooze.

'Look, Father, there is an interesting statue–'

'He has set his foot on Klatchian soil! The squid thief!'

'Get those filthy sandals off Ankh–Morporkian territory!'

'Oh, Dad–'

The two fishermen stopped screaming at each other, mainly in order to get their

breath back. Crabs scuttled away. Water drained between the patches of weed,

carving runnels in the grey silt.

'Father, look, there's still coloured tiles on the—'

'Mine!'

'Mine!'

Les caught Akhan's eye. They exchanged a very brief glance which was nevertheless modulated with a considerable amount of information, beginning with

been doorways, and glassless apertures that could have been windows,
but
all was darkness within. Now and again, Les fancied he could hear
something
slithering.

Solid Jackson coughed. 'The lad's right,' he muttered. 'Daft to argue. just
the
four of us.'

'Indeed,' said Arif.

They backed away, each man carefully watching the other. Then, so
closely that

it was a chorus, they both yelled: 'Grab the boat!'

There was a confused couple of moments and then each pair, boat carried
over

their heads, ran and slithered along the muddy streets.

They had to stop and come back, with mutual cries of 'A kidnapper as well,
eh?'

to get the right sons.

As every student of exploration knows, the prize goes not to the explorer
who

first sets foot upon the virgin soil but to the one who gets that foot home
first. If it is still attached to his leg, this is a bonus.

The weathercocks of Ankh–Morpork creaked around in the wind.

Very few of them were in fact representations of *Avis domestica*. There
were

various dragons, fish and miscellaneous animals. On the roof of the
Assassins'

Guild a silhouette of one of the members squeaked into a new position,
cloak and

dagger at the ready. On the Beggars' Guild a tin beggar's hand asked the
wind

Speaking
was stretching a point to cover the ranters, haranguers and occasional self-absorbed mumblers that spaced themselves at intervals amongst the crowds.

And, traditionally, people said whatever was on their minds and at the top of their voices. The Patrician, it was said, looked kindly on the custom. He did. And very closely, too. He probably had someone make notes.

So did the Watch.

It wasn't spying Commander Vimes told himself. Spying was when you crept around peeking in windows. It wasn't spying when you had to stand back a bit so that you weren't deafened.

He reached out without paying attention and struck a match on Sergeant Detritus.

'Dat was me, sir,' said the troll reproachfully.

'Sorry, sergeant,' said Vimes, lighting his cigar.

'It not a problem.'

They returned their attention to the speakers.

It's the wind, thought Vimes. It's bringing something new...

Usually the speakers dealt with all kinds of subjects, many of them on the cusp

of sanity or somewhere in the peaceful valleys on the other side. But now they were all monomaniacs.

'—time they were taught a lesson!' screamed the nearest one. 'Why don't our so-called masters listen to the voice of the people? Ankh—Morpork has had enough of these swaggering brigands! They steal our fish, they steal our trade and now they're stealing our land!'

The crowd hissed.

'Ah? Not dried fish offal and condemned meat, then? That's your normal cargo, I believe.'

Mr Jenkins strained to look for the speaker.

'Fine silks!' he said. 'And what does the city care about that? Nothing!'

There were shouts of 'Shame!'

'Has the city been told?' said the enquiring voice.

People started to crane their heads. And then the crowd opened a little, to reveal the figure of Commander Vimes of the City Watch.

'Well, it's... I...!' Jenkins began. 'Er... I...!'

'I care,' said Vimes calmly. 'Shouldn't be too hard to track down a cargo of fine silks that stink of fish guts.' There was laughter. Ankh—Morpork people always like some variety in their street theatre.

Vimes apparently spoke to Sergeant Detritus, while keeping his gaze locked on

Jenkins. 'Detritus, just you go along with Mr Jenkins here, will you? His ship is the Milka, I believe. He'll show you all the lading bills and manifests and receipts and things, and then we can sort him out in jig time.'

There was a clang as Detritus's huge hand came to rest against his helmet.

'Yessir!'

'Er... er... you can't,' said Jenkins quickly. 'They... er... stole the paperwork as well...'

'Really? So they can take the stuff back to the shop if it doesn't fit?'

'Er... anyway, the ship's sailed. Yes! Sailed! Got to try and recoup my losses, you know!'

'Sailed? Without its captain?' said Vimes. 'So Mr Scoplett is in charge?'

Your first officer?'

'Yes, yes—'

'Damn!' said Vimes, snapping his fingers theatrically. 'That man we've got in

sort... I'd better go and... er... he said, and pushed his way through the mob, which waited a little while to see if anything interesting was going to happen and then, disappointed, sought out other entertainment.

'You want I should go ad have a look at his boat?' said Detritus.

'No, sergeant. There won't be any silk, and there won't be any paperwork.

There

won't be anything except a lingering aroma of fish guts.'

'Wow, dem damn Klatchians steals everything that ain't nailed down, right?'

Vimes shook his head and strolled on. 'They don't have trolls in Klatch, do they?' he said.

'Nossir. It's der heat. Troll brains don't work in der heat. If I was to go to Klatch,' said Detritus, his knuckles making little bink–bink noises as he dragged them over the cobbles, 'I'd be really stoopid.'

'Detritus?'

'Yessir?'

'Never go to Klatch.'

'Nossir.'

Another speaker was attracting a much larger crowd. He stood in front of a large

banner that proclaimed: GREASY FORANE HANDS OFF LESH P.

'Leshp,' said Detritus. 'Now dere's a name that ain't got its teef in.'

'It's the land that came back up from under the sea last week,' said Vimes despondently. . . ,

They listened while the speaker proclaimed that Ankh–Morpork had a duty to

protect its kith and kin on the new land. Detritus looked puzzled.

'How come dere's dese kiff and kin on dere when it only just come up from under

der water?' he said.

'Good question,' said Vimes.

'Dey been holding dere breath?'

'I doubt it.'

years over a strip of garden two inches wide. Peopled live for ages side by side, nodding at one another amicably on their way to work every day, and then some trivial thing would happen and someone would be having a garden fork removed from their ear.

And now some damn rock had risen up out of the sea and everyone was acting as if

Klatch had let its dog bark all night.

'Agragaah,' said Detritus, mournfully.

'Don't mind me, just don't spit it on my boot,' said Vimes.

'It mean—' Detritus waved a huge hand, 'like... dem things, what only comes in...' he paused and looked at his fingers, while his lips moved '... fours.

Agragaah. It mean lit'rally der time when you see dem little pebbles and you

jus' know dere's gonna be a great big landslide on topa you and it already too

late to run. Dat moment, dat's agragaah.'

Vimes's own lips moved. 'Forebodings?'

'Dat's der bunny.'

'Where does the word come from?'

Detritus shrugged. 'Maybe it named after der soun' you make just as a t'ousand

ton of rock hit you.'

'Forebodings...' Vimes rubbed his chin. 'Yeah. Well, I've got plenty of them...'

Landslides and avalanches, he thought. All the little snowflakes land, light as

a feather – and suddenly the whole side of a mountain is moving...

Detritus looked at him slyly. 'I know everyone say "Dem two short planks, dey're

as fick as Detritus",' he said, 'but I know which way der wind is blowin'.'

Vimes looked at his sergeant with a new respect.

club and listen to granddad tellin' you how he beat up all dem dwarfs when he was a boy,' he said. 'Somethin' in der wind, right?'

'Er... yes... ' said Vimes.

There was a fluttering above him. He sighed. A message was coming in. On a pigeon.

But they'd tried everything else, hadn't they? Swamp dragons tended to explode in the air, imps ate the messages and the semaphore helmets had not been a success, especially in high winds. And then Corporal Littlebottom had pointed out that Ankh-Morpork's pigeons were, because of many centuries of depredation by the city's gargoyle population, considerably more intelligent than most pigeons, although Vimes considered that this was not difficult because there were things growing on old damp bread that were more intelligent than most pigeons.

He took a handful of corn out of his pocket. The pigeon, obedient to its careful training, settled on his shoulder. In obedience to internal pressures, it relieved itself.

'You know, we've got to find something better,' said Vimes, as he unwrapped the message. 'Every time we send a message to Constable Downspout he eats it.'

'Well, he are a gargoyle,' said Detritus. 'He fink it lunch arrivin.'

'Oh,' said Vimes, 'his lordship requires my attendance. How nice.'

Lord Vetinari looked attentive, because he'd always found that listening keenly

Assassins' Guild was failing to say in a lengthy exposition of the Guild's high level of training and value to the city. The voice, eventually, came to a stop in the face of Vetinari's aggressive listening.

'Thank you, Lord Downey,' he said. 'I'm sure we shall all be able to sleep a lot more uneasily for knowing all that. Just one minor point... I believe the word "assassin" actually comes from Klatch?'

'Well... indeed...'

'And I believe also that many of your students are, as it turns out, from Klatch and its neighbouring countries?'

'The unrivalled quality of our education. . .'

'Quite so. What you are telling me, in point of fact, is that their assassins have been doing it longer, know their way around our city and have had their traditional skills honed by you?'

'Er...'

The Patrician turned to Mr Burleigh.

'We surely have superiority in weapons, Mr Burleigh?'

'Oh, yes. Say what you like about dwarfs, but we've been turning out some superb stuff lately,' said the President of the Guild of Armourers.

'Ah. That at least is some comfort.'

'Yes,' said Burleigh. He looked wretched. 'However, the thing about weapons manufacture... the important thing...'

'I believe you are about to say that the important thing about the business of

weaponry is that it is a business,' said the Patrician.

Burleigh looked as though he'd been let off the hook on to a bigger hook.

'Er... yes.'

'That, in fact, the weapons are for selling.'

The Great Leveler Cart-mounted Ten-Bank 500-pound Crossbow? He said. 'And, let me see... the "Meteor" Automated Throwing Star Hurler, Decapitates at Twenty Paces, Money Back If Not Completely Decapitated?'

'Have you ever heard of the D'regs, my lord?' said Burleigh. 'They say the only way to pacify one of them is to hit him repeatedly with an axe and bury what's left under a rock. And even then, choose a heavy rock.'

The Patrician seemed to be staring at a large drawing of the 'Dervish' Mk III Razor-Wire Bolas. There was a painful silence. Burleigh tried to fill it up, always a bad mistake.

'Besides, we provide much-needed jobs in AnkhMorpork,' he murmured. 'Exporting these weapons to other countries,' said Lord Vetinari. He handed the paper back and fixed Burleigh with a friendly smile.

'I'm very pleased to see that the industry has done so well,' he said. 'I will bear this particularly in mind.'

He placed his hands together carefully. 'The situation is grave, gentlemen.'

'Whose?' said Mr Burleigh.

'I'm sorry?'

'What? Oh... I was thinking about something else, my lord...'

'I was referring to the fact that a number of our citizens have gone out to this wretched island. As have, I understand, a number of Klatchians.'

'Why are our people going out there?' said Mr Boggis of the Thieves' Guild.

'Because they are showing a brisk pioneering spirit and seeking wealth and... additional wealth in a new land,' said Lord Vetinari.

'What's in it for the Klatchians?' said Lord Downey.

'Oh, they've gone out there because they are a

like a
death rattle and technically it was, since the man had been a zombie for
several
hundred years although historical accounts suggested that the only
difference
dying had made to W Slant was that he'd started to work through his lunch
break.

'Yes, indeed,' he said, opening a large legal tome. 'The history of the city of
Leshp and its surrounding country is a little obscure. It is known to have
been

above the sea almost a thousand years ago, however, when records
suggest that it

was considered part of the Ankh—Morpork empire—

'What is the nature of these records and do they tell us who was doing the
considering?'

said the Patrician. The door opened and Vimes stepped in.
'Ah,

commander, do take a seat. Continue, Mr Slant.'

The zombie did not like interruptions. He coughed again. 'The records
relating

to the lost country date back several hundred years, my lord. And they are
of

course our records.'

'Only ours?'

'I hardly see how any others could apply,' said Mr Slant severely.

'Klatchian ones, for example?'

said Vimes, from the far end of the table.
'Sir Samuel, the Klatchian language does not even have a word for lawyer,'
said

Mr Slant.

'Doesn't it?' said Vimes. 'Good for them.'

'It is our view,' said Slant, turning his chair slightly so that he did not have
to look at Vimes, 'that the new land is ours by Eminent Domain,
Extra—Territoriality and, most importantly, Acquiris Quodcumque Rapis. I
am

Selachii. Remember all that business last year with the cabbages? Ten damn boatloads they wouldn't accept! 'And everyone knows caterpillars add to the flavour,' said Vimes, more or less to himself.

The Patrician shot him a glance, 'That's right!' said Selachii. 'Good honest protein! And you remember all that trouble Captain Jenkins had over that cargo of mutton? They were going to imprison him! In a Klatchian jail!'

'Surely not? Meat is at its best when it's going green,' said Vimes. 'It's not as if it'd taste any different under all that curry,' said Burleigh. 'I was at a dinner in their embassy once, and do you know what they made me eat? It was a sheep's—'

'Excuse me, gentlemen,' said Vimes, standing up. 'There are some urgent matters I must deal with.'

He nodded to the Patrician and hurried out of the room. He shut the door behind him and took a breath of fresh air, although right now he'd have happily inhaled deeply in a tannery.

Corporal Littlebottom stood up and looked at him expectantly. She had been sitting next to a box, which cooed peacefully. 'Something's up. Run down to... I mean, send a pigeon down to the Yard,' said Vimes.

'Yes, sir?'

'All leave is cancelled as of now and I want to see every officer, and I mean every officer, at the Yard at, oh, let's say six o'clock.'

Everyone knows it.

Old Detritus was right. You could hear the little pebbles bouncing. It's not just a few fishermen having a scrap, it's a hundred years of... well, like two big men trying to fit in one small room, trying to be polite about it, and then one day one of them just has to stretch and pretty soon they're both smashing the furniture.

But it couldn't really happen, could it? From what he'd heard, the present Seriph was a competent man

who was mostly concerned with pacifying the rowdy edges of his empire.

And there

were Klatchians living in AnkhMorpork, for heaven's sake! There were Klatchians

born in Ankh–Morpork. You saw some lad with a face that'd got camels written all

over it, and when he opened his mouth it'd turn out he had an Ankhian accent so

thick you could float rocks. Oh, there's all the jokes about funny food and foreigners, but surely...

Not very funny jokes, come to think of it.

When you hear the bang, there's no time to wonder how long the little fuse has

been fizzing.

There were raised voices when he went back into the Rats Chamber.

'Because, Lord Selachii; the Patrician was saying, 'these are not the old days.

It is no longer considered... nice... to send a warship over there to, as you put it, show Johnny Foreigner the error of his ways. For one thing, we haven't

had any warships since the Mary–Jane sank four hundred years ago. And times have

changed. These days, the whole world watches. And, my lord, you are no longer

war on,' said Lord Vetinari. 'For some reason the slaughter of thousands of people tends to stick in the memory.'

'Oh, history,' said Lord Selachii. 'That's all in the past!'

'A good place for history, agreed,' said the Patrician solemnly.

'I meant: why don't they like us now? Do we owe them money?'

'No. Mostly they owe us money. Which is, of course, a far better reason for their dislike.'

'How about Sto Lat and Pseudopolis and the other cities?' said Lord Downey.

'They don't like us much, either.'

'Why not? I mean t'say, we do share a common heritage,' said Lord Selachii.

'Yes, my lord, but that common heritage largely consists of having had wars with

one another,' said the Patrician. 'I can't see much support there. Which is a little unfortunate because we do not, in fact, have an army. I am not, of course, a military man but I believe that one of those is generally considered

vital to the successful prosecution of a war.'

.He looked along the table.

'The fact is" he went on, 'that Ankh–Morpork has been violently against a standing army.'

'We all know why people don't trust an army,' said Lord Downey. 'A lot of armed

men, standing around with nothing to do... they start to get ideas . .

Vimes saw the heads turn towards him.

'My word,' he said, with glassy brightness, 'can this be a reference to "Old Stoneface" Vimes, who led the city's militia in a revolt against the rule of a tyrannical monarch in an effort to bring some sort of freedom and justice to the

place? I do believe it is! And was he Commander of the Watch at the time?

Good

paid to start fighting. And, unless you are very lucky, you end up paying them

even more to stop—'

Selachii thumped the table.

'Very well, then, by jingo!' he snarled. 'Alone!'

'We could certainly do with one,' said Lord Vetinari. 'We need the money. I was

about to say that we cannot afford mercenaries.'

'How can this be?' said Lord Downey. 'Don't we pay our taxes?'

'Ah, I thought we might come to that,' said Lord Vetinari. He raised his hand and, on cue again, his clerk placed a piece of paper in it.

'Let me see now... ah yes. Guild of Assassins... Gross earnings in the last year: AM\$13,207,048. Taxes paid in the last year: forty—seven dollars, twenty—two pence and what on examination turned out to be a Hershebian half—dong, worth one—eighth of a penny.'

'That's all perfectly legal! The Guild of Accountants—'

'Ah yes. Guild of Accountants: gross earnings AM\$7,999,011. Taxes paid: nil.

But, ah yes, I see they applied for a rebate of AM\$200,000.'

'And what we received, I may say, included a Hershebian half—dong,' said Mr

Frostrip of the Guild of Accountants.

'What goes around comes around" said Vetinari calmly.

He tossed the paper aside. 'Taxation, gentlemen, is very much like dairy farming

The task is to extract the maximum amount of milk with the minimum of moo. And I

am afraid to say that these days all I get is moo.'

'Are you telling us that Ankh—Morpork is bankrupt?' said Downey.

'Of course. While, at the same time, full of rich people. I trust they have been

spending their good fortune on swords.'

'And you have allowed this wholesale tax avoidance?' said Lord Selachii.

Right, sir. And if they resist, sir?' said Vimes, smiling nastily.
'Oh, how can they resist, commander? This is the will of our civic leaders.'

He took the paper his clerk proffered. 'Let me see, now. Top of the list—'
Lord Selachii coughed hurriedly. 'Far too late for that sort of nonsense now,'

he said.

'Water under the bridge,' said Lord Downey.

'Dead and buried,' said Mr Slant.

'I paid mine,' said Vimes.

'So let me recap, then,' said Vetinari. 'I don't think anyone wants to see two grown nations scrapping over a piece of rock. We don't want to fight, but—'

'By jingo, if we do, we'll show those—' Lord Selachii began.

'We have no ships. We have no men. We have no money, too,' said Lord Vetinari.

'Of course, we have the art of diplomacy. It is amazing what you can do with the right words.'

'Unfortunately, the right words are more readily listened to if you also have a

sharp stick,' said Lord Downey.

'Lord Selachii slapped the table. 'We don't have to talk to these people! My lords... gentlemen... it's up to us to show them we won't be pushed around!'

We must re-form the regiments!'

'Oh, private armies?' said Vimes. 'Under the command of someone whose fitness

for it lies in the fact that he can afford to pay for a thousand funny hats?'

Someone leaned forward, halfway along the table. Up to that moment

Vimes had

thought he was asleep, and when Lord Rust spoke it was, indeed, in a sort of

yawn.

men in times of need is one of the duties of a gentleman. History is on your side. The precedents are dear enough, I can't go against them. I have to say I cannot afford to.'

'You're going to let them play soldiers?' said Vimes.

'Oh, Commander Vimes,' said Mr Burleigh, smiling. 'As a military man yourself, you must—.,

Sometimes people can attract attention by shouting. They might opt for thumping a table, or even take a swing at someone else. But Vimes achieved the effect by freezing, by simply doing nothing. The chill radiated off him. Lines in his face locked like a statue.

'I am not a military man.'

And then Burleigh made the mistake of trying to grin disarmingly.

'Well, commander, the helmet and armour and everything... It's really all the same in the end, isn't it?'

'No. It's not.'

'Gentlemen. ..' Lord Vetinari put his hands flat on the table, a sign that the meeting had ended. 'I can only repeat that tomorrow I shall be discussing the matter with Prince Khufurah—'

'I've heard good reports of him,' said Lord Rust. 'Strict but fair. One can only admire what he's doing in some of those backward regions. A most—'

'No, sir. You are thinking of Prince Cadram,' said Lord Vetinari 'Khufurah is the younger brother. He is arriving here as his brother's special envoy.'

'Him? That one? The man's a wastrel! A cheat! A liar! They say he takes bri—'

'Thank you for your diplomatic input, Lord Rust,' said the Patrician. 'We must deal with facts as they are. There is always a way. Our nations have many

special aristocratic whisper that carries to the waiters. It's an insult to send him here!

'I am sure that you will see to it that the streets are safe to walk, Vimes,' said the Patrician sharply. 'I know you pride yourself on that sort of thing. Officially he's here because the wizards have invited him to their big award ceremony. An honorary doctorate, that sort of thing. And one of their lunches

afterwards. I do like negotiating with people after the faculty of Unseen University have entertained them to lunch. They tend not to move about much and

they'll agree to practically anything if they think there's a chance of a stomach powder and a small glass of water. And now, gentlemen... if you will excuse me.. .'

The lords and leaders departed in ones and twos, talking quietly as they walked out into the hall.

The Patrician shuffled his papers into order, running a thin finger along each edge of the pile, and then looked up.

'You appear to be casting a shadow, commander.'

'You're not really going to allow them to re-form the regiments, are you?' said

Vimes.

'There is absolutely no law against it, Vimes. And it will keep them occupied. Every official gentleman is entitled, in fact I believe

used to be required, to raise men when the city required it. And, of course, any

citizen has the right to bear arms. Bear that in mind, please.'

'Arms is one thing. Holding weapons in 'em and playing soldiers is another.'

Vimes put his knuckles on the table and leaned forward.

'You see, sir,' he said, 'I can't help but think that over there in Klatch a

removed them.

'Vimes, you will be at the wizards' Convivium tomorrow. I sent you a memo about

it.'

'I never—' A vision of the piles of unread paperwork on Vimes's desk loomed treacherously in his mind. 'Ah,' he said.

'The Commander of the Watch leads the procession in full dress uniform.

It's an ancient custom.'

'Me? Walk in front of everyone?'

'Indeed. Very... civic. As I'm sure you recall. It demonstrates the friendly alliance between the University and the civil government which, I may say, seems

to consist of their promising to do anything we ask provided we promise not to

ask them to do

anything. Anyway, it is your duty. Tradition decrees it. And Lady Sybil has agreed to see to it that you are there with a crisp bright shining morning face.'

Vimes took a deep breath. 'You asked my wife?'

'Certainly. She is very proud of you. She believes you are capable of great things, Vimes. She must be a great comfort to you.'

'Well, I... I mean, I... yes...'

'Excellent. Oh, just one other thing, Vimes. I do have the Assassins and the Thieves in agreement on this, but to cover all eventualities... I would consider

it a favour if you could see to it that no-one throws eggs or something at the

Prince. That sort of thing always upsets people.'

The two sides watched each other carefully. They were old enemies. They had

know his name. But Carrot had found out somehow. If anyone else had called him

'William' they'd be looking for their ear. In their mouth.

'Chewing gum, mister.'

'Have you brought enough for everybody?'

'No, mister.'

'Then put it away, there's a good chap. Now, let's— Gavin, what's that up your sleeve?'

The one known as Scumbag Gav didn't bother to argue.

' 's a knife, Mr Carrot.'

'And I bet you brought enough for everybody, eh?'

' 'sright, mister.' Scumbag grinned. He was ten.

'Go on, put them on the heap with the others. .

Constable Shoe looked over the wall in horror. There were about fifty youths in

the wide alleyway. Average age in years, about eleven. Average age in cynicism

and malevolent evil: about 163. Although Ankh—Morpork football doesn't usually

have goals in the normal sense, two had been nevertheless made at each end of

the alley using the time—honoured method of piling up things to mark where the

posts would be.

Two piles: one of knives, one of blunt instruments.

In the middle of the boys, who were wearing the colours of some of the nastier

street gangs, Captain Carrot was bouncing an inflated pig's bladder.

Constable Shoe wondered if he ought to go and get help, but the man seemed quite

as ease.

'Er, captain?' he ventured.

you all on Tuesday for the sing-song and sausage sizzle.

'Yeah, mister,' said the Artful Nudger.

'And Corporal Argue will see if she can teach you the campfire howl.'

'Yeah, right,' said Scumbag.

'But what do we do before we part?' said Carrot expectantly.

The bloods of the Skats and the Mohocks looked bashfully at one another.

Usually

they were nervous of nothing, it being a banishment matter to show fear in any

circumstances. But when they'd variously drawn up the clan rules, no-one had

ever thought there'd be someone like Carrot.

Glaring at one another with 'I'll-kill-you-if-you-ever-mention-this expressions,

they all raised the index fingers of both hands to the level of their ears and chorused: 'Wib wib wib.'

'Wob wob wob,' Carrot replied heartily. 'OK Reg, let's go.'

'How'd you do that, captain?' said Constable Shoe, as the watchmen hurried off.

'Oh, you just raise both fingers like this,' said Carrot. 'But I'd be obliged if you don't tell anyone, because it's meant to be a secret sig—'

'But they're thugs, captain! Young killers! Villains!'

'Oh, they're a bit cheeky, but nice enough boys undeneath, when you take the

time to understand—'

'I heard they never give anyone enough time to understand! Does Mr Vimes know

you're doing this?'

'He sort of knows, yes. I said I'd like to start a club for the street kids and he said it was fine provided I took them camping on the edge of some really sheer cliff somewhere in a high wind. But he always says things like that.

And

I'm sure we wouldn't have him

Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs leaned against a stack of timber and watched a man very carefully painting the name Pride of Ankh–Morpork on the prow of a ship. At some point he'd realize that he'd left out the 'c', and they were idly looking forward to this modest entertainment.

'You ever been to sea, sarge?' said Nobby.

'Hah, not me!' said the sergeant. 'Don't go flogging the oggin, lad.'

'I don't,' said Nobby. 'I have never flogged any oggin. Never in my entire life have I flogged oggin.'

'Right.'

'I've always been very clean in that respect.'

'Except you don't know what flogging the oggin means, do you?'

'No, sarge.'

'It means going to sea. You can't bloody trust the sea. When I was a little lad

I had this book about this little kid, he turned into a mermaid, sort of thing, and he lived down the bottom of the sea—'

'—the oggin—'

'Right, and it was all nice talking fishes and pink seashells and stuff, and then I went on my holidays to Quirm and I saw the sea, and I thought: here goes,

and if our ma hadn't been quick on her feet I don't know what would have happened. I mean, the kid in the book could breathe under the sea, so how was I

to know? It's all bloody lies about the sea. It's just all yuk with lobsters in it.'

'My mum's uncle was a sailor' said Nobby. 'But after the big plague he got press–ganged. Bunch of farmers got him drunk, he woke up next morning tied to a plough.'

They lounged some more.

'Looks like we're going to be in a fight, sarge,' said Nobby, as the painter

Well...

as me, anyway,' he added, in view of the various hues of Corporal Nobbs.

There

was probably no-one alive who was the same colour as Corporal Nobbs.

'Constable Visit's pretty brown' ' said Nobby. 'I never seen him run away. if

there's a chance of giving someone a religious pamphlet ole Washpot's

after them

like a terrier.'

'Ah, but Omnians are more like us,' said Colon. 'Bit weird but, basic'ly, just

the same as us underneath. No, the way you can tell a Klatchian is, you

look an'

see if he uses a lot of words beginning with "al", right? 'Cos that's a dead

giveaway. They invented all the words starting with "al". That's how you can

tell they're Klatchian. Like al-cohol, see?'

'They invented beer?'

'Yeah.'

'That's clever.'

'I wouldn't call it clever,' said Sergeant Colon, realizing too late that he'd

made a tactical error. 'More, luck, I'd say.'

'What else did they do?'

'Well, there's...' Colon racked his brains. 'There's al-gebra. That's like sums

with letters. For... for people whose brains aren't clever enough for

numbers,

see?'

'Is that a fact?'

'Right,' said Colon. 'In fact,' he went on, a little more assertively now he

could see a way ahead, 'I heard this wizard down the University say that

the

Klatchians invented nothing. That was their great contribution to maffs, he

said. I said "What?" an' he said, they come up with zero.'

'Dun't sound that clever to me,' said Nobby. 'Anyone could invent nothing. I

ain't invented anything.'

around to
count, so we invented numbers. It's like... well, they say the Klatchians
invented astronomy—'

'Al-tronomy,' said Nobby helpfully.

'No, no... no, Nobby, I reckon they'd discovered esses by then, probably
nicked'

em off us... anyway, they were bound to invent astronomy, 'cos there's
bugger

all else for them to look at but the sky. Anyone can look at the stars and
give

'em names. 's going it a bit to call it inventing, in any case. We don't go
around saying we've invented something just because we had a quick
dekko at it.'

'I heard where they've got a lot of odd gods,' said Nobby.

'Yeah, and mad priests,' said Colon. 'Foaming at the mouth, half of 'em.

Believe

all kinds of loony things.'

They watched the painter in silence for a moment. Colon was dreading the
question that came.

'So how exactly are they different from ours, then?' said Nobby. 'I mean,
some

of our priests are—'

'I hope you ain't being unpatriotic,' said Colon severely.

'No, of course not. I was just asking. I can see where they'd be a lot worse
than ours, being foreign and everything.

'And of course they're all mad for fighting,' said Colon. 'Vicious buggers with
all those curvy swords of theirs.'

'You mean, like they viciously attack you while cowardly running away after
tasting cold steel?' said Nobby, who sometimes had a treacherously good

memory

for detail.

'You can't trust 'em, like I said. And they burp hugely after meals.'

'Well... so do you, sarge.'

using
as a shield from the occasional random arrow and writing his letter home.
The
exercise was carried out with much frowning, sucking of the pencil and
what
Commander Vimes called a ballistic approach to spelling and punctuation.

Dere Mum and Dade,
I hope this letter finds you in good health as I am
also. Thank you for the big parcel of dwarf bread you
sent me I have sharred it with the other dwarfs on
the Watch and they say it is better even than
Ironcrufts ('t'Bread Wi' T'Edge') and you carn't
beat the taste of a home-forged loaf, so well done
mum.

Things are going well with the Wolf Pack that I
have told you about but Cmdr. Vimes is not happy, I
told him they were good lads at heart and it would
help them to learn the ways of Natchure and the
Wilderness and he said hah they know them already
that is the trouble. But he gave me \$5 to buy a
football which proves he cares deep down.

We have more new faeces in the Watch which is
just as well with this truble with Klatch, it is all
looking very Grave, I feel it is the Clam before the
Storm and no mistake.

I must brake off now because some robbers have
broke into Vortin's Dimond Warehouse and
have taken Corporal Angua hostage. I fear there
may be terrible bloodshed so,

I remain,
Yr. Loving Son,
Carrot Ironfoundersson (Captain)

Carrot took the sheet in one hand and megaphone in the other and raised his head carefully over the edge of the cart.

'Good morning again!' he said brightly. 'We've found another one. Theft of jewellery from—'

'Yes! Yes! We did it!' shouted a voice from the building.

'Really? I haven't even said what it was yet,' said Carrot.

'Never mind, we did it! Now can we come out, please?' There was another sound behind the voice. It sounded like a low, continuous growl.

'I think you ought to be able to tell me what you stole,' said Carrot.

'Er... rings? Cold rings?'

'Sorry, no rings mentioned.'

'Pearl necklace? Yes, that's what—'

'Getting warmer, but no.'

'Earrings?'

'Ooo, you're so close,' said Carrot encouragingly.

'A crown, was it? Maybe a coronet?'

Carrot leaned down to the constable. 'Says here a tiara, Reg, can we let—?'

He stood up. 'We're prepared to accept "coronet". Well done!'

He looked down at Constable Shoe again.

'This is all right, isn't it, Reg? It's not coercion, is it?'

'Can't see how it can be, captain. I mean, they broke in, they took a hostage...'

'I suppose you're right—'

'Please! No! Good boy! Down!'

'Seems to be about it, sir,' said Reg Shoe, peering around the edge of the cart.

'We've got them down for everything but the Hide Park Flasher—'

'We did that!' screamed someone.

'—and that was a woman...'

as

Carrot walked towards them.

'The owner of that place ought to be prosecuted!' he shouted. 'Keeping a wild

animal like that in his strongroom, it's disgraceful! We broke in perfectly peacefully and it just attacked us for no reason at all!'

'You shot at Constable Shoe here,' said Carrot.

'Only to miss! Only to miss!'

Constable Shoe pointed at the arrow sticking into his breastplate.

'Right where it shows!' he complained. 'It's a welding job and we have to pay

for our own armour repairs and there'll always be a mark, you know, no matter

what I do.'

Their horrified gaze took in the stitch marks around his neck and on his hands,

and it dawned on them that although the human race came in a variety of colours,

very few living people were grey with a hint of green.

'Here, you're a zombie!'

'That's right, kick a man when he's dead,' said Constable Shoe sharply.

'And you took Corporal Angua hostage. A lady,' said Carrot, in the same level

voice. It was very polite. But it simply suggested that somewhere a fuse was

burning, and it would be a good idea not to wait for it to reach the barrel.

'Yes... sort of... but she must've got away when that creature turned up...'

'So you left her in there?' said Carrot, still very calm.

The men dropped to their knees. The leader raised his hand imploringly.

'Please! We're just robbers and thieves! We're not bad men!'

Carrot nodded to Constable Shoe. 'Take them down to the Yard, constable.'

bed of roses, I might add.

A frightened face appeared round the door.

'Ah, Mr Vortin,' said Carrot. 'I think you will find that all is in order. They seem to have dropped everything.'

The diamond merchant looked at him in amazement.

'But they had a hostage—'

'They saw the error of their ways,' said Carrot.

'And... and there were snarling noises... sounded like a wolf...'

'Ah, yes,' said Carrot. 'Well, you know, when thieves fall out...' Which was no

kind of explanation, but because the tone of voice suggested that it was, Mr Vortin accepted it as such for fully five minutes after Carrot and Angua had left.

'Well, that's a nice start to the day,' said Carrot.

'Thank you, yes, I wasn't hurt,' said Angua.

'It makes it all seem worthwhile, somehow.'

'Just my hair messed up and another shirt ruined.'

'Well done.'

'Sometimes I might suspect that you don't listen to anything I say,' said Angua.

'Glad to hear it,' said Carrot.

The entire Watch was mustering. Vimes looked down at the sea of faces.

My gods, he thought. How many have we got now? A few years ago you could count

the Watch on the fingers of a blind butcher's hand, and now...

There's more coming in!

He leaned sideways to Captain Carrot. 'Who're all these people?'

'Watchmen, sir. You appointed them.'

'Did I? I haven't even met some of them!'

'You signed the paperwork, sir. And you sign the wage bill every month. Eventually.'

sir. He was very, er, vehement, sir. So I persuaded him that what the

Watch

needed was some expertise, and so he joined up, sir.'

'No more complaints?'

'Twice as many, sir. All from undead, sir, and all against Mr Shoe. Funny, that.'

Vimes gave his captain a sideways look.

'He's very hurt about it, sir. He says he's found that the undead just don't understand the difficulties of policing in a multi-vital society, sir.'

Good gods, thought Vimes, that's just what I would have done. But I'd have done

it because I'm not a nice person. Carrot is a nice person, he's practically got medals for it, surely he wouldn't have...

And he knew that he would never know. Somewhere behind Carrot's innocent stare

was a steel door.

'You enrolled him, did you?'

'Nossir. You did, sir. You signed his joining orders and his kit chitty and his posting orders, sir.'

Vimes had another vision of too many documents, hurriedly signed. But he must

have signed them and they needed the men, true enough. It was just that it ought

to be him who—

'And anyone of sergeant rank or above can recruit, sir,' said Carrot, as if reading his mind. 'It's in the General Orders. Page twenty-two, sir. just

below

the tea stain.'

'And you've recruited... how many?'

'Oh, just one or two. We're still very short-handed, sir.'

'We are with Reg. His arms keep falling off.'

'Aren't you going to talk to the men, sir?'

wouldn't be coppers.

Technically they were all in uniform, too, except that mostly they weren't wearing the same uniform as anyone else. Everyone had just been sent down to the

armoury to collect whatever fitted, and the result was a walking historical exhibit: Funny-Shaped Helmets Through the Ages.

'Er... ladies and gentlemen—' he began.

'Be quiet, please, and listen to Commander Vimes!' bellowed Carrot.

Vimes found himself meeting the gaze of Angua, who was leaning against the wall.

She rolled her eyes helplessly.

'Yes, yes, thank you, captain,' said Vimes. He turned back to the massed array

of Ankh-Morpork's finest. He opened his mouth. He stared. And then he shut his

mouth, all but a corner of it. And said out of that corner: 'What's that little lump on Constable Flint's head?'

'That's Probationary Constable Buggy Swires, sir. He likes to get a good view.'

'He's a gnome!'

'Well done, sir.'

'Another one of yours?'

'Ours, sir,' said Carrot, using his reproachful voice again. 'Yes, sir. Attached to the Chitterling Street Station since last week, sir.'

'Oh my gods...' murmured Vimes.

Buggy Swires saw his stare and saluted. He was five inches tall.

Vimes regathered his mental balance. The long and the short and the tall... waifs and strays, all of us.

'I'm not going to keep you long,' he said. 'You all know me... well, most of you

know me,' he added, with a sidelong glance at Carrot, 'and I don't make speeches. But I'm sure all of you have noticed the way this Leshp business has

was a large silver knob on the end. The watchmen craned to look.
'This... er... this...' Vimes groped. 'This old man turned up from the palace a couple of weeks ago. Cave me this damn thing. Got a label saying "Regalia of the Watch Commandr., Citie of Ankh-Morpork". You know they never throw anything away up at the palace.'
He waved it vaguely. The wood was surprisingly heavy.
'It's got the coat of arms on the knob, look.' Thirty watchmen tried to see.
'And I thought... I thought, good grief, this is what I'm supposed to carry?'
And
I thought about it, and then I thought, no, that's right, just once someone got it right. It's not even a weapon, it's just a thing. It ain't for using, it's just for having. That's what it's all about.
Same thing with uniforms. You see, a soldier's uniform, it's to turn him into part of a crowd of other parts all in the same uniform, but a copper's uniform is there to—'
Vimes stopped. Perplexed expressions in front of him told him that he was building a house of cards with too few cards on the bottom.
He coughed.
'Anyway,' he went on, with a glare to indicate that everyone should forget the previous twenty seconds, 'our job is to stop people fighting. There's a lot happening on the street. You've probably heard that they're starting up the regiments again. Well, people can recruit if they like. But we're not going to have any mobs. There's a nasty mood around. I don't know what's going to happen, but we've got to be there when it does.' He looked around the room.
'Another

policing.

Any questions? Good. Thank you very much.'

There was a general rustling and relaxing among the squad as it dawned on them

that they were free to go.

Carrot started to clap.

It wasn't the clap used by middlings to encourage

underlings to applaud overlings.[1] It had genuine enthusiasm behind it which

was, somehow, worse. A couple of the more impressionable new constables picked

it up and then, in the same way that little pebbles lead the avalanche, the sound of humanoids banging their hands together filled the room.

Vimes glowered.

'Very inspiring, sir!' said Carrot, as the clapping rose to a storm.

Rain poured on Ankh–Morpork. It filled the gutters and overflowed and was then

flung away by the wind. It tasted of salt.

The gargoyles had crept out of their daytime shadows and were perched on every

cornice and tower, ears and wings outstretched to sieve anything edible out of

the water. It was amazing what could fall on Ankh–Morpork. Rains of small fish

and frogs were common enough, although bedsteads caused comment.

A broken gutter poured a sheet of water down the window of Ossie Brunt, who was

sitting on his bed because there were no chairs or, indeed, any other furniture.

He didn't mind at the moment. In a minute or two he might be very angry.

And,

then again, possibly not.

year...

Ossie.' People said that. People tended to put him out of their minds, in the same way that you didn't pay much attention to empty space.

He wasn't stupid. He thought a lot about things. Sometimes he'd sit and think

for hours, just staring at the opposite wall where the rain came in on damp nights and made a map of Klatch.

Someone hammered on the door. 'Mr Brunt? Are you decent?'

'I'm a bit busy, Mrs Spent" he said, putting his bow under the bed with his magazines.

'It's about the rent!'

'Yes, Mrs Spent?'

'You know my rules!'

'I shall pay you tomorrow, Mrs Spent,' said Ossie, looking towards the window.

'Cash in my hand by noon or it's out you go!'

'Yes, Mrs Spent.'

He heard her stamp downstairs again.

He counted to fifty, very carefully, and then reached down and pulled out his

bow again.

Angua was on patrol with Nobby Nobbs. This was not an ideal arrangement, but

Carrot was on swing patrol and on a night like this Fred Colon, who kept the

roster, had an uncanny knack of being on desk duty in

the warm. So the spare partners had been thrown together. It was a terrible thought.

'Can I have a word, miss?' said Nobby, as they rattled doorknobs and waved their

lanterns into alleyways.

'Yes, Nobby?'

And, er... how were you thinking of doing that, Nobby?

'I mean, I sent off for stuff, miss, Creams an' that.'

'Creams,' said Angua flatly.

'That you rub on,' said Nobby helpfully.

'Rub on.'

'And a thing you do exercises with—'

'Oh gods...'

'Sorry, miss?'

'What? Oh... I was just thinking of something else. Do go on. Exercises?'

'Yeah. To build up my biceps and that.'

'Oh, exercises. Really?' Nobby did not appear to have any biceps to speak of.

There wasn't really anything for them to be – on. Technically he had arms, because his hands were attached to his shoulders, but that was about all you

could say.

Horrified interest got the better of her.

'Why, Nobby?'

He looked down, sheepishly.

'Well... I mean... you know... girls an' that...'

To her amazement, Nobby was blushing.

'You mean you...'

she began. 'You want to... you're looking for...'

'Oh, I'm not just after... I mean, if you want a thing done properly then... I mean, no,' said Nobby reproachfully. 'What I'm saying is, as you get older, you

know, you think about settlin' down, findin' someone who'll go with you hand in

hand down life's bumpy highway— Why's your mouth open?'

Angua shut it abruptly.

'But I just don't seem to meet girls,' Nobby said. 'Well, I mean, I meet girls, and then they rush off.'

'Despite the cream.'

'Right.'

She's got her own business, though. Does wonderful Chowder, too.

'And a squint.'

'Not exactly a squint, Nobby.'

'Yes, but you know what I mean.'

Angua had to admit that she did. Verity had the opposite of a squint. Both eyes

appeared to be endeavouring to see the adjacent ear. When you talked to her, you

had to suppress a feeling that she was about to walk off in two directions.

But

she could gut fish like a champion.

She sighed again. She was familiar with the syndrome. They said they wanted a

soulmate and helpmeet but sooner or later the list would include a skin like silk and a chest fit for a herd of cows.

Except for Carrot. That was almost... almost one of the annoying things about

him. She suspected he wouldn't mind if she shaved her head or grew a beard. It

wasn't that he wouldn't notice, he just wouldn't mind, and for some reason that

was very aggravating.

'The only thing I can suggest,' she said, 'is that women are quite often attracted to men who can make them laugh.'

Nobby brightened. 'Really?' he said. 'I ought to be well in there, then.'

'Good.'

'People laugh at me all the time.'

High above, quite oblivious of the rain that had already soaked him to the skin,

Ossie Brunt checked the oilskin cover round his bow and settled down for the

long wait.

Rain falling on water...

Ah, yes... When he was a little lad he'd pretended that the raindrops splashing

in the running gutters were soldiers. Millions of soldiers. And the bubbles that

sometimes went floating by were men on horseback.

Right now he couldn't remember what the occasional dead dog had been.

Some kind

of siege weapon, possibly.

Water swirled around his boots and dripped off his cape. When he tried to light

a cigar the wind blew the match out and the rain poured off his helmet and soaked the cigar in any case.

He grinned in the night.

He was, temporarily, a happy man. He was cold, wet and alone, trying to keep out

of the worst of the weather at three o'clock on a ferocious morning. He'd spent

some of the best nights of his life like this. At such times you could just...

sort of hunch your shoulders like this and let your head pull in like this and you became a little hunch of warmth and peace, the rain banging on your helmet,

the mind just ticking over, sorting out the world...

It was like this in the old days, when no-one cared about the Watch and all you

really had to do was keep out of trouble. Those were the days when there wasn't

as much to do.

But there was as much to do, said an inner voice. You just didn't do it.

He could feel the official truncheon hanging heavily in the special pocket that

Sybil herself had sewn in his breeches. Why is it just a bit of wood? he'd asked

The halo drew nearer and illuminated the damp face of Captain Carrot. The young man ripped off a salute – at godsdam three in the morning, Vimes thought – that would have brought a happy tear to the eye of the most psychotic drill sergeant.

'What're you doing out, sir?'

'I just wanted to... check up on things,' said Vimes.

'You could have left it all to me, sir,' said Carrot. 'delegation is the key to successful command.'

'Really? Is it?' said Vimes sourly. 'My word, we live and learn, don't we.'

And

you certainly learn, he added in the privacy of his head. And he was almost sure

he was being mean and stupid.

'We've just about finished, sir. We've checked all the empty buildings. And there will be an extra squad of constables on the route. And the gargoyles will

be up as high as they can. You know how good they are at watching, sir.'

'Gargoyles? I thought we just had Constable Downspout...'

'And Constable Pediment now, sir.'

'One of yours?'

'One of ours, sir. You signed—'

'Yes, yes, I'm sure I did. Damn!'

A gust of wind caught the water pouring from an overloaded gutter and dumped it down Vimes's neck.

'They say this new island's upset the air streams' said Carrot.

'Not just the air,' said Vimes. 'A lot of damn fuss over a few square miles of silt and some old ruins! Who cares?'

'They say it's strategically very important,' said Carrot, falling into step beside him.

Very sandy place, they say.

'Yes, sir. Apparently.'

There was a crash somewhere ahead of them, and a scream. Coppers learned to be

good at screams. There was to the connoisseur a world of difference between 'I'm

drunk and I've just trodden on my fingers and I can't get up!' and 'Look out!

He's got a knife!'

Both men started to run.

Light blazed out in a narrow street. Heavy footsteps vanished into the darkness.

The light flickered beyond a shop's broken window. Vimes stumbled through the doorway pulled off his sodden cape and threw it over the fire in the middle of

the floor.

There was a hiss, and a smell of hot leather.

Then Vimes stood back and tried to work out where the hell he was.

People were staring at him. Dimly, his mind assembled clues: the turban, the

beard, the woman's jewellery...

'Where did he come from? Who is this man?'

'Er . good morning?' he said. 'Looks like there's been a bit of an accident?'

He

raised the cape gingerly.

A broken bottle lay in a pool of sizzling oil.

Vimes looked up at the broken window. 'Oh...'

The other two people were a boy almost as tall as his father and a small girl trying to hide behind her mother.

Vimes felt his stomach turn to lead.

Carrot arrived in the doorway.

'I lost them,' he panted. 'There were three of them, I think. Can't see anything

cannot kneel down and looked at the broken bottle.

'Oh, you know how it is. You come in here on night shift for a hot caraway bun

and you just get chatting. You must have picked up the odd word, sir.'

'Well... vindaloo maybe, but...'

'This is a firebomb, sir.'

'I know, captain.'

'This is very bad. Who would do a thing like this?'

'Right now?' said Vimes. 'Half the city, I should think.'

He looked helplessly at Goriff. He vaguely recognized the face. He vaguely recognized Mrs Goriff's face. They were... faces. They were usually at the other

end of some arms holding a portion of carry or a kebab. Sometimes the boy ran

the place. The shop opened very early in the morning and very late at night,

when the streets were owned by bakers, thieves and watchmen.

Vimes knew the place as Mundane Meals. Nobby Nobbs had said that Goriff had

wanted a word that meant ordinary, everyday, straight-forward, and had asked

around until he found one he liked the sound of.

'Er... tell him... tell him you're staying here, and I'll go back to the Watch House and send someone out to relieve you,' said Vimes.

'Thank you,' said Goriff.

'Oh, you underst—' Vimes felt like an idiot. 'Of course you do, you must have been here, what, five, six years?'

'Ten years, sir.'

'Really?' said Vimes manically. 'That long? Really? My word... well, I'd better

get along... Good morning to you—'

He hurried out into the rain.

I didn't know you were on tonight, Mr. Vimes...

'This is unofficial, Fred,' said Vimes. He accepted 'Me from certain people.

In

an odd way, they'd earned it. 'Send someone along to Mundane Meals in Scandal

Alley, will you? A bit of trouble there.'

He reached the stairs.

'You stopping, sir?' said Fred.

'Oh, yes,' said Vimes grimly. 'I've got to catch up on the paperwork.'

The rain fell on Leshp so hard it probably hadn't been worth the island's bother

of rising from the bottom of the sea.

Most of the explorers slept in their boats now. There were buildings on the risen island, but...

... the buildings weren't quite right.

Solid Jackson peered out from the tarpaulin he'd rigged up on deck. Mist was

rising off the soaking ground and was made luminous by the occasional flash of lightning.

The city, by storm light, looked far too malevolent. There were things he could

recognize – columns and steps and archways and so on – but there were others...

he shuddered. It looked as if people had once tried to add human touches to

structures that were already ancient...

It was because of his son that everyone was staying in the boats.

A party of Ankh–Morpork fishermen had gone ashore that morning to search for the

heaps of treasure that everyone knew littered the ocean bottom and had found a

odd things that sometimes got washed up on beaches or tanned up in nets. Sometimes you pulled things over the side that'd put a man off fish for life. And suddenly no-one wanted to explore any more, just in case they found something.

Solid Jackson pulled his head back under the cover.

'Why'n't we going home, Dad?' said his son. 'You said this place gives you the willies.'

'All right, but they're Ankh-Morpork willies, see? And no foreigner's going to get his hands on them.'

'Dad?'

'Yes, lad?'

'Who was Mr Hong?'

'How should I know?'

'Only, when we was all heading back for the boats one of the other men said, 'We

all know what happened to Mr Hong when he opened the Three Jolly Luck Take-Away

Fish Bar on the site of the old fish-god temple in Dagon Street on the night of

the full moon, don't we... ?" Well, I don't know.'

'Ah...' Solid Jackson hesitated. Still, Les was a big lad now...

'He... closed up and left in a bit of a hurry, lad. So quick he had to leave some things behind.'

'Like what?'

'If you must know... half an earhole and one kidney.'

'Cool!'

The boat rocked, and wood splintered. Jackson jerked the cover up. Spray washed

over him. Somewhere close in the wet darkness a voice shouted: 'Why you not

carrying lights, you second cousin of a jackal?'

Jackson pulled out the lantern and held it up.

and too

much rigging coming unriggered.

At times like this the ancient traditions of the sea that unite all mariners should come to the fore and see them combine in the face of their common foe,

the hungry and relentless ocean.

However, at this point Mr Arif hit Mr Jackson over the head with an oar.

'Hnh? Wuh?'

Vimes opened the only eye that appeared to respond. A horrible sight met it.

...I read him his rites, whereupon, he said up, yours copper. Sgnt Detritus then, cautioned him, upon which he said, ouch...

There may be a lot of things I'm not good at, thought Vimes, but at least I don't treat tile punctuation of a sentence like a game of Pin the Tail on the Donkey...

He rolled his head away from Carrot's fractured grammar. The pile of paper shifted under him.

Vimes's desk was becoming famous. Once there were piles, but they had slipped as

piles do, forming this dense compacted layer that was now turning into something

like peat. It was said there were plates and unfinished meals somewhere down

there. No—one wanted to check. Some people said they'd heard movement. There was a genteel cough. Vimes rolled his head again and looked up into the

big pink face of Willikins, Lady Sybil's butler. His butler too, technically, although Vimes hated to think of him like that.

'I think we had better proceed with alacrity, Sir Samuel. I have brought your dress uniform, and your shaving things are by the basin.'

'What? What?'

polished. Outside, the city's clocks began to strike ten. It must've been almost four when I sat down Vimes thought. I know I heard the shift change at eight, and then I had to sort out Nobby's expenses, that's advanced mathematics if ever there was some...

He tried to yawn and shave at the same time, which is never a good idea. 'Damn!'

'I shall fetch some tissue paper directly, sir,' said Willikins, without looking round. As Vimes dabbed at his chin, the butler went on: 'I should like to take this opportunity to raise a matter of some import, sir...'

'Yes?' Vimes shared blearily at the red tights that seemed to be a major item of his dress uniform.

'Regretfully, I am afraid I must ask leave to give in my notice, sir. I wish to join the Colours.'

'Which colours are these, Willikins?' said Vimes, holding up a shirt with puffed sleeves. Then his brain caught up with his cars. 'You want to become a soldier?'

'They say Klatch needs to be taught a sharp lesson, sir. A Willikins has never been found wanting when his country calls. I thought that Lord Venturi's Heavy Infantry would do for me. They have a particularly attractive uniform of red and white, sir. With gold frogging.'

Vimes pulled his boots on. 'You've had military experience, have you?'

'Oh, no, sir. But I am a quick learner, sir, and I believe I have some prowess with the carving knife.' The butler's face showed a patriotic alertness.

'On turkeys and on...' said Vimes.

'Yes, sir; said Willikins, buffing up die ceremonial helmet.

With the gold frogging, sir. Willikins thrust out his jaw. 'Yes, sir. If the need arises.'

'You don't see anything wrong with this picture?'

'Sir?'

'Oh, never mind.' Vimes yawned. 'Well, we shall miss you, Willikins.' Others may

not, he thought. Especially if they have time for a second shot.

'Oh, Lord Venturi says it'll all be over by Hogswatch, sir.'

'Really? I didn't know it had started.'

Vimes ran down the stairs and into a smell of curry.

'We saved you some, sir,' said Sergeant Colon. 'You was asleep when the lad

brought it round.'

'It was Goriff's kid,' said Nobby, chasing a bit of rice around his tin plate.

'Enough for half the shift.'

'The rewards of duty,' said Vimes, hurrying towards the door.

'Bread and mango pickle and everything,' said Colon happily. 'I've always said

old Goriff isn't that bad for a rag'ead.'

A pool of sizzling oil... Vimes stopped at the door. The family, huddling together... He took out his watch. It was twenty past ten. If he ran—

'Fred, could you just step up to my office?' he said. 'It won't take a moment.'

'Right, sir.'

Vimes ushered the sergeant up the stairs and closed the door.

Nobby and the other watchmen strained to listen, but there was no sound except

for a low murmuring which went on for some time.

The door opened again. Vimes came down the stairs.

'Nobby, come up to the University in five minutes, will you? I want to stay in touch and I'm damned if I'm taking a pigeon with this uniform on.'

'Right, sir.'

Vimes left.

scratched
his head. 'Don't make sense, really. I reckon Sir Sam is missing too much sleep.'

'He's a very busy man, Fred.'

'Trying to do everything, that's his trouble. And... Nobby?'

'Yes?'

'It's Sergeant Colon, thanks.'

There was sherry. There was always sherry at these occasions. Seam Vimes could regard it dispassionately, since he always drank fruit juice these days. He'd heard they made sherry by letting wine go rotten. He couldn't see the point of sherry.

'And you will try to look dignified, won't you?' said Lady Sybil, adjusting his cloak.

'Yes, dear.'

'What will you try to look?'

'Dignified, dear.'

'And please try to be diplomatic.'

'Yes, dear.'

'What will you try to be?'

'Diplomatic, dear.'

'You're using your "henpecked" voice, Sam.'

'Yes, dear.'

'You know that's not fair.'

'No, dear.' Vimes raised a hand in a theatrical gesture of submission. 'All right, all right. It's just these feathers. And these tights,' He winced and tried to do some surreptitious rearranging in an effort to prevent himself becoming the city's first hunchgroin. 'I mean, supposing people see me?'

'Of course they'll see you, Sam. You're leading the procession. And I'm very

proud of you.'

me? I never run—
'You ran away before the big soiree for the Genuan ambassador. Everyone saw you.'

'I'd just got news that the De Bris gang were robbing Vortin's strongroom!' 'But you don't have to chase everyone, Sam. You employ people for that now.'

'We got 'em, though,' said Vimes, with satisfaction.

He'd enjoyed it immensely, too. It wasn't just the pursuit that was so invigorating, with his velvet cloak left behind on a tree and his hat in a puddle somewhere, it was the knowledge that while he was doing this he wasn't

eating very small sandwiches and making even smaller talk. It wasn't proper

police work, Vimes considered, unless you were doing something that someone

somewhere would much rather you weren't doing.

When Sybil had disappeared into the crowd he found a handy shadow and lurked in

it. It enabled him to see almost the whole of the University's Great Hall.

He quite liked the wizards. They didn't commit crimes. Not Vimes's type of crimes, anyway. The occult wasn't Vimes's beat. The wizards might well mess up

the very fabric of time and space but they

didn't lead to paperwork, and that was fine by Vimes. There were a lot of them

in the hall, in all their glory. And there was nothing finer than a wizard dressed up formally, until someone could find a way of inflating a Bird of Paradise, possibly by using an elastic band and some kind of gas. But the wizards were getting a run for their money, because the rest of the guests were

either nobles or guild leaders or both, and an occasion like the Convivium brought out the peacock in everyone.

They chatted in small groups. One or two nodded and smiled to him as they passed.

The world is watching, Vimes thought. If something went wrong and this stupid Leshp business started a war, it's men like these who'd be working out exactly how to deal with the winner, whoever it was. Never mind who started it, never mind how it was fought, they'd want to know how to deal with things now. They represented what people called the 'international community'. And like all uses of the world 'community', you were never quite sure what or who it was. He shrugged. It wasn't his world, thank goodness.

He sidled over to Corporal Nobbs, who was standing by the main doors in the sort of lopsided slouch which was the closest a living Nobbs could come to attention.

'All quiet, Nobby?' he said, out of the corner of his mouth.

'Yessir.'

'Nothing going on at all?'

'Nossir. Not a pigeon anywhere, sir.'

'What, nowhere? Nothing?'

'Nossir.'

'There was trouble all over the place yesterday!'

'Yessir.'

'You did tell Fred he was to send a bird if there was anything at all?'

'Yessir.'

'The Shades? There's always something—'

'Dead quiet, sir.'

'Damn!'

He turned. Archchancellor Ridcully was bearing down on him, towing a couple of swarthy men. Vimes hurriedly put on his official face.

'This is Commander Vimes, gentlemen. Sam... no, I'm doing this the wrong way round, aren't I, got the protocol all wrong – so much to sort out, the Bursar's locked himself in the safe again, we don't know how he manages to get the key in there with him, I mean, it's not even as if it's got a keyhole on the inside...'

The first man held out a hand as Ridcully bustled off again. 'Prince Khufurah,' he said. 'My carpet got in only two hours ago.'

'Carpet? Oh... yes... you flew . . .'

'Yes, very chilly and of course you just can't get a good meal. And did you get your man, Sir Samuel?'

'What? Pardon?'

'I believe our ambasssador told me you had to leave the reception last week...?'

The Prince was a tall man who had probably once been quite athletic until the big dinners had finally weighed him down. And he had a beard. All Klatchians had beards. This Klatchian had intelligent eyes, too. Disconcertingly intelligent. You looked into them and several layers of person looked back at you.

'What? Oh. Yes. Yes, we got 'em all right,' said Vimes.

'Well done. He put up a fight, I see.'

Vimes looked surprised. The Prince tapped his jaw thoughtfully. Vimes's hand flew up and encountered a little bit of tissue on his own chin.

'Ah... er... yes...'

'Commander Vimes always gets his man,' said the Prince.

The Prince's eyes stayed locked on Vimes's face.

Vimes was conscious of his own thoughts moving very fast, and they seemed to

reach their own decision. We'll explain later, they said. You're too tired for explanations. Right now, with this man, it's oh so much better to be honest...

'It... refers to your headdress,' he said.

'Oh. Is it some kind of obscure joke?'

Of course he knows, thought Vimes. And he knows I know...

'No. It's an insult,' he said eventually.

'Ah? Well, we certainly cannot be held responsible for the ramblings of idiots,

commander.' The Prince flashed a smile. 'I must commend you, incidentally.'

'I'm sorry?'

'For your breadth of knowledge. I must have asked a dozen people that question

this morning and, do you know? Not one of them knew what it meant. And they all

seemed to have caught a cough.'

There was a diplomatic pause but, in it, someone sniggered.

Vimes let his glance drift sideways to the other man, who had not been introduced. He was shorter and skinnier than the Prince and, under his

black

headdress, had the most crowded face Vimes had ever seen. A network of scars

surrounded a nose like an eagle's beak. There was a sort of beard and moustache,

but the scars had affected the hair growth so much that they stuck out in strange bunches and at odd angles. The man looked as though he had been hit in

the mouth by a hedgehog. He could have been any age. Some of the scars looked

The Prince gave a dismissive shrug.

'Pfui,' he said. 'A few square miles of uninhabited fertile ground with superb anchorage in an unsurpassed strategic position? What sort of inconsequence is that for civilized people to war over?'

Once again Vimes felt the gaze on him, reading him. Well, the hell with it.

He said, 'Sorry, I'm not good at this diplomacy business. Did you mean what you just said then?'

There was another snigger. Vimes turned and looked at the leering bearded face

again. And was aware of a smell, no, a stench of cloves.

Good grief, he chews the stinking things...

'Ah,' said the Prince, 'you haven't met 71-hour Ahmed?'

Ahmed grinned again and bowed. 'Offendi,' he said, in a voice like a gravel path.

And that seemed to be it. Not 'This is 71-hour Ahmed, Cultural Attache' or '71-hour Ahmed, my bodyguard' or even '71-hour Ahmed, walking strongroom and moth

killer'. It was dear that the next move was up to Vimes.

'That's... er... that's an unusual name" he said.

'Not at all,' said the Prince smoothly. 'Ahmed is a very common name in my country.'

He leaned forward again. Vimes recognized this as the prelude to a confidential

aside. 'Incidentally, was that beautiful lady I saw just now your first wife?'

'Er... all my wives,' said Vimes. 'That is—'

'Could I offer you twenty camels for her?'

Vimes looked back into the dark eyes for a moment, glanced at 71-hour Ahmed's

24-carat grin, and said:

'This is another test, isn't it... ?'

camping we are complete barbarians who'd try to buy their wives at the drop of, shall we say, a turban. I am surprised they're giving me an honorary degree, considering how incredibly backward I am.'

'Oh? What degree is that?' said Vimes. No wonder this man was a diplomat. You couldn't trust him an inch, he thought in loops, and you couldn't help liking him despite it.

The Prince pulled a letter out of his robe.

'Apparently it's a Doctorum Adamus cum Flabello Dulci – Is there something wrong, Sir Samuel?'

Vimes managed to turn the treacherous laugh into a coughing fit. 'No, no, nothing,' he said. 'No.'

He desperately wanted to change the subject. And fortunately there was something here to provide just the opportunity.

'Why has Mr Ahmed got such a big curved sword slung on his back?' he said.

'Ah, you are a policeman, you notice such things—'

'It's hardly a concealed weapon, is it? It's nearly bigger than him. He's practically a concealed owner!'

'It's ceremonial,' said the Prince. 'And he does fret so if he has to leave it behind.'

'And what exactly is his—'

'Ah, there you are,' said Ridcully. 'I think we're just about ready. You know you go right at the front, Sam—'

'Yes, I know,' said Vimes. 'I was just asking His Highness what'

'—and if you, Your Highness, and you, Mr... my word, what a big sword, and you come back here and take your place among the honoured guests, and we'll be ready

Someone tapped Vimes on the shoulder. He turned and looked right into the grin of 71-hour Ahmed.

'If hyou changing your mind, offendi, I give hyou twenty-five camels, no problem,' he said, pulling a clove from his teeth. 'May your hlions be full of fruit.'

He winked. It was the most suggestive gesture Vimes had ever seen. 'Is this another-' he began, but the man had vanished into the crowd.

'My loins be full of fruit?' he repeated to himself. 'Good grief!'

71-hour Ahmed reappeared at his other elbow in a gust of cloves. 'I go, I hcome back,' he growled happily. 'The Prince hsays the degree is Doctor of Sweet Fanny Adams. A hwizard Wheeze, yes? Oh, how we are laughing.'

And then he was gone.

The Convivium was Unseen University's Big Day. Originally it had just been the degree ceremony, but over the years it had developed into a kind of celebration of the amicable relationship between the University and the city, in particular celebrating the fact that people were hardly ever turned to clams any more.

In the absence of anything resembling a .Lord Mayor's Show or a state opening of Parliament, it was one of the few formal opportunities the citizens had of jeering at their social superiors, or at least at people wearing tights and ridiculous costumes.

It had grown so big that it was now held in the city's Opera House.

Distrustful people – that is to say, people like Vimes considered that this was so there

And someone, once, had decided that the Commander of the Watch should walk in front, for symbolic reasons. That hadn't mattered for years because there hadn't been a Commander of the Watch, but now there was, and he was Sam Vimes. In a red shirt with silly baggy sleeves, red tights, some kind of puffed shorts in a style that went out of fashion, by the lock of it, at the time when flint was at the cutting edge of cuttingedge technology, a tiny shiny breastplate and a helmet with feathers in it. And he really did need some sleep. And he had to carry the truncheon. He kept his eyes fixed on the damn thing as he walked out of the University's main gate. Last night's rain had cleaned the sky. The city steamed. If he stared at the truncheon he didn't have to see who was giggling at him. The downside was that he had to keep staring at the thing. It said, on a little tarnished shield that he'd had to clean before reading it, Protector of thee Kinge's Piece. That had brightened the occasion slightly. Feathers and antiques, gold braid and fur... Perhaps it was because he was tired, or just because he was trying to shut out the world, but Vimes found himself slowing down into the traditional watchman's walk and the traditional idling thought process. It was an almost Pavlovian response.[4] The legs swung, the feet moved, the mind began to work in a certain way. It wasn't a dream state, exactly. It was just that the ears, nose and eyeballs wired themselves straight into the ancient 'suspicious bastard' node of his brain, leaving his higher brain centre free to freewheel. ... Fur and tights... what kind of wear was that for a watchman? Bashed-in

a lump of silver on the end... even a constable got a decent sword, what was he supposed to do, wave it at people?... ye gods, it was months since he'd had a good walk through the streets... lot of people about today... some parade on, wasn't there... ?

'Oh dear,' said Captain Carrot, in the crowd. 'What's he doing?'

Next to him an Agatean tourist was industriously pulling the lever of his iconograph.

Commander Vimes stopped and, with a faraway look in his eyes, tucked his

truncheon under one arm and reached up to his helmet.

The tourist locked up at Carrot and tugged his shirt politely.

'Please, what is he doing now?' he said.

'Er... he's... he's taking out. .

'Oh, no...' said Angua.

'... he's taking the ceremonial packet of cigars out of his helmet,' said

Carrot. 'Oh... and he's, he's lighting one...'

The tourist pulled the lever a few times.

'Very historic tradition?'

'Memorable,' murmured Angua.

The crowd had fallen silent. No one wanted to break Vimes's concentration.

There

was the big gusty silence of a thousand people holding their breath.

'What's he doing now?' said Carrot.

'Can't you see?' said Angua.

'Not with my hands over my eyes. Oh, the poor man...'

'He's... he's just blown a smoke ring... '

'...first one of the day, he always does that...'

'...and now he's set off again... and now he's pulled out the truncheon and he's

tossing it up in the air and catching it again, you know the way he does with

going to do things because they were apparently ridiculous, you might as well go home right now.

'He's tired, that's what it is,' said Carrot. 'He's been running around overseeing things for days. Night and day watches. You know what a hands-on person he is.'

'Let's hope the Patrician will agree to let him stay that way.'

'Oh, his lordship wouldn't... He wouldn't, would he?'

Laughter was starting. Vimes had started to toss the truncheon from one hand to the other.

'He can make his sword spin three times and still catch it—'

Vimes's head turned. He looked up. His truncheon clattered on to the cobbles and rolled into a puddle, unheeded.

Then he started to run.

Carrot stared at him and then tried to see what the man had been looking at.

'On top of the Barbican...' he said. 'In that window... isn't that someone up there? Excuse me, excuse me, sorry, excuse me—' He began to push his way through the crowd.

Vimes was already a small figure in the distance, his red cloak flying out after him.

'Well? There's lots of people watching the parade from high places,' said Angua.

'What's so special about—'

'No one should be up there!' said Carrot, starting to run now he was free of the

crowd. 'It's all sealed up!'

Angua looked around. Every face was turned towards the street theatre, and there

No one could get to the top of the Barbican. The Barbican had been the fortified gateway in the days when Ankh–Morpork didn't regard an attacking army as a marvellous commercial opportunity. Some parts were still in use, but the bulk of it was six or seven storeys of ruin, without stairs that any sensible man would trust. For years it had been used as an unofficial source of masonry for the rest of the city. Bits of it fell off on windy nights. Even gargoyles avoided it.

He was aware that far behind him the noise of the crowd became a lot of shouting. One or two people screamed. He didn't turn round. Whatever was going on, Carrot could take care of it.

Something overtook him. It looked like a wolf would look if one of its ancestors had been a longhaired Klatchistan hunting dog, one of those graceful things that were all nose and hair.

It bounded ahead and through the crumbling gateway. The creature was nowhere to be seen when Vimes arrived. But the absence was not a matter that grabbed at his attention, because of the more pressing presence of the corpse, lying in a mess of fallen masonry.

One of the things Vimes had always said – that is to say, one of the things he said he always said, and no one disagrees with the commanding officer – was that sometimes small details, tiny little details, things that no one would notice in ordinary circumstances, grab your senses by the throat and scream, 'See me!'

The iconograph I borrowed from the tourist.
'I don't know what you're talking about,' said Vimes.

'But you—'

'I can't see you going very far in the Watch, captain, if you go around seeing things that aren't there.'

'Oh.'

The clock seemed to tick louder.

'You're thinking something, sir. Aren't you?'

'It is a use to which I occasionally put my brain, captain. Strange as it may seem.'

'What are you thinking, sir?'

'What they want me to think,' said Vimes.

'Who's they?'

'I don't know yet. One step at a time.'

A bell tinkled.

Vimes stood up. 'You know what I always say,' he said.

Carrot removed his helmet and polished it with his sleeve. 'Yes, sir.

"Everyone's guilty of something, especially the ones that aren't," sir.'

'No, not that one...'

'Er... "Always take into consideration the fact that you might be dead wrong,"

sir?'

'No, nor that one either.'

'Er... "How come Nobby ever got a job as a watchman?", sir? You say that a lot.'

'No! I meant "Alwaysact stupid," Carrot.'

'Ah, right, sir. From now on I shall remember that you always said that, sir.'

They put their helmets under their arms. Vimes knocked at the door.

'Come,' said a voice.

The Patrician was standing at the window.

Sitting or standing around the office were Lord Rust and the others. Vimes never

NO, sir.

'They didn't?'

'No, sir. I did that myself.'

'You physically checked it yourself, Vimes?' said Boggis of the Thieves' Guild.

Captain Carrot could feel Vimes's thoughts at this point.

'That is correct... Boggis,' said Vimes, without turning his head. 'But... we think someone got in where the windows are boarded up and pulled the boards back

after him. Dust has been disturbed and—'

'And you didn't spot this, Vimes?'

Vimes sighed. 'It'd be hard enough to spot the nailed-back boards in daylight,

Boggis, let alone in the middle of the night.' Not that we did, he added to himself. Angua smelled the scent on them.

Lord Vetinari sat down at his desk. 'The situation is grave, Vimes.'

'Yes, sir?'

'His Highness is very seriously injured. And Prince Cadram, we understand, is

beside himself with rage.'

'They insist on keeping his brother in the embassy,' said Lord Rust. 'A studied

insult. As if we haven't good surgeons in this city.'

'That's right, of course,' said Vimes. 'And many of them could give him a decent

shave and a haircut too.'

'Are you making fun of me, Vimes?'

'Certainly not, my lord,' said Vimes. 'In my opinion, no surgeons anywhere have

cleaner sawdust on their floors than the ones in this city.'

Rust glared at him.

The Patrician coughed.

'You have identified the assassin?' said the Patrician.

between two
barn doors.'

'Was he acting alone?'

'We only found the one body, sir. And a lot of recently fallen masonry, so it looks as—'

'I meant does he belong to any organization? Any suggestion that he's anti-Klatchian?'

'Apart from him trying to kill one? Enquiries are continuing.'

'Are you taking this seriously, Vimes?'

'I have put my best men on the job, sir.' Who's looking worried? 'Sergeant Colon

and Corporal Nobbs.' Who's looking relieved? 'Very experienced men. The keystones of the Watch.'

'Colon and Nobbs?' said the Patrician. 'Really?'

'Yes, sir.'

Their gazes met, very briefly.

'We're getting some very threatening noises, Vimes,' said Vetinari.

'What can I say, sir? I saw someone up on the tower, I ran, someone shot the

Prince with an arrow and then I found the man at the bottom of the tower very

obviously dead, with a broken bow and a lot of rock beside him. The storm last

night probably loosened things up. I can't make up facts that don't exist, sir.'

Carrot watched the faces round the table. The general expression was one of

relief.

'A lone Bowman,' said Vetinari. 'An idiot with some kind of mad grudge.

Who died

in the execution of the, uh, attempted execution. And, of course, valiant action

by our watchmen probably at least prevented an immediately fatal shot.'

shot. As it was, the man panicked. Yes... the Prince, possibly, would accept that.'

'Prince?' said Vimes. 'But the poor devil—'

'His brother,' said the Patrician.

'Ah. The nice one?'

'Thank you, commander,' said the Patrician. 'Thank you, gentlemen. Do not let

me detain you. Oh, Vimes... just a brief word, if you would be so good. Not you,

Captain Carrot. I'm sure someone is committing some crime somewhere.'

Vimes remained staring at the far wall while the room emptied. Vetinari left

his

chair and went over to the window.

'Strange days indeed, commander,' he said.

'Sir.'

'For example, I gather that this afternoon Captain Carrot was on the roof of

the Opera House firing arrows down towards the archery butts.'

'Very keen lad, sir.'

'It could well be that the distance between the Opera House and the targets is

about the same, you

know, as the distance between the top of the Barbican and the spot where

the

Prince was hit.'

'Just fancy that, sir.'

Vetinari sighed. 'And why was he doing this?'

'It's a funny thing, sir, but he was telling me the other day that in fact it is

still law that every citizen should do one hour's archery practice every day.

Apparently the law was made in 1356 and it's never been—'

'Do you know why I sent Captain Carrot away just now, Vimes?'

'Couldn't say, sir.'

'Captain Carrot is an honest young man, Vimes.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Nailed them back?'

Blast. 'Yes, sir.'

'From the outside.'

Damn. 'Yes, sir.'

'A Particularly resourceful lone bowman, then.'

Vimes didn't bother to comment. Vetinari sat down at his desk, raised his steepled fingers to his lips and stared at Vimes over the top of them.

'Colon and Nobbs are investigating this? Really?'

'Yes, sir.'

'If I were to ask you why, you'd pretend not to understand?'

Vimes let his forehead wrinkle in honest perplexity 'Sir?'

'If you say "Sir?" again in that stupid voice, Vimes, I swear there will be trouble.'

'They're good men, sir.'

'However, some people might consider them to be unimaginative, stolid and... how

can I put this?... possessed of an inbuilt disposition to accept the first explanation that presents itself and then bunk off somewhere for a quiet smoke?

A certain lack of imagination? An ability to get out of their depth on a wet pavement? A tendency to rush to judgement?'

'I hope you are not impugning my men, sir.'

'Vimes, Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs have never been pugn'd in their entire

lives.'

'Sir?''

'And yet... in fact, we do not need complications, Vimes. An ingenious lone madman... well, there are many madmen. A regrettable incident.'

'Yes, sir.' The man was looking harassed and Vimes felt there was room for a

pinch of sympathy.

'Fred and Nobby don't like complications either, sir.'

when vines had gone Lord Vetinari sat at his desk for a while, staring at nothing. Then he took a key from a drawer and walked across to a wall, where he pressed a particular area. There was a rattle of a counterweight. The wall swung back. The Patrician walked softly through the narrow passageway beyond. Here and there it was illuminated by a very faint glow from around the edges of the little panels which, if gently slid back, would allow someone to look out through the eyesockets of a handy portrait. They were a relic of a previous ruler. Vetinari never bothered with them. Looking out of someone else's eyes wasn't the trick. There was a certain amount of travel up dark stairways and along musty corridors. Occasionally he'd make movements the meaning of which might not be readily apparent. He'd touch a wall here and here, apparently without thinking, as he passed. Along one stone-flagged passage, lit only by the grey light from a window forgotten by everyone except the most optimistic flies, he appeared to play a game of hopscotch, robes flying around him and calves twinkling as he skipped from stone to stone. These various activities did not seem to cause anything to happen. Eventually he reached a door, which he unlocked. He did this with some caution. The air beyond was full of acrid smoke, and the steady pop-pop sound which he had begun to hear further back along the passage was now quite loud. It faltered

That was one of Leonard of Quirm's traits. He picked up conversations out of the air, he assumed everyone was an interested friend, and he took it for granted that you were as intelligent as he was.

Vetinari peered at a small heap of bent and twisted metal.

'What was it, Leonard?' he said.

'An experimental device for turning chemical energy into rotary motion,' said Leonard. 'The problem, you see, is getting the little pellets of black powder into the combustion chamber at exactly the right speed and one at a time. If two ignite together, well, what we have is the external combustion engine.'

'And, er, what would be the purpose of it?' said the Patrician.

'I believe it could replace the horse,' said Leonard proudly.

They looked at the stricken thing.

'One of the advantages of horses that people often point out,' said Vetinari, after some thought, 'is that they very seldom explode. Almost never, in my experience, apart from that unfortunate occurrence in the hot summer a few years ago.' With fastidious fingers he pulled something out of the mess. It was a pair of cubes, made out of some soft white fur and linked together by a piece of string. There were dots on them.

'Dice?' he said.

Leonard smiled in an embarrassed fashion. 'Yes. I can't think why I thought they'd help it go better. It was just, well, an idea. You know how it is.'

Lord Vetinari nodded. He knew how it was. Be knew how it was far more than Leonard of Quirm did, which was why there was one key to the door and he had it.

Not that the man was a prisoner, except by dull, humdrum standards. He appeared

Leonard's incredible brain sizzled away alarmingly, an overloaded chip part on the Stove of Life. It was impossible to know what he would think of next, because he was constantly reprogrammed by the whole universe. The sight of a waterfall or a soaring bird would send him spinning down some new path of practical speculation that invariably ended in a heap of wire and springs and a cry of 'I think I know what I did wrong.' He'd been a member of most of the craft guilds in the city but had been thrown out for getting impossibly high marks in the exams or, in some cases, correcting the questions. It was said that he'd accidentally blown up the Alchemists' Guild using nothing more than a glass of water, a spoonful of acid, two lengths of wire and a pingpong ball. Any sensible ruler would have killed off Leonard, and Lord Vetinari was extremely sensible and often wondered why he had not done so. He'd decided that it was because, imprisoned in the priceless, enquiring amber of Leonard's massive mind, underneath A that bright investigative genius was a kind of wilful innocence that might in lesser men be called stupidity. It was the seat and soul of that force which, down the millennia, had caused mankind to stick its fingers in the electric fight socket of the Universe and play with the switch to see what happened – and then be very surprised when it did. It was, in short, something useful. And if the Patrician was anything, he was the political equivalent of the old lady who saves bits of string because you never know when they might come in handy. After all, you couldn't plan for every eventuality, because that would involve knowing what was going to happen, and if you knew what was going to happen, you

want

them to be there while you talk to yourself.

'I've just made some tea.' said Leonard. 'Will you join me?'

He followed the Patrician's gaze to a brown stain all up one wall, which ended

in a star of molten metal in the plaster.

'I'm afraid the automatical tea engine went wrong,' he said. 'I shall have to make it by hand.'

'So kind,' said Lord Vetinari.

He sat down amidst the easels and, while Leonard busied himself at the fireplace, leafed through the latest sketches. Leonard sketched as automatically

as other people scratched; genius – a certain kind of genius – fell off him like

dandruff.

There was a picture of a man drawing, the lines catching the figure so accurately it appeared to stand out of the paper. And around it, because Leonard

never wasted white space, were other sketches, scattered aimlessly. A thumb. A

bowl of flowers. A device, apparently, for sharpening pencils by water power...

Vetinari found what he was looking for in the bottom lefthand corner, sandwiched

between a sketch for a new type of screw and a tool for opening oysters. It, or

something very much like it, was always there somewhere.

One of the things that made Leonard such a rare prize, and kept him under such

secure lock and key, was that he really didn't see any difference between the

thumb and the roses and the pencil-sharpener and this.

'Ah, the self-portrait,' said Leonard, returning with two cups.

wheels and uses the oxen to wind the windlass.

'Really?' said Vetinari, taking in the carefully numbered parts. 'And it could be built?'

'What? Oh, yes. Macaroon? In theory.'

'In theory?'

'No—one would ever actually do it. Raining unquenchable fire down upon fellow

humans? Hah!' Leonard sprayed macaroon crumbs. 'You'd never find an artisan to

build it, or a soldier who would pull the lever... That's part 3(b) on the plan, just here, look. ..'

'Ah, yes,' said Vetinari. 'Anyway,' he added, 'I imagine these huge power arms

here couldn't possibly be operated without them breaking . . .'

'Seasoned ash and yew, laminated and held together by special steel bolts,' said

Leonard promptly. 'I made a few calculations, just there below the sketch of light on a raindrop. As an intellectual exercise, obviously.'

Vetinari ran his eye along several lines of Leonard's spidery mirror-writing.

'Oh, yes,' he said glumly. He put the paper aside.

'Have I told you that the Klatchian situation is intensely political? Prince Cadram is trying to do a great deal very fast. He needs to consolidate his position. He is depending on support that is somewhat volatile. There are many

plotting against him, I understand.'

'Really? Well, this is the sort of thing people do,' said Leonard.

'Incidentally, I've recently been examining cobwebs and, I know this will interest you, their strength in relation to their weight is much greater even than our best steel wire. Isn't that fascinating?'

'What kind of weapon do you intend to make out of them?' said the Patrician.

'Sorry?'

'Oh, nothing. I was just thinking aloud.'

string-weaving machine and ended up as an instrument for ascertaining
the

specific gravity of cheese.

He was as easily distracted as a kitten. All that business with the flying
machine, for example. Giant bat wings hung from the ceiling even now. The
Patrician had been more than happy to let him waste his time on that idea,
because it was obvious to anyone that no human being would ever be able
to flap

the wings hard enough.

He needn't have worried. Leonard was his own distraction. He had ended
up

spending ages designing a special tray so that people could eat their meals
in

the air.

A truly innocent man. And yet always, always, some little part of him would
sketch these wretchedly beguiling engines, with their clouds of smoke and
carefully numbered engineering diagrams...

'What's this?' Vetinari said, pointing to yet another doodle. It showed a man
holding a large metal sphere.

'That? Oh, something of a toy, really. Makes use of the strange properties
of

some otherwise quite useless metals. They don't like being squeezed. So
they go

bang. With extreme alacrity.'

'Another weapon...'

'Certainly not, my lord! It would be no possible use as a weapon! I did think
it

might have a place in the mining industries, though.'

'Really...'

'For when they need to move mountains out of the way.'

'Tell me,' Vetinari said, putting this paper aside as well, 'you don't have any
relatives in Klatch, do you?'

'I don't believe so. My family lived in Quirm for generations.'

the tunnel.
'Certainly! I would be astonished if they haven't made considerable progress!'

said Leonard of Quirm happily.

'Ah?' The Patrician sank a little in his chair. It had turned out that the end of the tunnel was on fire.

'A splendid people with much to recommend them,' said Leonard. 'I always thought

it was the presence of the desert. It leads to an urgency of thought. It makes

you aware of the briefness of life.'

The Patrician glanced at another page. Between a sketch of a bird's wing and a

careful drawing of a ball-joint was a little doodle of something with spiked wheels and spinning blades. And then there was the device for moving mountains

aside...

'The desert is not required,' he said. He sighed again and pushed the pages

aside. 'Have you heard about the lost continent of Leshp?' he said.

'Oh, yes. I did some sketches there a few years ago,' said Leonard. 'Some interesting aspects, I recall. More tea? I fear you've let that one get cold.

Was there anything you particularly wanted?'

The Patrician pinched the bridge of his nose.

'I'm not sure. There is a small problem developing. I thought perhaps you could

help. Unfortunately,' the Patrician glanced at the sketches again, 'I suspect that you can.' He stood up, straightened his robe and forced a smile. 'You have

everything you require?'

'Some more wire would be nice,' said Leonard. 'And I have run out of Burnt UMBER.'

'I shall have some sent along directly,' said Vetinari. 'And now, if you will

pausing to hop sideways on one leg.

Then there was a pause, such as might be made by someone adjusting their

clothing and getting their breath back.

The door opened and the Patrician returned. He sat down and looked carefully at

Leonard of Quirm.

'You did what?' he said.

Vimes turned the clove over and over under the magnifying glass.

'I see tooth marks,' he said.

'Yes sir,' said Littlebottom, who represented in her entirety the watch's forensic department. 'Looks like someone was chewing it like a toothpick.'

Vimes sat back. 'I would say,' he said, 'that this was last touched by a swarthy

man of about my height. He had several gold teeth. And a beard. And a slight

cast in one eye. Scarred. He was carrying a large weapon. Curved, I'd say.

And

you'd have to call what he was wearing a turban because it wasn't moving fast

enough to be a badger.'

Littlebottom looked astonished.

'Detectoring is like gambling,' said Vimes, putting down the dove. 'The secret

is to know the winner in advance. Thank you, corporal. Write down that description and make sure everyone gets a copy, please. He goes by the

name of

71-hour Ahmed, heaven knows why. And then go and get some rest.'

Vimes turned to face Carrot and Angua, who had crammed into the tiny little

room, and nodded at the girl.

'I followed the clove smell all the way down to the docks,' she said.

,Right. And?

'It's a Burleigh and Stronginthearm "Shureshotte Five", sir. A bow for the expert. I'm not a great bowman but I could at least hit the target at that elevation. But...'

'I'm ahead of you,' said Vimes. 'You're, a big lad, Carrot. Our late Ossie had arms like Nobby. I could put my hand round them.'

'Yes, sir. It's a hundred-pound draw. I doubt if he could even pull the string back.'

'I'd hate to watch him try. Good grief... the only thing he could be sure of hitting with a bow like that would be his foot. By the way, do you think anyone saw you up there?'

'I doubt it, sir. I was right in among the chimneys and the air vents.'

Vimes sighed. 'Captain, I expect if you'd done it in a cellar at midnight his lordship would have said "Wasn't it rather dark down there?" next morning.' He took out the by now rather creased picture. There was Carrot – or at least

Carrot's arm and ear – as he ran towards the procession. And there, among the

people in the procession turning to look at him, was the face of the Prince. There was no sign of 71-hour Ahmed. He'd been at the soiree, hadn't he? But then

there'd been all that milling around at the door, people changing places, treading on one another's robes, nipping back to the privy, walking into one another... He could have gone anywhere.

'And the Prince fell as you got to him? With the arrow in his back? He was still facing you?'

'Yes, sir. I'm sure of that. Everyone else was milling around, of course.. .'

'So he was shot in the back by a man in front of him who could not possibly have

used the bow that he didn't shoot him with from the wrong direction. .

There was a tapping at the window.

chimney
and his paper squeaker had echoed out forlornly amongst the snowy
rooftops all
night.

But gargoyles were good at watching, and good at remembering, and very,
very
good at being patient.

Vimes opened the window. Moving jerkily, Downspout unfolded himself into
the
room and then quickly scrambled up on to a corner of Vimes's desk, for the
comfort that it brought.

Angua and Carrot stared at the arrow the gargoyle held in his hand.

'Ah, well done,' said Vimes, in the same even voice. 'Where did you find it,
Downspout?'

Downspout spluttered a series of guttural syllables only pronounceable by
someone with a mouth shaped like a pipe.

'In the wall on the second floor of the dress shop in the Plaza of Broken
Moons,' Carrot translated.

'eshk,' said Downspout.

'That's barely halfway to Sator Square, sir.'

'Yes,' said Vimes. 'A small weak man trying to pull a heavy bow, the arrow
wobbling all over the place... Thank you very much, Downspout. There will
be an

extra pigeon for you this week.'

'nkorr,' said Downspout, and clambered back out of the window.

'Excuse me, sir?' said Angua. She took the arrow from Vimes and, closing
her

eyes, sniffed at it gingerly.

'Oh, yes... Ossie,' she said. 'All over it . . .

'Thank you, corporal. It's as well to be sure.'

Carrot took the arrow from the werewolf and looked at it critically. 'Huh.
Peacock feathers and a plated point. It's the sort of thing an amateur buys
because he thinks it'll magically improve his shot. Showy.'

Isn't this fun?' said Vimes. 'I don't want you to get in Fred's way. Just... ask around. Try Done It Duncan, Or Sidney Lopsides, hah, there's a man with his

ear to the ground all right. Or the Agony Aunts, or Lily Goodtime. Or Mr Slider,

haven't seen him around for a while, but—'

'He's dead, sir,' said Carrot.

'What, Smelly Slider? When?'

'Last month, sir. He got hit by a falling bedstead. Freak accident, sir.'

'No—one told me.'

'You were busy, sir. But you put some money in the envelope when Fred brought it

round, sir. Ten dollars, which Fred remarked was very generous.'

Vimes sighed. Oh, yes, the envelopes. Fred was always wandering around with an

envelope these days. Someone was always leaving, or some friend of the Watch was

in trouble, or there was a raffle, or the

tea money was low again, or some complicated explanation... so Vimes just put

some money in. Simplest way.

Old Smelly Slider...

'You should've mentioned it,' he said reproachfully.

'You've been working hard, sir.'

'Any other street news you haven't mentioned, captain?'

'Not that I can think of, sir.'

'All right. Well... see which way the wind is blowing. Very carefully. And — trust no—one.'

Carrot looked worried.

'Er... I can trust Angua, can't I?' he said.

'Well, of course you—'

'And you, presumably.'

'Me, well, obviously. That goes without say—'

She's a werewolf, thought Vimes, of course she understands. And you'd think a man who is technically a dwarf'd be able to fold his head around the idea of subterfuge.

'Look, just... listen to the streets,' said Vimes. 'The streets know everything. Talk to... Blind Hugh—'

'I'm afraid he passed away last month,' said Carrot.

'Did he? No—one told me!'

'I thought I sent you a memo, sir.'

Vimes glanced guiltily at his overloaded desk, and then shrugged.

'Have a quiet look at things. Get to the bottom of things. And trust no— Trust practically no—one. All right? Except trustworthy people.'

'Come on, open up! Watch business!'

Corporal Nobbs pulled at Sergeant Colon's sleeve and whispered in his ear.

'Not Watch business!' said Colon, pounding the door again. 'Nothing to do with

the Watch at all! We are just civilians, all right?'

The door opened a crack.

'Yes?' said a voice that counted its small change.

'We have to ask you some questions, missus.'

'Are you the Watch?' said the voice.

'No! I think I just made that clear—'

'Piss off, copper!'

The door slammed.

'You sure this is the right place, sarge?'

'Harry Chestnuts said he saw Ossie going in here. Come on, open up!'

'Everyone's looking at us, sarge,' said Nobby. Doors and windows had opened all

along the street.

'And don't call me sarge when we're in plain clothes!'

'Right you are, Fred.'

We hear you've got a room to let, missus! He yelled.

'Brilliant, Frederick,' said Nobby. 'That was bloody brilliant!'

'Well, I am the sergeant, right?' Colon whispered.

'No.'

'Er... yeah... right... well, just you remember that, right?'

The door snapped open.

The woman within had one of those faces that had settled over the years, as

though it had been made of butter and then left in the sun. But age hadn't been

able to do much with her hair. It was a violent ginger and piled up like a threatening thunderhead.

'Room? You shoulda said,' she said. 'Two dollars a week, no pets, no cookin', no

wimmin after 6 a.m., if you don't want it thousands do, are you with the circus?

You look like you're with the circus.'[5]

'We're—' Colon began, and then stopped. There were undoubtedly a large number of

things to be apart from policemen, but there and then he couldn't think of any

of them.

'—actors,' said Nobby.

'Then it's payment a week in advance,' said the woman. 'And no filthy foreign

habits. This is a respectable house, she added, in defiance of evidence so far.

'We ought to see the room first,' said Colon.

'Oh, the choosy sort, eh?'

She led them upstairs.

The room vacated so terminally by Ossie was small and bare. A few items of

clothing hung on nails in the wall. and a heap of wrappers and greasy bags

magnetism.

Mrs Spent gave the shocked Nobby a sharp look and bustled out of the room.

'What'd you go and say that for?' said Nobby.

'It's got rid of her, hasn't it?'

'You were having a go at me, don't deny it! just because I'm going through a bit

of an emotional wossname, eh?'

'It was just a joke, Nobby. Just a joke.'

Nobby peered under the narrow bed.

'Wow!' he said, all emotional wossnames forgotten.

'What is it? What is it?' said Colon.

'It looks like a complete run of Bows and Ammo! And...!' Nobby pulled another

stack of badly engraved magazines out into the light, 'here's Warrior of Fortune, look! And Practical Siege Weapons...'

Colon leafed through page after page of very similarlooking people holding very

similar weapons of personal destruction.

'You got to be a bit odd to sit around all day reading this kind of thing,' he said.

'Yeah,' said Nobby. 'Here, don't put that one back, that's last August's issue,

I ain't got that one. Hang on, there's a box right at the back...'

He wriggled out, towing a small box with him. It was locked, but the cheap metal

gave way when he accidentally levered at the lid.

Silver coins gleamed. Lots and lots of them.

'Whoops...' he muttered. 'We're in trouble now...'

'That's Klatchian money, that is!' said Colon. 'Sometimes people slip you one

instead of a half-dollar in your change. Look, there's all curly writing on them!'

under the bed.

'Ah, but that's because you is trained,' said Colon. 'Your basic civilian wouldn't think of that, right? Ah, it all begins to make sense!'

'Does it? Why would the Klatchians give him money to shoot a Klatchian?' said

Nobby. .

Colon tapped the side of his nose. 'Politics,' he said.

'Ah, politics,' said Nobby. 'Ah, well, politics. I see. Politics. Right. So why?'

'Aha,' said Colon again, tapping the other side of his nose.

'Why're you picking your nose, sarge?'

'I'm tapping it,' said Colon severely. 'That's to show I'm in the know.'

'In the nose,' said Nobby cheerfully.

'It's just the sort of underhand cunning thing they'd do,' said Colon.

'Payin' us to kill them?' said Nobby.

'Ah, you see, some Klatchian nob gets topped here, and then they can send a

snotty note saying, "You killed our big nob, you foreign nephews of dogs, this

means war!" see? A perfect excuse.'

'Do you need an excuse to have a war?' said Nobby. 'I mean, who for?'

Can't you

just say, "You got lots of cash and land but I've got a big sword so divvy up right now, chop chop?" That's what I'd do,' said Corporal Nobbs, military strategist. 'And I wouldn't even say that until after I'd attacked.'

'Ah, but that's 'cos you don't know about politics,' said Colon. 'You can't do that stuff any more. Mark my words, this case has got politics written all

over

it. That's why old Vimes put me on it, depend upon it. Politics. Young

Carrot's

all very well, but you need a hexperienced man of the world in these delicate

political situations.'

else but sand in Kiatchi. Still got some in his sandals.

Nobby opened the window. It gave on to a gently sloping roof. Someone could get

through it easily and be away over the tiles and into the maze of chimneys.

'He could've gone in and out this way, sarge,' he volunteered.

'Good point, Nobby. Write that down. Evidence of conniving and sneaking around.'

Nobby peered down. 'Here, there's glass outside, Fred...'

Sergeant Colon joined him at the stricken window. One of the panes had been

smashed. Outside, glass glittered on the tiles.

'That could be a clue, eh?' said Nobby, hopefully.

'It certainly is,' said Sergeant Colon. 'See the glass fell outside the window? Everyone knows you look at which way the glass falls. I reckon he was just testing his bow and it went off while it was loaded.'

'That's clever, sarge,' said Nobby.

'That's detectoring,' said Colon. 'It's no good just looking at things, Nobby.

You got to think straight, too.'

'Cecil, sarge. '

'That's Frederick, Cecil. Come on, I think we've wrapped this up nicely. Old Vimes says he wants a report toot sweet.'

Nobby looked out of the broken window. The roof abutted the end wall of a much

larger warehouse. For a moment he found himself thinking bendy rather than

straight, but he reasoned that his thinking was only a corporal's thinking, and

worth far less per thought than a sergeant's thinking, so he kept his private thoughts to himself.

As they went downstairs Mrs Spent watched them suspiciously through a barely

opened doorway at the far end of the hall, clearly ready to slam it shut at the

been

there because of, e.g., the sand on the floor...

'He'd still got sand in his sandals?' murmured Vimes. 'Good grief.'

'Sam?'

Vimes looked up from his reading.

'Your soup will be cold,' said Lady Sybil from the far end of the table.

'You've

been holding that

spoonful in the air for the last five minutes by the clock.'

'Sorry, dear.'

'What are you reading?'

'Oh, just a little masterpiece,' said Vimes, pushing Fred Colon's report aside.

'Interesting, is it?' said Lady Sybil a little sourly.

'Practically unparalleled,' said Vimes. 'The only things they haven't found are

the bunch of dates and the camel hidden under the pillow...'

Belatedly, his nuptial radar detected a certain chilliness from the far side of the cruet.

'Is, er, there something wrong, dear?' he said.

'Can you remember when we last had dinner together, Sam?'

'Tuesday, wasn't it?'

'That was the Guild of Merchants' annual dinner, Sam.'

Vimes's brow wrinkled. 'But you were there too, weren't you?'

A further subtle change in the dragonhouse quotient told him that this was not a

well chosen answer.

'And then you rushed off afterwards because of that business with the barber in

Gleam Street.'

'Sweeney Jones,' said Vimes. 'Well, he was killing people, Sybil. The best you

could say is that he didn't mean to. He was just very bad at shaving—'

There's always been a lot to do. And the bigger the Watch gets the more there

is to do, have you noticed that?'

Vimes nodded. That was true. Rotas, receipts, notebooks, reports... the Watch

might or might not be making a difference in the city, but it was certainly frightening a lot of trees.

'You ought to delegate,' said Lady Sybil.

'So he tells me,' muttered Vimes.

'Pardon?'

'Just thinking aloud, dear.' Vimes pushed the paperwork away. 'I'll tell you what... let's have an evening in,' he said. 'There's a nice fire in the drawing room—'

'Er... no, Sam, there isn't.'

'Hasn't young Forthright lit it?' Forthright was the Boy; it came as news to Vimes that this was an official servant position, but the Boy's job was to light

the fires, clean the privies, help the gardener and take the blame.

'He's gone off to be a drummer boy in the Duke of Eorle's regiment,' said Lady

Sybil.

'Him too? He seemed a bright lad! Isn't he too young?'

'He said he was going to lie about his age.'

'I hope he lies about his musical ability. I've heard him whistling.' Vimes shook his head. 'Whatever possessed him to do such a daft thing?'

'He thinks the uniform will impress the girls.'

Sybil gave him a gentle smile. An evening at home suddenly began to seem very

inviting.

'Well, it won't take a genius to find the woodshed,' said Vimes. 'And then we can bolt the doors and—'

One of the aforesaid doors shook to the sound of frantic knocking.

Vimes caught Sybil's gaze.

you've got to wear a uniform. If you don't wear a uniform it's like spying on people. He knows I think that.'

Angua looked at his short red hair and honest ears.

'I've taken a lot of the work off his shoulders,' Carrot went on. 'He doesn't have to go on patrol at all, but he still tries to do everything.'

'Perhaps he doesn't want you to be quite so helpful?' said Angua, as tactfully as possible.

'It's not as if he's getting any younger, either. I've tried to point that out.'

'That was kind of you.'

'And I've never worn plain clothes.'

'On you they'll never be very plain,' said Angua, pulling on her coat. It was a relief to be out of that armour. As for Carrot, there was no disguising him. The size, the ears, the red hair, the expression of muscular good-naturedness...

'I suppose a werewolf is in plain clothes all the time, when you think about it,' said Carrot.

'Thank you, Carrot. And you are absolutely right.'

'I just don't feel comfortable, living a lie.'

'Walk a mile on these paws.'

'Pardon?'

'Oh... nothing.'

Goriff's son Janil had been angry. He didn't know why. The anger was built up of a lot of things. The firebomb last night was a big part. So were some of the words he'd been hearing in the street. He'd had an argument with his father about sending that food round to the Watch House this morning. They were an official part of the city. They had those stupid badges. They had uniforms. He was angry about a lot of things, including the fact that he was thirteen.

curiously at Carrot.

'All right... stop... no, on a bit... stop... turn a little bit to the left... I mean my left... back a bit... now throw your arms up...'

He walked over to her and followed her gaze.

'He was shot from the University?'

'Looks like the library building,' said Angua. 'But a wizard wouldn't do it, surely? They keep out of that sort of thing.'

'Oh, it's not too hard to get in there, even when the gates are shut,' said Carrot. 'Let's try the unofficial way, shall we?'

'OK Carrot?'

'Yes?'

'The false moustache... it's not you, you know. And the nose is far too pink'

'Doesn't it make me look inconspicuous?'

'No. And the hat... I should lose the hat, too' It is a good hat,' she added quickly. 'But a brown bowler... it's not your style. It doesn't suit you.'

'Exactly!' said Carrot. 'If it was my style, people would know it's me, right?'

'I mean it makes you look like a twerp, Carrot.'

'Do I normally look like a twerp?'

'No, not-'

'Aha!' Carrot fumbled in the pocket of his large brown overcoat. 'I got this book of disguises from the joke shop in Phedre Road, look. Funny thing, Nobby

was in there buying stuff too. I asked him why and he said it was desperate measures. What d'you think he meant by that?'

'I can't imagine,' said Angua.

'It's just amazing the stuff they've got. False hair, false noses, false beards, even false...' He hesitated, and began to blush. 'Even false... you know, chests. For ladies. But I can't imagine for the life of me why they'd want to disguise those.'

He probably couldn't, Angua thought. She took the very small book from Carrot

and glanced through it. She sighed.

at one

end. A couple of student wizards went past.

The unofficial entrance to the University has always been known only to students. What most students failed to remember was that the senior members of

the faculty had also been students once, and also liked to get out and about

after the official shutting of the gates. This naturally led to a certain amount of embarrassment and diplomacy on dark evenings.

Carrot and Angua waited patiently as a few more students climbed over, followed

by the Dean.

'Good evening, sir,' said Carrot, politely.

'Good evening to you, Spuddy,' said the Dean, and ambled off into the night.

'You see?'

'Ah, but he didn't call me Carrot,' said Carrot. 'The principle is sound.'

They dropped down on to lawns of academia and headed for the library.

'It'll be shut,' said Angua.

'Remember, we have a man on the inside,' said Carrot, and knocked.

The door opened a little way. 'Ook?'

Carrot raised his horrible little round hat.

'Good evening, sir, I wonder if we could come in? It's Watch business.'

'Ook eek ook?'

'Er...,

'What did he say?' said Angua.

'If you must know, he said, "My goodness me, a walking potato,"' said Carrot.

The Librarian wrinkled his nose at Angua. He did not like the smell of werewolves. But he beckoned them inside and then left them waiting while he

knuckled back to his desk and rummaged in a drawer. He produced a Watch Special

OOK OOK – OOK.

'He says that's just old storerooms,' said Carrot.

'And that last "ook'?' said Angua.

' "Mr Horrible Hat", ' said Carrot.

'Still, he hasn't worked out who you are, eh?' said Angua.

The fifth floor was a corridor of airless rooms, smelling sadly of old, unwanted

books. They were stacked not on shelves but on wide racks, bundled up with

string. A lot of them were battered and missing their covers. judging by what

remained, though, they were old textbooks that not even the most ardent bibliophile could treasure.

Carrot picked up a torn copy of Woddeley's Occult Primer. Several loose pages

fell out. Angua picked one up.

"Chapter Fifteen, Elementary Necromancy", ' she read aloud. `Lesson One:

Correct

Use of Shovel...'

She put it down again and sniffed the air. The presence of the Librarian filled

the nasal room like an elephant in a matchbox, but–

'Someone else has been in here,' she said. 'In the last couple of days.

Could

you leave us, sir? When it comes to odours, you're a bit... forthright...'

'Ook?'

The Librarian nodded at Carrot, shrugged at Angua and ambled out.

'Don't move,' said Angua. 'Stay right where you are, Carrot. Don't disturb the

air . .

She inched forward carefully.

Her ears told her the Librarian was down the corridor, because she could hear

humans would put on a different coat, but even there it was considered polite to do it behind a bush.

When he re-opened them Angua was slinking forward, her whole being concentrated in her nose.

The olfactory presence of the Librarian was a complex shape, a mere purple blur where he had been moving but almost a solid figure where he'd been standing still. Hands, face, lips... they'd be just the centre of an expanding cloud in a few hours' time, but now she could still smell them out.

There must be only the tiniest air currents in here. There weren't even any flies buzzing in the dead air to cause a ripple of disturbance.

She edged nearer to the window. Vision was a mere shadowy presence, providing a charcoal sketch of a room over which the scents painted their glorious colours.

By the window... by the window...

Yes! A man had stood there, and by the scent of it he hadn't moved for some time. The smell wavered in the air, on the edge of her nasal skill. The curling, billowing traces said that the window had been opened and closed again, and was there just the merest, tiniest suggestion that he'd held an arm out in front of him?

Her nose raced, trying to form original shapes from the patterns hanging in the room like dead smoke...

When she'd finished, Angua went back to her pile of clothes and coughed politely while she was pulling on her boots.

You can smell the colour.

'No. The dye. It comes from Sto Lat, I think. And... I think he shot a bow. An expensive bow. There's a hint of silk in the air, and that's what the strongest bowstrings are made of, isn't it? And you wouldn't put one of those on a cheap bow.'

Carrot stood by the window. 'He got a good view,' he said, and looked down at the floor. And then at the sill. And on the shelves nearby.

'How long was he here?'

'Two or three hours, I'd say.'

'He didn't move around much.'

'No.'

'Or smoke, or spit He just stood and waited. A professional. Mr Vimes was right.'

'A lot more professional than Ossie,' said Angua.

'Green coat,' said Carrot, as if thinking aloud. 'Green coat, green coat...'

'Oh. .. and bad dandruff,' said Angua, standing up.

'Snowy Slopes?!' shouted Carrot.

'What?'

'Really bad dandruff?'

'Oh, yes, it—'

'That's why they call him Snowy,' said Carrot. 'Daceyville Slopes, the man with

the reinforced comb. But I'd heard he'd moved to Sto Lat—'

In unison they said: '—where the dye comes from—' 'Is he good with a bow?' said

Angua.

'Very good. He's good at killing people he never met, too.'

'He's an Assassin, is he?'

'Oh, no. He just kills people for money. No style. Snowy can't read and write.'

MR SLOPES?

Snowy Slopes gingerly felt his neck, or at least the neck of his soul. The human soul tends to keep to the shape of the original body for some time after death.

Habit is a wonderful thing.

'Who the hell was he?' he said.

NOT SOMEONE YOU KNOW? said Death.

'Well, no! I don't know many people who cut my head off!'

Snowy Slopes's body had knocked against the table as it fell. Several bottles of

medicated shampoo now dripped and mixed their contents into the other more

intimate fluids from the Slopes corpse.

'That stuff with the special oil in it cost me nearly four dollars,' said Snowy.

Yet, somehow, it all seemed slightly... irrelevant now. Death happens to other

people. The other person in this case had been him. That is, the one down there.

Not the one standing here looking at it. In life, Snowy hadn't even been able to

spell 'metaphysical', but he was already beginning to view life in a different way. From the outside, for a start.

'Four dollars,' he repeated. 'I never even had time to try it!'

IT WOULDN'T HAVE WORKED, said Death, patting the man on a fading shoulder. BUT,

IF I MIGHT SUGGEST

THAT YOU LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, IT WILL NO LONGER BE NECESSARY.

'No more dandruff?' said Snowy, now quite transparent and fading fast.

EVER, said Death. TRUST ME ON THIS.

Oh, gods... so who's the officer in charge?
'Sergeant Detritus, sir.'
It seemed to the dwarf that she was suddenly standing still. Commander Vimes had become a rapidly disappearing blur.

With the calm expression of someone who was methodically doing his duty, Detritus picked up a man and used him to hit some other men. When he had a clear area around him and a groaning heap of former rioters, he climbed the heap and cupped his hands round his mouth.

'Listen to me, youse people!'

A troll shouting at the top of his voice could easily be heard above a riot. When he seemed to have their attention he pulled a scroll out of his breastplate and waved it over his head.

'Dis is der Riot Act,' he said. 'You know what dat means? It means if'n I reads it out and youse don't disb... disp... go away, der Watch can use deadly force, you unnerstand?'

'What did you just use, then?' moaned someone from underneath his feet.

'Dat was you helpin' der Watch,' said Detritus, shifting his weight.

He unrolled the scroll.

Although there was some scuffling in alleyways and shouts from the next street,

a ring of silence expanded outwards from the troll. An almost genetic component

of the citizens of Ankh-Morpork was their ability to spot an opportunity for amusement.

Detritus held the document at arm's length. And then a few inches from his face.

don't

want to stand here listenin' to me all day!' he bellowed. 'Dis is der Riot Act and you've all got to read it, right? Pass it round.'

'What if we don't read it?' said a voice in the crowd.

'You got to read it. It legal.'

'And then what happens?'

'Den I shoot you,' said Detritus.

'That's not allowed!' said another voice. 'You've got to shout "Stop! Armed Watchman!" first.'

'Sure, dat suits me,' said Detritus. He shrugged one huge shoulder to bring his

crossbow under his arm. It was a siege bow, intended to be mounted on the cart.

The bolt was six feet long. 'It harder to hit runnin' targets.'

He released the safety catch.

'Anyone finishing readin' dat thing yet?'

'Sergeant!'

Vimes pushed his way through the crowd. And it was a crowd now. Ankh–Morpork was

always a good audience.

There was a clang as Detritus saluted.

'Were you proposing to shoot these people in cold blood, sergeant?'

'Nossir. just a warning shot inna head, sir.'

'Really? Just give me a moment to talk to them, then.'

Vimes looked at the man next to him. He was holding a flaming torch in one hand

and a long length of wood in the other. He gave Vimes the nervously defiant

stare of someone who has just felt the ground shift under his feet.

Vimes pulled the torch towards him and lit a cigar. 'What's happening here, friend?'

'The Klatchians have been shooting people, Mr Vimes! Unprovoked attack!'

'Really?'

keep, but Detritus is going to stay here. And I just hope he doesn't do anything to disgrace the uniform. Or get it very dirty, at least.'

irony was not a degree-level subject among the listeners, but the brighter ones recognized Vimes's expression. It said that here was a man hanging on to his patience by his teeth.

The mob dispersed, going ragged at the edges as people legged it down side alleys, threw away their makeshift weapons and emerged at the other end walking the grave, thoughtful walk of honest citizens.

'All right, what happened?' said Vimes, turning to the troll.

'We're hearing where dis boy shot dis man,' said Detritus. 'We got here, next minute it rainin' people from everywhere, shoutin'.'

'He smote him as Hudrun smote the fleshpots of Ur,' said Constable Visit.[6]

'Smote?' said Vimes, bewildered. 'He killed someone?'

'Not by der way der man was cussing, sir,' said Detritus. 'Hit him in der arm. His friends brought him round der Watch House to complain. He a baker on der night shift. He said he was late for work, he come runnin' in to pick up his dinner, next minute he flat on der floor.'

Vimes walked across the street and tried the door of the shop. It opened a little way, and then fetched up against what seemed to be a barricade. Furniture had been piled up against the window as well.

'How many people were there, constable?'

'A multitude thereof, sir.'

And four people in here, thought Vimes. A family. The door moved a fraction and

know what I mean?

There was no reply.

'All right. Detritus, just step over here—'

There was a hissed argument inside, and then the sound of scraping as furniture was moved.

He tried the door. It swung inwards.

The family were at the far end of the room. Vimes felt eight eyes on him.

The

atmosphere had a hot, worrying feel, spiced with the smell of burnt food.

Mr Goriff was holding the crossbow gingerly, and the expression on his son's

face told Vimes a lot of what he needed to know.

'All right,' he said. 'Now you all listen to me. I'm not arresting anyone right now, you hear? This sounds like one of those things that make his lordship yawn.

But you'd do better spending the rest of the night in the Watch House. I can't

spare the men to stand guard here. Do you understand? I could arrest you.

But

this is just a request.'

Mr Goriff cleared his throat.

'The man I shot—' he began, and left the question and the lie hanging in the air.

Vimes forced himself not to glance at the boy. 'Not badly hurt,' he said.

'He... ran in,' said Mr Goriff. 'And after last night—'

'You thought you were being attacked again and grabbed the crossbow?'

'Yes,' said the boy, defiantly, before his father could speak.

There was a brief argument in Klatchian. Then Mr Goriff said:

'We must leave the house?'

'For your own good. We'll try to have someone watch it. Now, get something

together and go off with the sergeant. And give me that crossbow.'

It wasn't large. In the kitchen behind the shop something spicy in a pot was boiling dry. After burning his fingers a couple of times he managed to tip the pot on to the fire to put it out and then, vaguely remembering his mother doing something like this, put the pot under the pump to soak. Then he barricaded the windows as best he could and went out, locking the door behind him. A discreetly obvious brass Thieves' Guild plaque over the door told the world that Mr Goriff had conscientiously paid his annual fee,[7] but the world had plenty of less formal dangers and so Vimes took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and wrote on the door:

UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE WATCH

As an afterthought he signed it:

SGT DETRITUS

In the imaginations of the less civically minded the majesty of the rule of law didn't carry anything like as much weight as the dread of Detritus. The Riot Act! Where the hell had he dredged that from? Carrot, probably. It hadn't been used for as long as Vimes could remember, and that was no wonder when you knew what it really did. Even Vetinari would hesitate to use it. Now it was nothing more than a phrase. Thank goodness for trollish illiteracy... It was when Vimes stood back to admire his handiwork that he saw the glow in the sky over Park Lane, almost at the same time as he heard the clatter of iron

'Yes, sir!

Mrs Spent opened the door a crack.

'Yes?'

'I'm a friend of...' Carrot hesitated, wondering if Fred would have given his real name. 'Er... big fat man, suit doesn't fit—'

'The one who goes around with the sex maniac?'

'Pardon?'

'Skinny little twerp, dresses like a clown?'

'They said you'd have a room,' said Carrot desperately.

'They've got it,' said Mrs Spent, trying to shut the door.

'They said I could use it—'

'No sub—lettin!'

'They said I should pay you two dollars!'

The pressure of the door was released a little.

'On top of what they paid?' said Mrs Spent.

'Of course.'

'Well...' She looked Carrot up and down and sniffed. 'All right. What shift are

you on?'

'Sorry?'

'You're a watchman, right?'

'Er...' Carrot hesitated, and then raised his voice. 'No, I am not a watchman.

Haha, you think I'm a watchman? Do I look like a watchman?'

'Yes, you do,' said Mrs Spent. 'You're Captain Carrot. I seen you walking about

the town. Still, I suppose even coppers have to sleep somewhere.'

On the roof, Angua rolled her eyes.

'No wimmin, no cookin', no music, no pets,' said Mrs Spent, as she led the way

up the creaking stairs.

Angua waited in the dark until she heard the window open.

'She's gone,' Carrot hissed.

across

the room, frozen in time by their smell. But after a day smells criss-crossed and entangled. You had to take them apart, remove the familiar pieces, and what

you had left

'They're so mixed up!'

'All right, all right,' said Carrot soothingly.

'At least three people! But I think one of them is Ossie... It's stronger round the bed... and...'

She opened her eyes wide and looked down at the floor. 'Somewhere here!'

'What? What is?'

Angua crouched down with her nose just above the floorboards.

'I can smell it but I can't see it!'

A knife appeared in front of her. Carrot got down on his knees and ran the blade

along the dust-filled crack between the floorboards.

Something splintery and brown popped up. It had been trodden on and rolled

underfoot, but at this distance even Carrot could pick up traces of the clove smell. 'Do you think Ossie made a lot of apple pies?' he whispered.

'No cookin', remember?' said Angua, and grinned.

'There's something else...'

Carrot levered out more dirt and dust. In it, something glittered. 'Fred said all the glass was outside, didn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Well, supposing we assume that someone didn't pick up all the bits when they

broke in?'

'For someone that doesn't like lying, Carrot, you can be quite devious, you know?'

'Just logical. There's glass outside the window, but all that means is that

says it. I'm allowed.

Carrot scratched up some more glass fragments. Angua looked under the bed and

pulled out the battered magazines.

'Ye gods, do people really read this stuff?' she said, flicking through Bows and

Ammo. ' "Testing the Locksley Reflex 7: A Whole Lotta Bow"... "Footsore!

We test

the Ten Best Caltrops!"... and what's this magazine... ? Warrior of Fortune?'

'There's always little wars somewhere,' said Carrot, pulling out the box of money.

'But will you look at the size of this axe here? "Get A Head, Get A Burleigh and

Stronginthearm 'Streetsweeper' and Win By A Neck!" Well, it must be true what

they say about men who like big weapons...'

'And that is?' said carrot, lifting the lid of the box.

She looked at the top of his head. As always, Carrot radiated innocence like a

small sun. But he'd... They'd... Surely he...

'They, er... they're rather small,' she said.

'Oh, that's true,' said Carrot, picking up some of the Klatchian coins. 'Look at

dwarfs. Never happier than with a chopper the same size as them. And

Nobby's

fascinated by weapons and he's practically dwarfsized.'

'Er... '

Technically, Angua was sure she knew Carrot better than anyone else. She was

pretty sure he cared a lot for her. He seldom said so, he just assumed that she

knew. She'd known other men, although turning into a wolf for part of the month

could be
so creatively dumb, without being very intelligent. It was like being an actor.

Only a very good actor was any good at being a bad actor.

'Rather a lonely person, our Nobby,' said Carrot.

'Well, yes...'

'But I'm sure he'll find the right person for him,' Carrot added, cheerfully.

Probably in a bottle, said Angua to herself. She remembered the conversation

with him. It was a terrible thing to think, but there was something itchy about the thought of Nobby being allowed in pool, even at the shallow end.

'You know, these coins are odd,' said Carrot.

'How do you mean?' said Angua, grateful for the distraction.

'Why would he be paid in Klatchian wols? He wouldn't be able to spend them here,

and the money changers don't give very good rates.' Carrot tossed a coin in the

air and caught it. 'When we were leaving, Mr Vimes said to me, "Make sure you

find the bunch of dates and the camel hidden under the pillow." I think I know

what he meant.'

'Sand on the floor,' said Angua. 'Now, isn't that an obvious clue? You can tell

they were Klatchian because of the sand in their sandals!'

'But these cloves...' Carrot prodded the little bud. 'It's not as if it's a common habit, even among Klatchians. That's not a very obvious clue, is it?'

'It smells newer,' said Angua. 'I'd say he was here last night.'

'After Ossie was dead?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'How should I know? What kind of name is 71-hour Ahmed?' said Angua.

'Why don't I just stay and rip her throat out?' said Angua. 'All right, all right, it was a joke, all right?' she said, swinging her legs over the sill.

Ankh–Morpork no longer had a fire brigade. The citizens had a rather disturbingly direct way of thinking at times, and it did not take long for people to see the rather obvious flaw in paying a group of people by the number of fires they put out. The penny really dropped shortly after Charcoal Tuesday.

Since then they had relied on the good old principle of enlightened self–interest. People living close to a burning building did their best to douse

the fire, because the thatch they saved might be their own.

But the crowd watching the burning embassy were doing so in a hollow–eyed,

distant way, as if it was all taking place on some distant planet.

They moved aside automatically as Vimes elbowed his way through to the space in

front of the gates. Flames were already licking from every groundfloor window,

and they could make out scurrying silhouettes in the flickering light.

He turned to the crowd. 'Come on! What's up with you? Get a bucket chain going!'

'It's their bloody embassy,' said a voice.

'Yeah. 's Klatchian soil, right?'

'Can't go on Klatchian soil.'

'That'd be an invasion, that would.'

'They wouldn't let us,' said a small boy holding a bucket.

Vimes looked at the embassy gateway. There were a couple of guards.

Their

worried glances kept going back from the fire behind them to the crowd in front.

They were nervous men, but it was much worse than that, because they were

You! Come here! You see this? He shouted at the guard, pointing down.

The man
took a hesitant step forward.

'That's Ankh-Morpork soil down there, my friend,' said Vimes. 'And you're standing on it and you're obstructing me in my—' he rammed his fist as hard as

he could into the guard's stomach '—duty!'

He was already kicking out as the other guard rushed him. He caught him on the

knee. Something went click. It felt like Vimes's own ankle.

Cursing and limping slightly, he ran on into the embassy and caught a scurrying

man by his robe.

'Are there people still in there? Are there people in there?'

The man gave Vimes a panicky look. The armfuls of paper he'd been carrying

spilled on to the ground.

Someone else grabbed his shoulder. 'Can you climb, Mr Vimes?'

'Who're—'

The newcomer turned to the cowering paper-carrier and struck him heavily across

the face. 'Rescuer of paper!'

As the man fell back his turban was snatched from his head.

'This way!' The figure plunged off through the smoke. Vimes hurried after him

until they reached a wall, with a drainpipe attached.

'How did you—?'

'Up! Up!'

Vimes put one foot in the man's cupped hands, managed to get the other one on a

bracket, and forced himself upwards.

'Hurry!'

He managed to half climb, half pull himself up the pipe, little fireworks of

again into the smoke.

'But wh—'

Vimes could feel the heat through his boots. He edged away across the roof, and heard the shouting coming from below.

When he leaned over the edge here he could see the window some way below him.

Someone had smashed a pane, because a hand was waving.

There was more commotion down in the courtyard. Amid a press of figures he could

make out the huge shape of Constable Dorfl, a golem and quite definitely fireproof. But Dorfl was bad enough at stairs as it was. There weren't many that

could take the weight.

The hand in the smoke stopped waving.

Vimes looked down again.

Can you fly, Mr Vimes?

He looked at the chimney, belching flame.

He looked at the unwound turban.

A lot of Sam Vimes's brain had shut down, although the bits relaying the twinges

of pain from his legs were operating with distressing efficiency. But there were

still some thoughts operating down around the core, and they delivered for his

consideration the insight:

... tough-looking cloth...

He looked back at the chimney. It looked stout enough.

The window was about six feet below.

Vimes began to move automatically.

So, purely theoretically, if a man were to wrap one end of the cloth round the

belching stack like this and pay it out like this and lower himself over the

who was about the size of a man, but bent almost double, and was covered with hair or rags or quite possibly a matted mixture of both that was so felted and unwashed that small plants had taken root on it. If the thing had stopped walking and crouched down, it would have given an astonishingly good impression of a long-neglected compost heap. As it walked along, it snuffled.

A foot was stuck out to impede its progress.

'Good evening, Stoolie,' said Carrot as the cart halted.

The heap stopped. Part of it tilted upwards.

'Geroff,' it muttered, from somewhere in the thatch.

'Now, now, Stoolie, let's help one another, shall we? You help me, and I'll help you.'

'B'g'r'ff, c'p'r.'

'Well, you tell me things I want to know,' said Carrot, 'and I won't search your cart.'

'I hate gnolls,' said Angua. 'They smell awful.'

'Oh, that's hardly fair. The stressed be a lot dirtier without you and yours, eh, Stoolie?' said Carrot, still speaking quite pleasantly. 'You pick up this, you pick up that, maybe bash it against a wall until it stops struggling—'

' 's a vile acur'cy,' said the gnoll. There was a bubbling noise that might have been a chuckle.

'So I'm hearing you might know where Snowy Slopes is these days,' said Carrot.

'D'nno n'thin'.'

'Fine.' Carrot produced a three-tined garden fork and walked round to the cart, which dripped.

'D'nno n'thin' ab't-' said the gnoll quickly.

'They're good fellows at heart,' said Carrot. 'I think it says a lot for the spirit of tolerance in this city that even gnolls can call it home.'

'They turn my stomach,' said Angua, as they set off again. ['That one had plants growing on him!'

'Mr Vimes says we ought to do something for them,' said Carrot.

'All heart, that man.'

'With a flamethrower, he says.'

'Wouldn't work. Too soggy. Has anyone ever really found out what they eat?'

'It's better to think of them as... cleaners. You certainly don't see as much rubbish and dead animals on the streets as you used to.'

'Yes, but have you ever seen a gnoll with a brush and shovel?'

'Well, that's society for you, I'm afraid,' said Carrot. 'Everything is dumped on the people below until you find someone who's prepared to eat it. That's what

Mr Vimes says.'

'Yes,' said Angua. They walked in silence for a while, and then she said.

'You

care a lot about what Mr Vimes says, don't you... ?'

'He is a fine officer and an example to us all.'

'And... you've never thought of getting a job in Quirm or somewhere, have you?'

'The other cities are headhunting Ankh–Morpork watchmen now.'

'What, leave Ankh–Morpork?' The tone of voice included the answer.

'No... I suppose not,' said Angua sadly.

'Anyway, I don't know what Mr Vimes would do without me running around all the time.'

'It's a point of view, certainly,' said Angua.

It wasn't far to Money Trap Lane. It was in a ghetto of what Lord Rust would probably call 'skilled artisans', the people too low down the social scale to be

movers and shakers but slightly too high to be easily moved or shook. The

that
civilization was based on a shared respect for ownership; Angua thought
they
were just tight little bastards who'd sell you the time of day.
Carrot walked noiselessly down the alley beside the sweetshop. There was
a rough
wooden staircase going up to the first floor. He pointed silently to the
midden
below it.
It seemed to consist almost entirely of bottles.
'Big drinker?' Angua mouthed. Carrot shook his head.
She crouched down and looked at the labels, but her nose was already
giving her
a hint. Dibbler's Homeopathic Shampoo. Mere and Stingbat's Herbal Wash
– with
Herbs! Rinse 'n' Run Scalp Tonic – with Extra Herbs!...
There were others. Herbs, she thought. Chuck a handful of weeds in the
pot and
you've got herbs...
Carrot was starting up the stairs when she put her hand on his shoulder.
There
was another smell. It was one that drove through all the other scents of the
streets like a spear. It was one that a werewolf's nose is particularly attuned
to.
He nodded and went carefully to the door. Then he pointed down. There
was a
stain under the gap.
Carrot drew his sword and kicked the door open.
Daceyville Slopes hadn't taken his condition lightly.
Bottles of all shapes and colours occupied most flat surfaces, giving
testimony
to the alchemist's art and humanity's optimism.
The suds of his latest experiment were still in a bowl on the table, and his

voice. Oh, it's foiled over there... What's the horrible smell?

'This!' Angua flourished the shampoo. 'Four dollars a bottle, it says.

Sheesh!'

Angua took another deep sniff at the herbal goo, to drown out the call of the wolf.

'Doesn't look as if they stole anything,' said Carrot. 'Unless they were very neat— What's the matter?'

'Don't ask!'

She managed to get a window open and sucked down great draughts of comparatively

fresh air, while Carrot went through the corpse's pockets.

'Er... you can't tell if there's a clove around, can you?' he said.

'Carrot! Please! This is a room with blood all over the floor! Have you any idea? Excuse me...'

She rushed out and down the steps. The alley had the generic smell of all alleys

everywhere, overlaid on the basic all-embracing smell of the city. But at least

it didn't make your hair grow and your teeth try to lengthen. She leaned against

the wall and fought for control. Shampoo? She could have saved Snowy a hell of a

lot of money with just one careful bite. Then he'd know all about a really bad

hair day...

Carrot came down a couple of minutes later, locking the door behind him.

'Are you feeling better?'

'A bit. ...'

'There was something else,' said Carrot, looking thoughtful. 'I think he wrote a

note before he died. But it's all rather odd.' He waved in the air what looked like a cheap notepad. 'This needs careful looking at.' He shook his head.

'Poor

Angua
thought, unusual tact. 'I don't know what you use, but it's a shame he never
tried it.'

'I doubt if he went to the right shop,' said Angua. 'It says "For a Glossy
Coat"

on the bottles I usually buy— What's the matter?'

'Can you smell smoke?' said Carrot.

'Carrot, it's going to be five minutes before I can smell anything except—'
But he was staring past her, at the big red glow in the sky.

Vimes coughed. And then coughed some more. And eventually opened his
streaming

eyes in the confident expectation of seeing his own lungs in front of him.

'Class of water, Mr Vimes?'

Vimes peered through the tears at the shifting shape of Fred Colon.

'Thanks, Fred. What's the horrible burning smell?'

'It's you, sir.'

Vimes was sitting on a low wall outside the wreck of the embassy. Cool air
washed around him. He felt like underdone beef. The heat was radiating off
him.

'You was passed on for a while there, sir,' said Sergeant Colon helpfully.

'But

everyone saw you swing in that window, sir! And you threw that woman out
for

Detritus to catch! That'll be a feather in your cap and no mistake, sir! I bet
the ragh— I bet the Klatchians'll be giving you the Order of the Camel or
something for this night's work, sir!' Colon beamed, bursting with pride by
association.

'A feather in my cap...' murmured Vimes. He undid his helmet and with a
certain

amount of exhausted delight saw that every single plume had been burned
to a
stub.

below,
and had thrown her out as politely as the circumstances allowed. Then the man
from the roof had come out of the smoke again, carrying another figure over his
shoulder, screamed something at him and beckoned him to follow and...
...then the floor had given way...

'There were... two other people in there,' he said, coughing again.

'They didn't get out the front way, then,' said Colon.

'How did I get out?' said Vimes.

'Oh, Dorfl was stamping on the fire down below, sir. Very handy, a ceramic constable. You landed right on him, so of course he stopped what he was doing
and brought you out. 's gonna be handshakes and buns all round in the morning,
sir!'

There weren't any right now, Vimes noted There were still plenty of people around, carrying bundles, putting out small fires, arguing with one another...
but there was a big hole where congratulating-the-hero-of-the-hour should have
been.

'Oh, everyone's always a bit preoccupied after something like this, sir,' said Colon, as if reading his thoughts.

'I think I'll have a nice cold bath,' said Vimes, to the world in general. 'And then some sleep. Sybil's got some wonderful ointment for burns... Ah, hello, you
two.'

'We saw the fire-' Carrot began, running up. 'Is it all over?'

'Mr Vimes saved the day!' said Sergeant Colon excitedly. 'Just went straight in
and saved everyone, in the finest tradition of the Watch!'

'Fred?' said Vimes, wearily.

'Yessir?'

On no,' said Vimes. 'Got to do the paperwork. Anyone know the time?'

'Bingeley-bingeley beep!' said a cheerful voice from his pocket.

'Damn!' said Vimes, but it was too late.

'It is,' said the voice, which had the squeaky friendly quality that begs to be strangled, 'about... nineish.'

'Nineish?'

'Yep. Nineish. Precisely about nineish.'

Vimes rolled his eyes. 'Precisely about nineish?' he said, pulling a small box

out of his pocket and opening the lid. The demon inside gave him an angry look.

'Yesterday you said,' it said, 'that if I, and I quote, Didn't Stop all that Eight Fifty-Six and Six Seconds Precisely business I Would Be Looking at a

Hammer From Below. And when I said, Mr Insert Name Here, that this would

invalidate my warranty, you said that I could take my warranty and—'

'I thought you'd lost that thing,' said Carrot.

'Hah,' said the Dis-organizer, 'really? You thought he did? I don't call putting

something in your trouser pockets just before they go into the wash losing it.'

'That was an accident,' muttered Vimes.

'Oh? Oh? And dropping me in the dragon's feeding bowl, that was accidental too,

was it?' The demon mumbled to itself for a moment and then said, 'Anyway, do you

want to know your appointments for this evening?'

Vimes looked at the smouldering wreckage of the embassy.

'Do tell,' he said.

'You don't have any,' said the demon sulkily. 'You haven't told me any.'

'You see?' said Vimes. 'That's what drives me lived! Why should I have to tell

He's actually sneakingly trying to keep his diary in the manual so his wife won't find out he's never bothered to learn how to use me,' said the demon. 'What about the Vimes manual, then?' snapped Vimes. 'I notice you've never bothered to learn how to use me!' The demon hesitated. 'Humans come with a manual?' it said. 'It'd be a damn good idea!' said Vimes. 'True,' murmured Angua. 'It could say things like "Chapter One: Bingeley–bingeley beep and other damn fool things to spring on people at six in the morning," ' said Vimes, his eyes wild. 'And "Toubleshooting: my owner keeps trying to drop me in the privy, what am I doing wrong?" And—' Carrot patted him gently on the back. 'I should sign off now, sir,' he said gently. 'It's been a busy few days.' Vimes rubbed his forehead. 'I daresay I could do with a rest,' he said. 'Come on, there's nothing more to see here. Let's go home.' 'I thought you said you weren't going—' Carrot began, but Vimes's mind was already scolding him. 'I meant the Yard, of course,' he said. 'I'll go home afterwards.'

A ball of lamplight floated through the Ramkin library, drifting across the shelves of huge, leatherbound books. Many of them had never been read, Sybil knew. Various ancestors had simply ordered them from the engravers and put them on the shelves, because a library was something you had to have, don'tcherknow, like a stableyard and a servants'

Most of them were of men. They were invariably in armour and always on horseback. And every single one of them had fought the sworn enemies of AnkhMorpork. In recent times this had been quite difficult and her grandfather, for example, had to lead an expedition all the way to Howondaland in order to find some sworn enemies, although there was an adequate supply and a lot of swearing by the time he left. Earlier, of course, it had been a lot easier. Ramkin regiments had fought the city's enemies all over the Sto Plains and had inflicted heroic casualties, quite often on people in the opposing armies.[8] There were a few women among the sitters, none of them holding anything heavier than a glove or a small pet dragon. Their job had largely been to roll bandages and await the return of their husbands with, she liked to think, resolution and fortitude and a general hope that said husbands would return with as many of their bits as possible. The point was, though, that they never thought about it. There was a war, and off they went. If there wasn't a war, they looked for one. They didn't even use words like 'duty'. It was all built in at bone level. She sighed. It was all so difficult these days, and Lady Sybil came from a class that was not used to difficulty, or at least the kind that couldn't be sorted out by shouting at a servant. Five hundred years ago one of her ancestors had cut off a Klatchian's head in baffle and had brought it home on a pole, and

stableyard and the Johnson Exploding Pagoda. You got them sorted out and then didn't think much about it. At least Sam was home every day. Well, most days. Every night, anyway. Well... part of most nights, certainly. At least they ate meals together. Well, most meals. Well, at least they made a start on most meals. Well, at least she knew he was never very far away, just somewhere where he was trying to do too much and run too fast and people were trying to kill him. All in all, she considered, she was jolly lucky.

Vimes stared at Carrot, who was standing in front of his desk. 'So what does all that add up to?' he said. 'The man we know didn't get the Prince is dead. The man who probably did... is dead. Someone tried very clumsily to make it look as if Ossie was paid by the Klatchians. OK, I can see why someone might want to do that. That's what Fred calls politics. They get Snowy to do the real business, and he helps poor dumb Ossie who's there to take the fall, and then the Watch proves that Ossie was in the pay of the Klatchians and that's another reason for fighting. And Snowy just slopes off. Only someone cured his dandruff for him.' 'After he'd written something, sir,' said Carrot. 'Ah... yes.' Vimes looked at the notepad retrieved from Snowy's room. It was a crude affair, the wads of mismatched bits of scrap that the engravers sold off cheaply. He sniffed at it.

page—

'—has been taken away, sir,' said Carrot, grinning and nodding. 'But that's not

the funny part, sir. See if you can guess, sir!'

Vimes glared at him and then moved the lamp closer. 'Very faint impression of

writing on the top page...' he muttered. 'Can't make it out...'

'We can't either, sir. We know he wrote in pencil, sir. There was one on the table.'

'Very faint traces,' said Vimes. 'Blokes like Snowy write as though they're chipping stone.' He flicked the notebook. 'Someone tore out... not just the page

he'd written on but several below it as well.'

'Clever, eh, sir? Everyone knows—'

'—you can read the suspicious note by looking at the marks on the page below,'

said Vimes. He tossed the book on to the table again. 'Hmm. There's a message

there, yes...'

'Perhaps he was blackmailing whoever's behind all this?' said Angua.

'That's not his style,' said Vimes. 'No, what I meant was—'

There was a knock on the door, and Fred Colon entered.

'Brung you a mug of coffee,' he said, 'and there's a bunch of wo— Klatchians to

see you downstairs, Mr Vimes. Probably come to give you a medal and gabble at

you in their lingo. And if you're on for late supper, Mrs Goriffs doing goat and

rice and foreign gravy.'

'I suppose I'd better go down and see them,' said Vimes. 'But I haven't even had

time for a wash—'

'That's evidence of your heroic endeavours,' said Colon stoutly.

feeling crept over Vimes that Klatch was a very big place in which his city and the whole of the Sto Plains would be lost, and so there must be room in it for all kinds of peoples, including this short chap in the red fez who was practically vibrating with indignation.

'Are you the man Vimes?' the enfezzed one demanded.

'Well, I'm Commander Vimes--'

'We demand the release of the Goriff family! And we won't take any excuses!'

Vimes blinked. 'Release?'

'You have locked them up! And confiscated their shop!'

Vimes stared at the man, and then he looked across the room at Sergeant Detritus.

'Where did you put the family, sergeant?'

Detritus saluted. 'In der cells, sir.'

'Aha!' said the man in the fez. 'You admit it!'

'Excuse me, who are you?' said Vimes, blinking with tiredness.

'I don't have to tell you and you can't beat it out of me!' said the man, sticking out his chest.

'Oh, thank you for telling me,' said Vimes. 'I do hate wasted effort.'

'Oh, hello, Mr Wazir,' said Carrot, appearing behind Vimes. 'Did you get the note about that book?'

There was one of those silences that happen when everyone has to reprogramme their faces.

Then Vimes said, 'What?'

'Mr Wazir sells books in Widdy Street,' said Carrot. 'Only I asked him for some

books on Klatch, you see, and one of the ones he gave me was The Perfumed

Allotment, or, The Garden of Delights. And I didn't mind because the Klatchians

turned

vengeful again. He glared at Vimes.

'Books are unimportant at this time! We demand you release my countrymen now!'

'Detritus, why the hell did you put them in the cells?' said Vimes wearily.

'What else we got, sir? Dey're not locked in and dey got dean blankets.'

'There's your explanation,' said Vimes. 'They're our guests.'

'In the cells!' said Wazir, relishing the word.

'They're free to go whenever they like,' said Vimes.

'I'm sure they are now,' said Wazir, contriving to indicate that only his arrival had prevented officially sanctioned bloodshed. 'You can be sure the Patrician will hear about this!'

'He hears about everything else,' said Vimes. 'But if they leave here, who is going to protect them?'

'We are! Their fellow countrymen!'

'How?'

Wazir almost stood to attention. 'By force of arms, if necessary.'

'Oh, good,' said Vimes. 'Then there'll be two mobs—'

'Bingeley—bingeley beep!'

'Damn!' Vimes slapped at his pocket. 'I don't want to know I haven't got any appointments!'

'You have one at eleven pee em. The Rats Chamber, at the palace,' said the

Dis-organizer.

'Don't be stupid!'

'Please yourself.'

'And shut up.'

'I was just trying to help.'

'Shut up.' Vimes turned back to the Klatchian bookseller.

'Mr Wazir, if Goriff wants to leave with you, we won't stop him—'

'Aha! You may well try!'

Vimes told himself that there was no reason at all why a Klatchian couldn't be a

He turned and walked up the stairs.

'Someone has to protect my people's rights!' shouted Wazir.

They heard Vimes stop halfway up the stairs. The board creaked under his weight

for a second. Then he continued upwards, and several of the watchmen started

breathing again.

Vimes shut his office door behind him.

Politics! He sat down and scrabbled through the papers. It was much easier to

think about crime. Give him good honest—crime any time.

He tried to shut out the outside world.

Someone had beheaded Snowy Slopes. That was a fact. You couldn't put it down to

a shaving accident, or unreasonably strong shampoo.

And Snowy had attempted to shoot the Prince.

And so had Ossie, but Ossie only thought he was an assassin. Everyone else

thought he was a weird little twerp who was as impressionable as wet clay.

A lovely idea, though. You used a real murderer, a nice quite professional, and

then you had – Vimes smiled grimly – someone else to take the fall. And if he

hadn't taken a less metaphorical fall the poor twisted little sod would have believed he was the murderer.

And the Watch was supposed to believe it was a Klatchian plot.

Sand in their sandals... The nerve of it! Did they think he was stupid? He wished Fred had carefully swept up the sand, because he was damn well going to

find out who'd put it there and they were going to eat it. Someone wanted Vimes

to chase Klatchians.

The man on the burning roof. Did he fit in? Did he have to fit in? What could

out several pages after Snowy had written whatever he'd written. Someone bright enough to know the trick of looking at the pages underneath for faint impressions.

So why not pinch the whole pad?

It was all too complicated. But somewhere was the one thing that'd make it simple, that would turn it all into sense—

He flung down his pencil and wrenched open the door to the stairs.

'What the hells all this noise?' he yelled.

'Sergeant Colon was halfway up the stairs.

'It was Mr Goriff and Mr Wazir having a bit of what you might call an argy-bargy, sir. Someone set fire to someone else's country two hundred years

ago, Carrot says.'

'What, just now?'

' 's all Klatchian to me, sir. Anyway, Wazir's gone off with his nose in a sling.'

'Wazir comes from Smale, you see,' said Carrot. 'And Mr Goriff comes from Elharib, and the two countries only stopped fighting ten years ago.

Religious differences.'

'Run out of weapons?' said Vimes.

'Ran out of rocks, sir. They ran out of weapons last century.'

Vimes shook his head. 'That always chews me up,' he said. 'People killing one

another just because their gods have squabbled—'

'Oh, they've got the same god, sir. Apparently it's over a word in their holy book, sir. The Elharibians say it translates as "god" and the Smalies say it's "man".'

'How can you mix them up?'

'Well, there's only one tiny dot difference in the script, you see. And some people reckon it's only a bit of fly dirt in any case.'

'Centuries of war because a fly crapped in the wrong place?'

The watchmen looked round. Vimes narrowed his eyes.

'You're one of Rust's men, aren't you?'

The young man saluted.

'Lieutenant Hornett, sir.' He hesitated. 'Er... his lordship has sent me to ask you if you and your senior officers would be so good as to come to the palace at

your convenience, sir.'

'Really? Those were his words?'

The lieutenant decided that honesty was the only policy.

'In fact he said, "Get Vimes and his mob up here right now," sir.'

'Oh, did he?' said Vimes.

'Bingeley-bingeley beep!' said a small triumphant voice from his pocket.

'The

time is eleven pee em precisely!'

The door opened before Nobby knocked, and a small stout woman glared out at him.

'Yes, I am!' she snapped.

Nobby stood with his hand still raised. 'Er... are you Mrs Cake?' he said.

'Yes, but I don't hold with doing it except for money.

Nobby's hand did not move.

'Er... you can tell the future, right?' said Nobby.

They stared at one another. Then Mrs Cake thumped her own ear a couple of times,

and blinked.

'Drat! Left my precognition on again.' Her gaze unfocused for a moment as she

replayed the recent conversation in the privacy of her head.

'I think we're sorted out,' she said. She looked at Nobby and sniffed. 'You'd better come in. Mind the carpet, it's just been washed. And I can only give you

ten minutes 'cos I've got cabbage boilin'.'

Nobby

again and, in a state of certainty that had nothing to do with precognition and everything to do with observation, added: 'That is, which of your problems do

you want to know about?'

Nobby coughed. 'Er... it's a bit... you know... intimate. Affairs of the heart, sort of thing.'

'Are women involved?' said Mrs Cake cautiously.

'Er... I hope so. What else is there?'

Mrs Cake visibly relaxed.

'I just want to know if I'm going to meet any,' Nobby went on.

'I see.' Mrs Cake gave a kind of facial shrug. It wasn't up to her to tell people how to waste their money. 'Well, there's the tenpenny future. That's what

you see. And there's the ten-dollar future. That's what you get.'

'Ten dollars? That's more'n a weeks pay! I'd better take the tenpenny one.'

'A very wise choice,' said Mrs Cake. 'Give me your paw.'

'Hand,' said Nobby.

'That's what I said.'

Mrs Cake examined Nobby's outstretched palm while taking care not to touch it.

'Are you going to moan and roll your eyes and stuff?' said Nobby, a man out to get his tenpenn'orth.

'I don't have to take cheek,' said Mrs Cake, without looking up. 'That sort of—'

She peered closer, and then gave Nobby a sharp look.

'Have you been playing with this hand?'

'Pardon?'

Mrs Cake whipped the crinoline lady off the crystal and glared into the depths.

After a while she shook her head.

Dunino, Nobby admitted. 'I suspect you'd know 'em if you saw 'em.
Mrs Cake, despite a certain rigidity of character, couldn't help but be aware
of
a drift in Nobby's speculation.
'Some of the ladies look... nubile,' she hinted.
'Ah, right,' said Nobby, his expression not changing in any way.
'If you understand what I mean...'
'Right. Yes. Nubile. Right.'
Mrs Cake gave up. Nobby counted out ten pennies.
'And that'll be soon, will it?' said Nobby.
'Oh yes. I can't see very far for tenpence.'
'Happy young ladies...' mused Nobby. 'Nubile, too. Definitely something to
think
about.'
After he'd gone, Mrs Cake went back to her crystal and sneaked a whole
ten
dollars' worth of precognition for her own curiosity and satisfaction, and
laughed about it all afternoon.

Vimes was only half surprised when the doors to the Rats Chamber
opened and
there, sitting at the head of the table, was Lord Rust. The Patrician wasn't
there.
He was half surprised. That is, at a certain shallow level he thought, that's
odd, I thought you couldn't budge the man with a siege weapon. But at a dark
level, where the daylight seldom penetrated, he thought: of course. At a
time
like this men like Rust rise to the top. It's like stirring a swamp with a
stick. Really
big bubbles are suddenly on the surface and there's a bad smell about
everything. Nevertheless, he saluted and said:
'Lord Vetinari on his holidays, then?'

but—

He met Lord Rust's gaze and at least that suspicion faded. Rust wouldn't try a

trick like that. Men like Rust had a moral code of sorts, and some things weren't honourable. You could own a street of crowded houses where people lived

like cockroaches and the cockroaches lived like kings and that was perfectly OK,

but Rust would probably die before he'd descend to forgery.

'I see, sir,' said Vimes. 'You wanted me?'

'Commander Vimes, I must ask you to take the Klatchians resident in the city into custody.'

'On what charge, sir?'

'Commander, we are on the verge of war with Klatch. Surely you understand?'

'No, sir.'

'We are talking about spying, commander. Sabotage, even,' said Lord Rust.

'To be

frank... the city is to be placed under martial law.'

'Yessir? What kind of law's that, sir?' said Vimes, staring straight ahead.

'You know very well, Vimes.'

'Is it the kind where you shout "Stop!" before you fire, sir, or the other kind?'

'Ah. I see.' Rust stood up and leaned forward.

'It pleased you to be... smart with Lord Vetinari, and for some reason he indulged you,' he said. 'I, on the other hand, know your type.'

'My type?'

'It seems to me that the streets are full of crimes, commander. Unlicensed begging, public nuisances... but you seem to turn a blind eye, you seem to think

you should have bigger ideas. But you are not required to have big ideas,

one.

'Bad hat?' said Vimes weakly.

'Commander Vimes,' he said, 'I had hoped to avoid this, but the last few days

point to a succession of astonishing judgemental errors on your part The Prince

Khufurah was shot, and you seemed helpless to prevent this or find the criminal

responsible. Mobs appear to run around the city unimpeded, I gather that one of

your sergeants proposed to shoot innocent people in the head, and we have just

heard that you took it upon yourself to arrest an innocent businessman and lock

him in the cells for no reason at all.'

Vimes heard Colon gasp. But it sounded a long way off. He could feel everything

crumbling under

but his mind seemed to be flying now, flapping through a pink sky where nothing

mattered very much.

'Oh, I don't know about that, sir,' he said. 'He was guilty of repeatedly being Klatchian, wasn't he? Don't you want me to do that to all of 'em?'

'And if this was not enough,' Rust went on, 'we are told, and in other circumstances I would find this very hard to believe, even of a counter-jumper

like you, that earlier tonight you, being quite unprovoked, assaulted two Klatchian guards, trespassed on Klatchian soil, entered the women's quarters,

abducted two Klatchians from their beds, ordered the destruction of Klatchian

property and... well, frankly, acted quite disgracefully.'

It was on fire at the time, Sir.

Lieutenant Hornett stepped forward and whispered something. Lord Rust subsided a bit.

'All right. Very well. There were perhaps mitigating circumstances, but politically it was a most ill-advised action, Vimes. I cannot pretend to know what has happened to the Prince, but frankly you seem to have taken a positive delight in making matters worse.'

Can you climb, Mr Vimes? Vimes said nothing. The other man had been carrying something bulky over his shoulder...

'You are removed from authority, commander. And the Watch will come under the direct command of this council. Is that understood?'

Rust turned to Carrot. 'Captain Carrot, many of us here have heard... good reports about you, and by due authority I hereby appoint you acting Commander of the Watch—'

Vimes shut his eyes.

Carrot saluted smartly. 'No! Sir!'

Vimes opened his eyes wide.

'Really?' Rust stared at Carrot for a few moments, and then gave a little shrug.

'Ah, well... loyalty is a fine thing. Sergeant Colon?'

'Sir!'

'In the circumstances, and since you are the most experienced non-commissioned officer and have an exemp— and have a military record, you will take command of the Watch for the duration of the... emergency. '

'Nossir!'

'That was an instruction, sergeant.'

again impressed, in the same dark way, by the manner in which Rust dealt with

the problem. He dealt with it by making it not be there.

'Who is the senior corporal in the Watch, Sir Samuel?'

'That would be Corporal Nobbs.'

The committee went into a huddle. There was a rush of whispering, in which the

words'—an absolute little tit —' could be heard several times. Finally Rust looked up again.

'And the next in seniority?'

'Let me see... that would be Corporal Stronginthearm,' said Vimes. He felt oddly

light-headed.

'Perhaps he is a man who can take orders.'

'He's a dwarf, you idiot!'

Not a muscle moved on Rust's face. There was a clink as Vimes's badge was set

neatly on the table.

'I don't have to take this,' Vimes said calmly.

'Oh, so you'd rather be a civilian, would you?'

'A watchman is a civilian, you inbred streak of piss!'

Rust's brain erased the sounds that his ears could not possibly have heard.

'And the keys to the armoury, Sir Samuel,' he said.

They jangled as they landed on the table.

'And do the rest of you have any empty gestures to make?' said Lord Rust.

Sergeant Colon took his grimy badge out of his pocket and was a little disappointed that it didn't make a defiant tinkle when he threw it on the table

but instead bounced and smashed the water jug.

'I got my badge carved on my arm,' Detritus rumbled. 'Someone c'n try an' take

it off if dey likes.'

Carrot laid his badge down very carefully.

who's he?' He whispered to Carrot.

'Prince Kalif. He's the deputy ambassador.'

'Another prince?'

The man came to a halt in front of the table, glanced at Vimes with no show of

recognition and bowed to Lord Rust.

'Prince Kalif,' said Lord Rust. 'Your arrival is unannounced but nevertheless—'

'I have grave news, my lord.' Even in his stunned state, a part of Vimes registered that the voice was different. Khufurah had learned his second language on the street, but this one had had tutors.

'At a time like this, what news isn't?' said Rust.

'There have been developments on the new land. Regrettable incidents. And indeed

in Ankh—Morpork, too.' He glanced at Vimes again. 'Although here, I must say,

reports are confused. Lord Rust, I have to tell you we are, technically, at war.'

'Technically at war?' said Vimes.

'I am afraid events are carrying us forward,' said Kalif. 'The situation is delicate.'

They know they're going to fight, Vimes thought. This is just like the start of a dance, where you hang around looking at your partner...

'I must tell you that you are being given twelve hours to remove all your citizens from Leshp,' said Kalif. 'If that is done, matters will be happily resolved. For the present.'

'Our response is that you have twelve hours to quit Leshp,' said Rust. 'If that

is not done, then we will take... steps...'

Kalif bowed slightly. 'We understand one another. A formal document will be with

you shortly and, no doubt, we will be receiving one from you.'

'Indeed.'

bowed

slightly.

So did Rust.

'After all, just because our countries are at war is no reason why we should not

respect one another as friends,' said Lord Rust.

'What? Yes, it bloody well is!' said Vimes. 'I can't believe this! You can't just stand there and... good grief, whatever happened to diplomacy?'

'War, Vimes, is a continuation of diplomacy by other means,' said Lord Rust. 'As

you would know, if you were really a gentleman.'

'And you Klatchians are as bad,' Vimes went on. 'It's that green mouldy mutton

Jenkins sells. You've all got Foaming Sheep Disease. You can't just stand there

and—'

'Sir Samuel, you are, as you are at pains to point out, a civilian,' said Rust.

'As such, you have no place here!'

Vimes didn't bother with a salute but just turned away and walked out of the room. The rest of the squad followed him in silence back to Pseudopolis

Yard.

'I told him he could put it where the sun didn't shine,' said Sergeant Colon, as

they crossed the Brass Bridge.

'That's right,' said Vimes woodenly. 'Well done.'

'Right to his face. "Where the sun don't shine." Just like that,' said Colon. It was a little difficult to tell from his tone whether this was a matter of pride

or dread.

'I'm afraid Lord Rust is technically correct, sir,' said Carrot.

'Really.'

'Yes, Mr Vimes. The safety of the city is of paramount importance, so in times

of war the civil power is subject to military authority.'

you can put it right where the— mused Sergeant Colon.

'You want me an' some of der boys go and sort out dat Rust later on?' said Detritus. 'It no problem. He bound to be guilty o' somethin'.'

'No!'

Vimes's head felt so tight now that he couldn't touch the ground with a rope. He

left them outside the Yard and let his head drag him on and up the hill and round the corner and into the house and past his astonished wife and up the

stairs and into the bedroom, where he fell full length on the bed and was asleep

before he hit it.

At nine next morning the first recruits for Lord Venturi's Heavy Infantry paraded down Broadway.

The watchmen went out to watch. That was all that was left for them to do.

'Isn't that Mr Vimes's butler?' said Angua, pointing to the stiff figure of Willikins in the front rank.

'Yeah, and that's his kitchen boy banging the drum in front,' said Nobby.

'You were a... military man, weren't you, Fred?' said Carrot, as the parade passed by.

'Yes, sir. Duke of Eorle's First Heavy Infantry, sir, The Pheasant Pluckers.'

'Pardon?' said Angua.

'Nickname for the regiment, miss. Oh, from ages ago. They were

bivvywhacking on

some estate and came across a lot of pheasant pens and, well, you know, having

to live off the land and everything... anyway, that's why we always wore a pheasant feather on our helmets. Traditional, see?'

Already old Fred's face was creasing up in the soft expression of someone who has been mugged in Memory Lane.

'We even had a marching song,' he said. 'Mind you, it was quite hard to sing

has obviously given you many pleasant memories.

'The ladies liked the uniform,' said Fred Colon, with the unspoken rider that sometimes a growing lad needed all the help he could get. 'An' it... weell...'

'Yes, sarge?'

Colon looked awkward, as if the bunched underwear of the past was tangling

itself in the crotch of recollection.

'It was... more easier, sir. Than being a copper, I mean. I mean, you're a soldier, right, and the other buggers is the enemy. You march into some big field somewhere and all form up into them oblongs, and then a bloke with the

feathery helmet gives the order, and you all forms up into big arrows—'

'Good gods, do people really do that? I thought it was just how they drew the

battle plans!'

'Well, the old duke, sir, he did it by the book... anyway, it's just a case of watching your back and walloping any bloke in the wrong uniform. But...'

Fred

Colon's face screwed up in agonized thought, I well, when you're a copper, well,

you dunno the good guys from the bad guys without a map, miss, and that's a fact.'

'But... there's military law, isn't there?'

'Well, yes... but when it's pissing with rain and you're up to your tonk— your waist in dead horses and someone gives you an order, that ain't the time to look

up the book of rules, miss. Anyway, most of it's about when you're allowed to

get shot, sir.'

'Oh, Im sure there's more to it than that, sergeant.'

'Oh, prob'ly, sir,' Colon conceded diplomatically.

'I'm sure there's lots of stuff about not killing enemy soldiers who've

other you've got this kinda urge to give him a bit of a... nudge, sort of thing. Just... you know... like, maybe in twenty years' time his leg'll twinge a bit on frosty days and he'll remember what he done, that's all.

He rummaged in a pocket and produced a very small book, which he held up for inspection.

'This belonged to my great-grandad,' he said. 'He was in the scrap we had against Pseudopolis and my great-gran gave him this book of prayers for soldiers, 'cos you need all the prayers you can get, believe you me, and he stuck it in the top pocket of his jerkin, 'cos he couldn't afford armour, and next day in battle whoosh, this arrow came out of nowhere, wham, straight into

this book and it went all the way through to the last page before stopping, look. You can see the hole.'

'Pretty miraculous,' Carrot agreed.

'Yeah, it was, I s'pose,' said the sergeant. He looked ruefully at the battered volume. 'Shame about the other seventeen arrows, really.'

The drumming died away. The remnant of the Watch tried to avoid one another's gaze.

Then an imperious voice said, 'Why aren't you in uniform, young man?' Nobby turned. He was being addressed by an elderly lady with a certain turkey-like cast of feature and a capital punishment expression.

'Me? Got one, missus,' said Nobby, pointing to his battered helmet.

'A proper uniform,' snapped the woman, handing him a white feather. 'What will

you be doing when the Klatchians are ravishing us in our beds?'

She glared at the rest of the guards and swept on. Angua saw several others like

her passing along the crowds of spectators. Here and there was a flash of white.

'I'll be thinking: those Klatchians are jolly brave,' said Carrot. 'I'm afraid, Nobby, that the white feather is to shame you into joining up.'

lot more of these—

'I meant what was it that Angua said?' said Carrot.

'What? Oh... it's just something women used to say when they sent their men off

to war. Come back with your shield, or on it.'

'On your shield?' said Nobby. 'You mean like... sledging, sort of thing?'

'Like dead,' said Angua. 'It meant come back a winner or not at all.'

'Well, I always came back with my shield,' said Nobby. 'No problem there.'

'Nobby,' sighed Colon, 'you used to come back with your shield, everyone else's

shield, a sack of teeth and fifteen pairs of still-warm boots. On a cart.'

'We—ell, no point in going to war unless you're on the winning side,' said Nobby, sticking the white feather in his helmet.

'Nobby, you was always on the winning side, the reason bein', you used to lurk

aroun' the edges to see who was winning and then pull the right uniform off

some poor dead sod. I used to hear where the generals kept an eye on what you

were wearin' so they'd know how the battle was going.'

'Lots of soldiers have served in lots of regiments,' said Nobby.

'Right, what you say is true. Only not usually during the same battle,' said Sergeant Colon.

They trooped back into the Watch House. Most of the shift had taken the day off.

After all, who was in charge? What were they supposed to be doing today?

The

only ones left were those who never thought of themselves as off duty, and the

new recruits who hadn't had their keen edge blunted.

'I'm sure Mr Vimes'll think of something,' said Carrot. 'Look, I'd better take the Goriffs back to their shop. Mr Goriff says he's going to pack up and leave.'

his eyes.

All that arrived now were memories. He winced. Another memory turned up. He groaned. The sound of his badge bouncing on the table replayed itself. He swore.

He swung his legs off the covers and groped for the bedside table.

'Bingeley–bingeley beep!'

'Oh, no... All right, what's the time?'

'One o'clock pee em! Hello, Insert Name Here!'

Vimes looked blearily at the Dis–organizer. One day, he knew, he really would have to try to understand the manual for the damn thing. Either that or drop it off a cliff.[9]

'What–' he began, and then groaned again. The twanging sound made by the unwound turban as it

One of the universal rules of happiness is: always be wary of any helpful item

that weighs less than its operating manual.

took his weight had just come back to haunt him.

'Sam?' The bedroom door was pushed open and Sybil came in carrying a cup.

'Yes, dear?'

'How do you feel?'

'I've got bruises on my brui–' Another memory crawled up from the pit of guilt.

'Oh, good grief, did I really call him a long streak of–?'

'Yes,' said his wife. 'Fred Colon came round this morning and told me all about

it. And a very good description, I'd say. I went out with Ronnie Rust once.

Bit

of a cold fish.'

him a kiss.

'What do I do now?' he said.

'Drink your tea and have a wash and a shave.'

'I ought to go down to the Watch House and

'A shave! There's hot water in the jug.'

When she had left he hauled himself upright and tottered into his bathroom.

There was, indeed, a jug of hot water on the marble washstand.

He looked at the face in the mirror. Unfortunately, it was his. Perhaps if he shaved it first... ? And then he could wash the bits that were left.

Fragments of the night before kept on respectfully drawing themselves to his

attention. It was a shame about that guard, but sometimes you just couldn't stand and argue

He shouldn't have done that with his badge. It wasn't like the old days. He had

responsibilities. He should've stayed on and made things just a little less

'No. That never worked.

He managed to get the lather on his face. The Riot Act! Good grief... He stopped

his razor thoughtfully. Rust's milky eyes stared out of his memory. Bastard!

Men

like that thought, they really thought, that the Watch was a kind of sheepdog,

to nip at the heels of the flock, bark when spoken to and never, ever, bite the

shepherd...

Oh yes. Vimes knew in his bones who the enemy was.

Except

No badge, no Watch, no job...

Another memory arrived, late.

Lather still dripping down his shirt, he pulled Vetinari's sealed letter out of his pocket and slit it open with the razor.

There was a blank sheet of paper inside. He turned it over, and there was

Who'd said it? Any gentleman
Vimes stared. Well, he was a gentleman, wasn't he? It was official.
And then he didn't shout, and he didn't run out of the room. He finished
shaving, had a wash and put on a change of underwear, very calmly.
Downstairs, Sybil had cooked him a meal. She wasn't a very good cook.
This was
fine by Vimes, because he wasn't a very good eater. After a lifetime of
street
meals his stomach wasn't set up right. What it craved was little crunchy
brown
bits, the food group of the gods, and Sybil reliably always left the pan too
long on the dragon.
She eyed him carefully as he chewed his fried egg and stared into the
middle
distance. Her manner was that of someone with a portable safety net
watching a
man on the high wire.
After a while, while she watched him crack open a sausage, he said, 'Do
we have
any books on chivalry, dear?'
'Hundreds, Sam.'
'Is there any one which tells you what... you know, what it's all about? I
mean,
what you have to do if you're a knight, say? Responsibilities and so on?'
'Most of them, I should think.'
'Good. I think I shall do a little reading.' Vimes hit the bacon with his fork.
It shattered very satisfactorily.
Afterwards, he went into the library. Twenty minutes later, he came back
out for
a pencil and some paper.
Ten minutes after that, Lady Sybil took him a cup of coffee. He was hidden
behind a pile of books, and apparently deep in Life of Chivalrie. She crept
out

The Goriff family trudged along silently beside Carrot.

'I'm sorry about your shop, Mr Goriff,' he said.

Goriff shifted the load he was carrying. 'We can start other shops,' he said.

'We]] certainly keep an eye on it,' said Carrot. 'And when all this is over, you can come back.'

'Thank you.'

His son said something in Klatchian. There was a brief family arguent.

'I appreciate your strength of feeling,' said Carrot, going red, 'although I must say I think your language was a little strong.'

'My son is sorry,' said Goriff automatically. 'He did not remember that you speak Kl—'

'No, I'm not! Why should we run away?' said the boy. 'We live here! I've never seen Klatch!'

'Oh, well, that will be something to look forward to,' said Carrot. 'I hear it has many fine—'

'Are you stupid?' said Janil. He shook himself free of his father's grasp and confronted Carrot. 'I don't care! I don't want all this stuff about the moon rising over the Mountains of the Sun! I get that at home all the time! I live here!'

'Now, you really ought to listen to your parents—'

'Why? My dad works all the time and now he's being pushed out! What good's that?

We ought to stay here and defend what's ours!'

'Ah, well, you shouldn't take the law into your own hands—'

'Why not?'

'It's our job—'

'But you're not doing it!'

There was a rattle of Klatchian from Mr Goriff.

'He says I've got to apologize,' said Janil sullenly. 'I'm sorry.'

'So am I,' said Carrot.

hostile scrutiny.

'Surely Rust isn't already forcing Klatchians out of their homes?' said Angua.

'We can tell which way the wind is blowing,' said Goriff calmly. Carrot sniffed the salt air. 'It's blowing from Klatch,' he said.

'For you, perhaps,' said Goriff.

A whip cracked behind them and they stood aside as several coaches rumbled by. A

blind at the window

was pulled aside momentarily. Carrot caught a brief glimpse of a face, all gold

teeth and black beard, before the cloth twitched back.

'That's him, isn't it?'

There was a faint grunt from Angua. She had her eyes closed, as she always did

when she was letting her nose do the seeing.. .

'Cloves,' she murmured, and then grabbed Carrot's arm.

'Don't run after it! There's armed men on that ship! What will they think when

they see a soldier running towards them?'

'I'm not a soldier!'

'How long do you think they'll spend working out the difference?'

The coach pushed through the press of people on the dock. The crowd surged back

around it.

'There's boxes being unloaded – I can't quite see . . . said Carrot, shading his

eyes. 'Look, I'm sure they'll understand if–'

71-hour Ahmed stepped out on to the dock and looked back towards the watchmen.

There was a momentary sparkle as he grinned. They saw his hand reach over his

shoulder and come back holding the curved sword.

as it
fell.

'That's what Mr Vimes was doing,' said Carrot, through gritted teeth. 'Now he's taunting us—'

'You will be killed if you go on the ship,' said Goriff behind him. 'I know that man.'

'You do? How?'

'He is feared in the whole of Klatch. That is 71-hour Ahmed!'

'Yes, why is—'

'You haven't heard of him? And he is a D'reg!' Mrs Goriff pulled at her husband's arm.

'D'reg?' said Angua.

'A warlike desert tribe,' said Carrot. 'Very fierce. Honourable, though. They say that if a D'reg is your friend he's your friend for the rest of your life.'

'And if he's not your friend?'

'That's about five seconds.'

He drew his sword. 'Nevertheless,' he added, 'we can't let—'

'I have said too much. We must go,' said Goriff. The family picked up their bundles.

'Look, there might be another way to find out about him,' said Angua. She pointed at the carriage.

A couple of lean, long-haired and extremely graceful dogs had been let out and

were straining at their leashes as they led the way up the gangplank.

'Klatchistan hunting dogs,' she said. 'The Klatchian nobility are very keen on

them, I understand.'

'They look a bit like—' Carrot began, and then the penny dropped. 'No, I can't

let you go on there by yourself,' he said. 'Something would go wrong.'

'I stand a much better chance than you would, believe me,' said Angua quickly.

Even the river Ankh can't kill a werewolf. Angua glanced at the turgid water.

'Probably, anyway.'

Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs had gone on patrol. They weren't sure why they were patrolling, and what they were supposed to do if they saw a crime, although many years of training had enabled them not to see some quite large crimes. But they were creatures of habit. They were watchmen, so they patrolled. They didn't

patrol with a purpose. They patrolled, as it were, in pure essence. Nobby's progress wasn't helped by the large, leatherbound book in his arms.

'A war'd do this place good,' said Sergeant Colon, after a while. 'Put some backbone in people. Everything's gone all to pot these days.'

'Not like when we were kids, sarge.'

'Not like when we were kids indeed, Nobby.'

'People trusted one another in them days, didn't they, sarge?'

'People trusted one another, Nobby.'

'Yes, sarge. I know. And people didn't have to lock their doors, did they?'

'That's right, Nobby. And people were always ready to help. They were always in and out of one another's houses.'

'sright, sarge,' said Nobby vehemently. 'I know no-one ever locked their houses down our street.'

'That's what I'm talking about. That's my point.'

'It was 'cos the bastards even used to steal the locks.'

Colon considered the truth of this.

'Yes, but at least it was each other's stuff they were nicking, Nobby. It's not like they was foreigners.'

'Right.'

They strolled on for a while, each entangled in his own thoughts.

Yes, sarge?

'Why are you carrying that huge book?'

'Hah, clever idea, sarge. I saw what you said about that book of your great-grandad, so if there's any fighting I got this one off Washpot. It's The Book of Om. Five inches thick.'

'It's a bit big for a pocket, Nobby. It's a bit big for a cart, to be honest.'

'I thought I could make sort of braces to carry it. I

reckon even a longbow could only get an arrow as far as the Apocrypha.'

A familiar creak made them look up.

A Klatchian's head was swinging in the breeze.

'Fancy a pint?' said Sergeant Colon. 'Big Anjie brews up some that's a treat.'

'Better not, sarge. Mr Vimes is in a bit of a mood.'

Colon sighed. 'You're right.'

Nobby looked up at the head again— It was wooden. It had been repainted many

times over the centuries. The Klatchian was smiling very happily for someone

who'd never have to buy a shirt ever again.

'The Klatchian's Head. My granddad said his granddad remembered when it was still

the real one,' Colon said. 'Of course, it was about the size of a walnut by then.'

'Bit... nasty, sticking up a bloke's head for a pub sign,' said Nobby.

'No, Nobby. Spoils of war, right? Some bloke came back from one of the wars with

a souvenir, stuck it on a pole and opened a pub. The Klatchian's Head.

Teach ,em

not to do it again.'

'I used to get into enough trouble just for nicking boots,' said Nobby.

'More robust times, Nobby.'

'You ever met a Klatchian, sarge?' said Nobby, as they began to pace the length

'Right! You poke around as much as you like in a Kitchian curry and you won't find a single piece of swede.'

'And I heard where they eat sheep's eyeballs, too,' said Nobby, international gastragnome.

'Right again.'

'Not decent ordinary stuff like lambs' fry or sweetbreads, then?'

'That's... right.'

Colon felt that he was being got at in some way.

'Look, Nobby, when alls said and done they ain't the right colour, and there's an end to it.'

'Good job you found out, Fred!' said Nobby, so cheerfully that Sergeant Colon was almost sure that he meant it.

'Well, it's obvious,' he conceded.

'Er... what is the right colour?' said Nobby.

'White, of course!'

'Not brick-red, then? 'Cos you—'

'Are you winding me up, Corporal Nobbs?'

'Course not, sarge. So... what colour am I?'

That caused Sergeant Colon to think. You could have found, somewhere on Corporal Nobbs, a shade appropriate to every climate on the disc and a few found only in specialist medical books.

'White's... white's a state of, you know... mind,' he said. 'It's like... doing an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, that sort of thing. And washing regular.'

'Not lazing around, sort of thing.'

'Right.'

'We—eh... my fore—lay lies in training, so I reckon I'd better stay here and train up the new recruits.'

'Here at the back, you might say.'

'We all have to do our bit, Nobby. If it was down to me I'd be out there like a shot to give Johnny Klatchian a taste of cold steel.'

'Their razor—sharp swords wouldn't worry you, then?'

'I should laugh at them with scorn, Nobby.'

'But s'posing the Klatchians attack here? Then you'll be at the front and the front will be at the back.'

'I'll sort of try for a posting in the middle. .

'The middle of the front or—'

'Gentlemen?'

They looked round to find that they had been followed by a man of medium height

but with an extraordinary head. It wasn't that he had gone bald. He had quite a

lot of hair, which was long and curly and reached almost to his shoulders, and

his beard was large enough to conceal a small chicken. But his head had simply

risen through his hair, like a kind of intrusive dome.

He gave them a friendly smile.

'Am I by any change addressing the heroic Sergeant Colon and the—' The man

looked at Nobby. Expressions of amazement, dread, interest and charity passed

across his otherwise sunny countenance like storm—driven clouds. 'And the Corporal Nobbs?' he finished.

'That is us, citizen,' said Colon.

'Ah, good. I was very specifically told to find you. It's quite amazing, you know. No—one had even broken into the boathouse, although I must say I did

it on properly, and frankly the materials are not very good—
Colon looked at his tube. It was pointed at one end.

'This is a firework rocket,' he said. 'Look, it's s got "A riot of coloured balls and stars" on it...'

'Yes, I do so apologize,' said the man, lifting a complex little arrangement of wood and metal out of the bag. 'May I have the tube back, corporal?' He took it

and screwed the arrangement on to one end. 'Thank you... yes, I'm afraid that
without my lathe and, indeed, my forge, I really have had to make do with what I

could find lying around... Could I have the rocket back, please? Thank you.'

'They don't go properly without a stick,' said Nobby.

'Oh, in fact they do,' said the man. 'Just not very accurately.'

He raised the tube to shoulder height and peered into a small wire grid.

'That seems about right,' he said.

'And they don't go along,' said Nobby. 'They just go up.'

'A common misconception,' said Leonard of Quirm, turning to face them.

Colon could see the tip of the rocket in the depths of the tube, and had a sudden image of stars and balls.

'Now, apparently you two have to step into this alley here and come with me,'

said Leonard. 'I'm very sorry about this, but his lordship has explained to me

at great length how the needs of society as a whole may have to overrule the

rights of a particular individual. Oh, and I've just remembered. You have to put

your hands up.'

Sand had been spilled across the big table in the Rats Chamber.

Lord Rust felt a sensation akin to pleasure as he surveyed it. There were the

cigarette end and trace of urine incontinence that would probably not be found

in the real desert, or certainly not to scale.

'Here would be a good landing area,' he said, pointing with his stick.

His equerry tried to look helpful. 'The El Kinte peninsula,' he said. 'That's the closest point to us, sir.'

'Exactly! We can be across the straits in jig time.'

'Very good, sir,' said Lieutenant Hornett, 'but... you don't think the enemy might be expecting us there? It being such an obvious landing site?'

'Not obvious at all to the trained military thinker, sir! They won't be expecting us there precisely because it is so obvious, d'y'see?'

'You mean... they'll think only a complete idiot would land there, sir?'

'Correct! And they know we're not complete idiots, sir, and therefore that will

be the last place they will be expecting us, d'y'see? They'll be expecting us somewhere like' – his stick stabbed into the sand – 'here.'

Hornett looked closely. In the street outside, someone started to bang a drum.

'Oh, you mean Eritor,' he said. 'Where I believe there is a concealed landing

area, and two days' forced march through good cover would have us at the heart

of the empire, sir.'

'Exactly!'

'Whereas landing at M Mints means three days over sand dunes and past the

fortified city of Zebra...'

'Precisely. Wide–open spaces! And that is where we can practise the art of warfare.' Lord Rust raised his voice above the drumming. 'That's how you settle

these things. One decisive battle. Us on one side, the Klatchians on the other.

THAT IS HOW THESE THINGS ARE D–'

First of Foot, my lord—

'The arrogance of the man. Go and— No, I'll go myself!'

There was a crowd in the street. In the centre there rose the bulk of Constable

Dorfl, and a key thing about the golem was that if he was banging a drum then

no-one was going to ask him to stop. No-one except possibly Lord Rust, who

strode up and snatched the drumsticks out of his hands.

'Yerss, it are species of your choice's life in der First of Foot!' shouted Sergeant Detritus, unaware of the events going on behind him. 'You learnin' a

trade! You learnin' self-respek! Also you get spiffy uniform plus all der boots

you can eat —here, dat's my banner!'

'What's the meaning of this?' said Rust, flinging the homemade banner on to the

ground. 'Vimes can't do this!'

A figure detached itself from the wall, where it had been watching the show.

'You know, I rather think I can,' said Vimes. He handed Rust a piece of paper.

'It's all here, my lord. With references citing the highest authorities, in case you are in any doubt.'

'Citing the—?'

'On the role of a knight, my lord. In fact the duties of a knight, funnily enough. A lot of it is pretty damn stupid stuff, riding around the place on one

of those bloody great horses with curtains round it and so on, but one of them

says in time of need a knight has to raise and maintain you'll laugh when I tell

you this a body of armed soldiers! No-one could have been more surprised than

Vimes. 'Your friend Lord Downley, for one. You were saying?'

'Then if you persist in playing games I will say that before a knight is created

he must spend a night's vigil watching his armour—'

'Practically every night of my life,' said Vimes. 'A man doesn't keep an eye on

his armour round here, that man's got no armour in the morning.'

'In prayer,' said Rust sharply.

'That's me,' said Vimes. 'Not a night has gone by without me thinking, "Ye gods,

I hope I get through this alive." '

'—and he must have proved himself on the field of combat. Against other trained

men, Vimes. Not vermin and thugs.'

Vimes started to undo the strap of his helmet.

'Well, this isn't the best of moments, my lord, but if someone'll hold your coat

I can spare you five minutes...'

In Vimes's eyes Rust recognized the fiery gleam of burning boats.

'I know what you're doing, Vimes, and I am not going to rise to it,' he said, taking a step back. 'In any case, you have had no formal training in arms.'

'That's true,' said Vimes. 'You've got me there, right enough. No—one ever trained me in arms. I was lucky there.' He leaned closer and lowered his

voice

so that the watching crowd wouldn't hear. 'Y'see, I know what "training in arms"

means, Ronald. There hasn't been a real war in ages. So it's all prancing around

wearing padded waistcoats and waving swords with knobs on the end so no—one'll

really get hurt, isn't it? But down in the Shades no—one's had any training in arms either. Wouldn't know an epee from a sabre. No, what they're good at

is a

I knew there was something about me that I liked.

'Can you not even see that you can't enrol... dwarfs and trolls in an Ankh-Morpork regiment?'

'It just says "armed soldiers", and dwarfs come with their own axes. A great saving. Besides, if you've ever seen them really fight, then you must've been on the same side.'

'Vimes—'

'It's Sir Samuel, my lord.'

Rust seemed to think for a moment.

'Very well, then,' he said. 'Then you and your... regiment come under my command—'

'Strangely, no,' said Vimes swiftly. 'Under the command of the King or his duly

appointed representative, it says in Scavone's Chivalric Law and Usage.

And, of

course, there has been no duly appointed representative ever since some complete

bastard cut off the last king's head. Oh, assorted beds appeared to have been

ruling the city, but according to the chivalric tradition—'

Rust stopped to think again. He had the look of a lawnmower just after the grass

has organized a workers' collective. There was a definite suggestion that, deep

inside, he knew this was not really happening. It could not be happening because

this sort of thing did not happen. Any contradictory evidence could be safely

ignored. However, it might be necessary to find some motions to go through.

'I think you'll find that, legally, your position—' he began, and his eyes bulged for a moment as Vimes interrupted him cheerfully.

his helmet.

'What we doin' now, sir?'

'We can pack up now, I think. All the lads have joined up?'

'Yessir!'

'You told them it wasn't compulsory?'

'Yessir! I said, "It ain't compuls'ry, you just gotta," sir.'

'Detritus, I wanted volunteers.'

' 'sright, sir. They volunteered all right, I saw to that.'

Vimes sighed as he walked back to his office. But they were probably safe.

He

was pretty sure he was legally sound and if he knew anything about Rust, the man

would respect the letter of the law. Such men did, in a chilly way. Besides, thirty men in the Watch simply didn't figure in the great scheme of things.

Rust

could ignore them.

Suddenly there's a war brewing, Vimes thought, and they all come back.

Civil

order is turned upside down, because that's the rules. And people like Rust are

at the top of the heap again. You have these aristocrats lazing around for years, and suddenly the old armour's out and the sword is being taken down from

over the fireplace. They think there's going to be a war and all they can think

about is that wars can be won or lost...

Someone's behind this. Someone wants to see a war. Someone paid to have Ossie

and Snowy killed. Someone wanted the Prince dead. I've got to remember that.

This isn't a war. This is a crime.

And then he realized he was wondering if the attack on Goriffs shop had been

because ordinary people, the kind who brushed the dog and told their children bedtime stories, were capable of then going out and doing horrible things to other ordinary people. It was so much easier to blame it on Them. It was bleakly depressing to think that They were Us. If it was Them, then nothing was anyone's fault. If it was Us, what did that make Me? After all, I'm one of Us. I must be. I've certainly never thought of myself as one of Them. No-one ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We're always one of Us. It's Them that do the bad things.

Around about this time, in his former life, Vimes would be taking the cap off a bottle, and wouldn't be too bothered about the bottle's contents so long as they crinkled paint

'Ook?'

'Oh, hello. What can I do for – oh, yes, I asked about books on Klatch... Is that all?'

The librarian shyly held out a small, battered green book. Vimes had been expecting something bigger, but he took it anyway. It paid to look at any book

the orang-utan gave you. He matched you up to books. Vimes supposed it was a knack, in the same way that an undertaker was very good at judging heights.

On the spine, in very faded gold lettering, were the words 'VENI VIDI VICI:

A

Soldier's Life by Gen. A. Tacticus'.

Nobby and Sergeant Colon edged along the alley.

They turned. Leonard was already dismantling the tube.

'If you could just hang on to this bit, corporal... and, sergeant, if you would be so good as to hold this piece steady... some sort of fins should do it, I'm sure I had a suitable piece of wood somewhere

Leonard began to pat his pockets.

The watchmen realized that the man holding them up had paused to redesign his weapon and had given it to them to hold while he looked for a screwdriver.

This

was a thing that did not often happen.

Nobby silently took the rocket from Colon and pushed it into the tube.

'What's this bit here, mister?' he said.

Leonard glanced up briefly in between patting his pockets.

'Oh, that is the trigger,' he said. 'Which, as you can see, rubs against the flint and—'

'Good.'

There was a short burst of flame and rather more black smoke.

'Oh, dear,' said Leonard.

The watchmen turned, like men dreading what they were about to see. The rocket

had shot the length of the alley and through the window of a house.

'Ah... putting "This Way Up" on the projectile would be an important safety point to bear in mind for the new design.' said Leonard. 'Now, where's that notebook... ?'

'I think we'd better leave,' said Colon, moving backwards. 'Very fast.'

Inside the house there was an explosion of stars and balls to delight young and

old but not the troll who had just opened the door.

'Ah, really?' said Leonard. 'Well, if speed is required, I have this very interesting design for a two-wheeled—'

Acting on an unspoken agreement, the watchmen each put a hand under a shoulder,

lifted him off the ground, and ran for it.

clever as an imitable cartoonist.

'I appear to have been a bit of a juggins, don't I?' Leonard agreed. 'But I do implore you to come with me. I'm afraid I thought that as warriors you would be

more inclined to understand force '

'Well, yes, we're warriors,' said Sergeant Colon. 'But—'

'ere, have you got another one of these rockets?' said Nobby, hefting the tube

onto his shoulder again. He had the special gleam in his eye that a small man

gets when he's laid his hands on a big, big weapon.

'I may have,' said Leonard, and the gleam in his eye was the mad twinkle of the

naturally innocent when they think they're being cunning. 'Why don't we go and

see? You see, I was told to fetch you by any means necessary.

'Bribery sounds good,' said Nobby. He put his eye to the tube's sights and started making 'whoosh' noises.

'Who told you to fetch us?' said Colon.

'Lord Vetinari.'

'The Patrician wants us?'

'Yes. He said you have special qualities and must come at once.'

'To the palace? I heard he'd done a runner.'

'Oh, no. To the, er... to the, er... docks...'

'Special qualities, eh?' said Colon.

'Er, sarge...' Nobby began.

'Now then, Nobby,' said Colon importantly. 'It's about time we were given some

recognition, you know that. Hexperienced officers are the backbone of the force.

Seems to me,' he went on, 'seems to me that this is a case of cometh the time,

cometh the man.'

element involved. Yes, indeed.

'Sarge—'

'You just be quiet, corporal.' Colon pulled Nobby closer. 'Undercover means not

getting stabbed and shot at, right?' he whispered. 'And what's the most important thing a professional soldier wants not to happen to him?'

'Not getting stabbed and shot,' said Nobby automatically.

'Right! So let's be going, Mr Quirm! The call has come!'

'Well done!' said Leonard. 'Tell me, sergeant, are you of a nautical persuasion?'

Colon saluted again. 'Nossir! Happily married man, sir!'

'I meant, have you ploughed the ocean waves at all?'

Colon gave him a cunning look.

'Ah, you can't catch me with that one, sir,' he said. 'Everyone knows the horses

sink.'

Leonard paused for a moment and retuned his brain to Radio Colon.

'Have you, in the past, floated around, on the sea, in a boat, at all?'

'Me, sir? Not me, sir. It's the sight of the waves going up and down, sir.'

'Really?' said Leonard. 'Well, happily, that will not be a problem.'

All right, start again...

Assembling facts, that's what it was about...

The world watched. Someone wanted the Watch to say that the assassination had

been inspired by Klatch. Who?

Someone had also beheaded Snowy Slopes where he stood and left him deader than

six buckets of fish bait.

A vision of 71-hour Ahmed's big curved sword presented itself for his attention.

So...

mind, and find out exactly how Lord Rust had organized it.
Rank bad hat! He didn't have to sit still for something like that, especially from a man who rhymed 'house' with 'mice'.
His eye was caught by the ancient book. General Tacticus? Every kid knew about him. Ankh–Morpork had ruled a huge empire and a lot of it had been in Klatch, thanks to him. Except there wasn't any thanks for him, strangely enough. Vimes had never quite known why, but the city seemed to be rather ashamed of the general.
One reason, of course, was that he'd ended up fighting Ankh–Mopork The city of Genua had run out of royalty, inbreeding having progressed to the point where the sole remaining example consisted mostly of teeth, and senior courtiers had written to Ankh–Morpork asking for help. There'd been a lot of that sort of thing, Vimes had been surprised to learn. The little kingdoms of the Sto Plains were for ever scrounging spare royalty off one another. The King had sent Tacticus out of sheer exasperation. It's hard to run a proper empire when you're constantly getting blood–stained letters on the lines of: Dear sire, I beg to inform you that we have conquered Betrek, Smale and Ushistan. Please send AM\$20,000 back pay. The man never knew when to stop.
So he was hastily made a duke and packed off to Genua, whereupon his first action was to consider what was that city's greatest military threat and then, having identified it, to declare war on Ankh-Morpork.

conquered... where? Pseudopolis, wasn't it? Or Al-Khair? Or Quimh?
Maybe Sto

Lat? That was in the old days when you attacked anyone else's city on principle, and went back and did them over again if they looked like getting up. And in

those days, you didn't care if the world watched. You wanted them to watch, and

learn. 'Veni, vidi, vici.' I came, I saw, I conquered.

As a comment it always struck Vimes as a bit too pat. It wasn't the sort of thing you came up with on the spur of the moment, was it? It sounded as if he

had worked it out. He'd probably spent long evenings in his tent, looking up in

the dictionary short words beginning with V and trying them out... Veni, vermini, vomui, I came, I got ratted, I threw up? Visi, veneri, vamoosi, I visited, I caught an embarrassing disease, I ran away? It must have been a big

relief to come up with three short acceptable words. He probably made them up

first, and then went off to see somewhere and conquer it.

He opened the book at random.

'It is always useful to face an enemy who is prepared to die for his country,' he read. 'This means that both you and he have exactly the same aim in mind.'

'Hah!'

'Bingeley-bingeley b-'

Vimes's hand slammed down on the box.

'Yes? What is it?'

'Three oh five pee em. Interview with Cpl Littlebottom re Missing Sgt: Colon,'

said the demon sulkily.

'Look, said the demon patiently, 'You can have an appointment at any time, right? So therefore any appointment exists in potentia—'

'Where's that?'

'Any particular appointment simply collapses the waveform,' said the demon. 'I

merely select the most likely one from the projected matrix.'

'You're just making this up,' said Vimes. 'If you were right, then any second now—'

Someone knocked at the door. It was a polite, tentative tap.

Vimes didn't take his eyes off the smirking demon.

'Is that you, Corporal Littlebottom?' he said.

'Yes, sir. Sergeant Colon has sent a pigeon. I thought you ought to see it, sir.'

'Come in!'

A small roll of thin paper was placed on his desk. He read:

Have volunteered for a mission of Vital
Importance. Nobby is here also. There will be
statchoos of us when this day's work is over.
PS Someone I can't tell you who says this note
will self-destruct in five seconds, he is sorry he
hasn't got good chemicles to do it better—

The paper began to crinkle around the edges and then vanished in a small
puff of
acid smoke.

Vimes stared at the little pile of ash that remained.

'I suppose it's a mercy they didn't blow up the pigeon, sir,' said Cheery.

'What the hell are they up to? Well, I can't chase around after them.

Thanks,

Cheery.'

The dwarf saluted and departed.

'Co-incidence,' said Vimes.

The whole thing was mounted on a crude trolley, which was in turn riding on a pair of iron rails that disappeared into the black water at the far end of the boathouse.

'Looks like a giant fish to me,' said Colon. 'Made of tin.'

'With an 'orn,' said Nobby.

'It'll never float,' said Colon. 'I can see where you've gone wrong there.

Everyone knows metal sinks.'

'Not entirely true,' said Leonard, diplomatically. 'In any case, this boat is designed to sink.'

'What?'

'Propulsion was a major headache, I'm afraid,' said Leonard, climbing up a stepladder. 'I thought of paddles and oars, and even some kind of screw, and

then I thought: dolphins, that's the ticket! They move extremely fast with barely an effort. That's out at sea, of course, we only get the shovel-nosed dolphin in our estuary here. The linkage rods are a bit complicated but I used

to be able to get quite a turn of speed. The pedalling can be somewhat tiresome,

but with three of us we should be able to get up to some quite satisfactory accelerations. It's amazing what you can do when you imitate nature, I just wish

my flying exp— Oh... where did you go... ?'

It would be difficult to establish what part of satisfactorily accelerating nature the watchmen were trying to imitate, but it was a part which tended to

get stuck in doors a lot.

They stopped struggling and began to back into the room.

'Ah, sergeant,' said Lord Vetinari, entering in front of them. 'And Corporal Nobbs, too. Leonard has explained everything to you?'

'You can't ask us to go in that thing, sir! It'll be suicide!' said Colon.

The Patrician brought his hands together in front of his lips in the manner of

aid of an ebony cane. NO-one could remember seeing him handle a weapon, and a flash of unaccustomed insight told Sergeant Colon that this was not in fact a comforting thought at all. They said he's been educated at the Assassins' School, but no-one remembered what weapons he'd learned. He'd studied languages.

And suddenly, with him in front of you, this didn't seem like the soft option. Sergeant Colon saluted, always a useful thing to do in an emergency such as this, and shouted: 'Corporal Nobbs, why aren't you in the... the metal sinking fish thing?'

'Sarge?'

'Let's see you get up them steps, lad... hup hup hup.. .'

Nobby scrambled up the ladder and disappeared. Colon saluted again. You could

usually tell his nervousness by the smartness of his salute. You could have cut

bread with this one.

'Ready to go, sah!' he shouted.

'Well done, sergeant,' said Vetinari. 'You're displaying exactly those special qualities I'm looking for—'

' 'ere, sarge,' came a metallic voice from the belly of the fish, 'there's all chains and cogwheels in here. What's this do?' The big auger in front of the thing started to squeak round.

Leonard appeared from behind the fish.

'I think we should all get in,' he said. 'I've lit the candle that'll bum down and sever the string that'll release the weight that'll pull the blocks out.'

'Er... what is this thing called?' said Colon, as he followed the Patrician up the ladder.

'Well, because it is submersed in a marine environment I've always called it the

No-one took any notice of Angua as she trotted up the gangplank. The important thing, she knew, was to look at home. No-one bothered a large dog that looked as though it knew where it was going. People were milling about on deck in the manner peculiar to non-sailors on board ship, not sure of what they should be doing or where they should refrain from doing it. Some of the more stoic ones had made little camps, defining with bundles and pieces of cloth tiny areas of private property. They reminded Angua of the bi-coloured drainpipes and microscopically delineated household boundaries in Money Trap Lane, showing yet another way of drawing a line in the sand. This is Mine, and that is Yours. Trespass on Mine, and you'll get Yours. There were a couple of guards standing on either side of the door to the cabins. They hadn't been told to stop dogs. Scents led down below. She could smell the other dogs and a strong odour of cloves. At the end of the narrow passage a door was ajar. She forced it open with her nose and looked around. The dogs were lying on a rug on one side of a large cabin. Other dogs might have barked, but these just turned their beautiful heads towards her, sighted down the length of their noses and examined her carefully.

help you to feel relaxed in most situations.

Ahmed patted her on the head. Very few people have ever done that to a werewolf

without having to get people to cut up their meals for them in future, but Angua

had learned self-control.

Then he stood up and went to the door. She heard him say something to someone

outside, and then he came back into the room and smiled at her.

'I go, I come back...'

He opened a small cupboard and took out a jewelled dog collar. 'You shall have a

collar. Oh, and here is some food,' he added, as a servant brought in some bowls. ' "Knickknack, paddywack, give a dog a bone" is a rhyme I hear your Ankh-Morpork children sing, but a paddywack is a ball of gristle suitable only

for animal food and who knows what part of the animal is its knick-knack...'

The plate was put in front of Angua. The other dogs stirred, but Ahmed snapped a

word at them and they settled back again.

The food was... dog food. In Ankh-Morpork terms, it meant something that you

wouldn't even put in a sausage, and there are very few things that a man with a

big enough mincer cannot put in a sausage.

The little central human part of her was revolted, but the werewolf drooled at

the sight of every glistening tube and wobbly fat bit

It was on a silver plate.

She looked up. Ahmed was watching her carefully. Of course, the royal dogs were

treated like kings, all those diamond collars... It didn't have to mean he knew—

the positioning and commitment of reserves, the bringing of power to a point...'

Vimes tried to concentrate on Tacticus. But there were two distractions.

One was

that the grinning face of 71-hour Ahmed looked out at him from every line.

The

other was his watch, which he had propped up against the Disorganizer. It was

powered by actual clockwork and was much more reliable. And it never needed

feeding. It ticked quietly. As far as it was concerned, he could forget his appointments. He liked it.

The second hand was just curving towards the top of the minute when he heard

someone coming up the stairs.

'Come in, captain,' said Vimes. There was a snigger from the box.

Carrot's face was pinker than normal.

'Something's happened to Angua,' said Vimes.

The high colour drained from Carrot's face. 'How did you know that?'

Vimes firmly dosed the lid on the sniggering demon. 'Let's call it intuition, shall we? I'm right, am I?'

' Yes, sir! She went aboard a Klatchian boat and now it's sailing! She hasn't come off!'

'What the hell did she go on board for?'

'We were after Ahmed! And he looked as if he was taking someone with him, sir.

Someone ill, sir!'

'He's left? But the diplomats are still—'

Vimes stopped. There was, if you didn't know Carrot, something wrong with the

situation. There were people who, when their girlfriend was spirited away on a

someone who didn't just believe it, but lived their life by it. It was as unnerving as meeting a really poor priest.

Obviously, it was a consideration that if someone had captured Angua you knew

that the rescue you were going to probably wouldn't be hers.

But...

The gods alone knew what would happen if he left now. The city had gone war mad.

Big things were happening. At a time like this, every cell in his body was telling him that the Commander of the Watch had Responsibilities...

He drummed his fingers on the desk. In times like this, it was vital to make the

right decision. That was what he was paid for. Responsibility...

He ought to stay here, and do the best he could.

But... history was full of the bones of good men who'd followed bad orders in

the hope that they could soften the blow. Oh, yes, there were worse things they

could do, but most of them began right where they started following bad orders.

His eyes went from Carrot to the Dis-organizer and then to the tottering mounds

of paperwork on his desk.

Blow that! He was a thief-taker! He'd always be a thieftaker! Why lie?

'Damned if I'll let Ahmed get back to Klatch!' he said, standing up. 'Fast boat,

was it?'

'Yes, but it looked pretty heavy in the water.'

'Then maybe we can catch it up before it goes very far—'

As he hurried forward he had, just for a second, the strange sensation that he

was two people. And this was because, for the merest fraction of a second, he

And sometimes the avalanche depends on one snowflake. Sometimes a pebble is allowed to find out what might have happened – if only it had bounced the other way.

The wizards of Ankh–Morpork had been very firm on the subject of printing. It's not happening here, they said. Supposing, they said, someone printed a book on magic and then broke up the type again and used it for a book on, say, cookery? The metal would remember. Spells aren't just words. They have extra dimensions of existence. We'd be up to here in talking souffles. Besides, someone might print thousands of the damn things, many of which could well be read by unsuitable people. The Engravers' Guild was also against printing. There was something pure, they said, about an engraved page of text. It was there, whole, unsullied. Their members could do very fine work at very reasonable rates. Allowing unskilled people to bash lumps of type together showed a disrespect for words and no good would come of it. The only attempt ever to set up a printing press in Ankh-Morpork had ended in a mysterious fire and the death by suicide of the luckless printer. Everyone knew it was suicide because he'd left a note. The fact that this had been engraved on the head of a pin was considered an irrelevant detail.

Lord Rust looked thoughtfully at Crumbling Michael, a Grade II Muttler.
'And what happened next?'
Crumbling Michael scratched his wrist. He'd recently got his extra grade because he'd finally managed to catch a disfiguring but harmless skin disease.
'Mr Carrot was in there about two minutes, m'lord. Then they all come runnin' out, right, an' they—'
'Who were they?' said Rust. He fought off an urge to scratch his own arm.
'There was Carrot an' Vimes an' a dwarf an' a zombie an' all of them, m'lord.
They ran all the way to the docks, m'lord, and Vimes saw Captain Jenkins and he said—'

'Ah, Captain Jenkins! This is your lucky day!'
The captain looked up from the rope he was coiling. Noone likes being told it's their lucky day. That sort of thing does not bode well. When someone tells you it's your lucky day, something bad is about to happen.
'It is?' he said.
'Yes, because you have an unrivalled opportunity to aid the war effort!'
'I have?'
'And also to demonstrate your patriotism,' Carrot added.
'I do?'
'We need to borrow your boat,' said Vimes.
'Bugger off!'
'I'm choosing to believe that was a salty nautical expression meaning "Why, certainly,"' said Vimes. 'Captain Carrot?'
'Sir.'
'You and Detritus go and look behind that false partition in the hold,' said Vimes.

anything, Carrot?

Carrot appeared over the edge of the hold. There was a crossbow in his hand.

'I do declare,' said Vimes, 'but that looks to me like a Burleigh and Stronginthearm. "Viper" Mk 3, which kills people but leaves buildings standing.'

'There's crates and crates of stuff,' said Carrot.

' 's no law—' Jenkins began, but he sounded as if the bottom was dropping out of his world.

'You know, I think there probably is some law against selling weapons to the

enemy in times of war,' said Vimes. 'Of course, there might not be. Tell you what,' he added brightly, 'why don't we all go along to Sator Square? It's full of people around this time, all very keen on the war and cheering our brave lads... Why don't we go along and put it to them? You told me I ought to listen

to the voice of the people. Odd thing, ain't it... you meet people one at a time, they

seem decent, they got brains that work, and then they get together and you hear

the voice of the people. And it snarls.'

'That's mob rule!'

'Oh, no, surely not,' said Vimes. 'Call it democratic justice.'

'One man, one rock,' Detritus volunteered.

Jenkins looked like a man afraid the world was about to drop out of his bottom.

He glared at Vimes and then at Carrot, and saw no help there.

'Of course, you'd have nothing to fear from us,' said Vimes. 'Although you might

trip on your way down the stairs to the cells.'

'There's no stairs down to your cells!'

'Stairs can be arranged.'

Jenkins whined.

'Who told you there was a false panel in the hold?' he demanded. 'It was a guess, right?'

'Right,' said Vimes.

'Aha! I knew you were only guessing!'

'Patriotic and clever,' said Vimes. 'Now... how do you make this thing go fast?'

Lord Rust tapped his fingers on the table.

'What did he take the boat for?'

'Dunno, m'lord,' said Cumbling Michael, scratching his head.

'Damn! Did anyone else see them?'

'Oh, there weren't many people around, m'lord.'

'That's a small mercy, at least.'

'Just me and Foul Ole Ron and the Duck Man and Blind Hugh and Ringo Eyebrows and

No Way Jose and Sidney Lopsides and that bastard Stoolie and Whistling Dick and

a few others, m'lord.'

Rust sank back in his chair and put a pale hand over his face. In Ankh–Morpork

the night had a thousand eyes and so did the day, and it also had five hundred

mouths and nine hundred and ninety–nine ears.[12]

'The Klatchians must know, then,' he said. 'A detachment of Ankh–Morpork soldiery has taken ship for Klatch. An invasion force.'

'Oh, you could hardly call it–' Lieutenant Hornett began.

'The Klatchians will call it that. Besides, the trod Detritus is with them,' said Rust.

Hornett looked glum. Detritus was an invasion force all by himself.

'What ships have we commandeered?' said Rust.

'There's more than twenty now, if you include the Indestructible, the Indolence

see it.

Damn the man. He forces our hand. But still, perhaps it is for the best. We should embark.'

'Are we entirely ready, sir?' said Lieutenant Hornett, with the special inflection that means 'We are not entirely ready, sir.'

'We had better be. Glory awaits, gentlemen. In the words of General Tacticus,

let us take history by the scrotum. Of course, he was not a very honourable fighter.'

White sunlight etched dark shadows in Prince Cadram's palace. He too had a map of Klatch, made of tiny coloured tiles set into the floor. He sat looking at it pensively.

'Just one boat?' he said.

General Ashal, his chief adviser, nodded. And added: 'Our scryers can't get a

very dear picture over that distance, but we do believe one of the men to be Vimes. You recall the name, sire.'

'Ah. the useful Commander Vimes.' The Prince smiled.

'Indeed. And since then there has been a lot of activity all along the docks. We

have to take the view that the expeditionary force is setting out.'

'I thought we had at least a week, Ashal.'

'It is certainly puzzling. They cannot possibly be prepared, sire. Something must have happened.'

Cadram sighed. 'Oh, well, let us follow where fate points the way. Where will they attack?'

'Gebra, sire. I'm sure of it.'

'Our most heavily fortified city? Surely not. Only an idiot would do that.'

'I have studied Lord Rust in some depth, sire. Remember that he doesn't expect

'Yes, Nobby?'

'Tell me again about our special qualities.'

'Shut up and keep pedalling, Nobby.'

'Right, sarge.'

It was quite dark in the Boat. A candle swung from a bracket over Leonard of

Quirm's bowed head as he sat steering with two levers. Around Nobby, pulleys

rattled and little chains clicked. It was like being inside a sewing machine. A damp one, too. Condensation dropped off the ceiling in a steady stream.

They had been pedalling for ten minutes. Leonard had spent most of the time

talking excitedly. Nobby got the impression he didn't get out much. He talked

about everything.

There were the tanks of air, for example. Nobby was happy to accept that you

could squeeze air up really

small, and that was what was in the groaning, creaking steel-bound casks strapped to the walls. It was what happened to the air afterwards that came

as a

surprise.

'Bubbles!' said Leonard. 'Dolphins again, you see? They don't swim through the

water, they fly through a cloud of bubbles. Which is much easier, of course. I

add a little soap, which seems to improve matters.'

'He thinks dolphins fly, sarge,' whispered Nobby.

'Just keep pedalling.'

Sergeant Colon risked a glance behind him.

Lord Vetinari was sitting on an upturned box amidst the clicking chains, with

several of Leonard's sketches open on his knees.

Only I don't think we'll get there, the reason being, in about another five minutes my knees are going to fall off. ..'

'Oh, my word, you won't have to pedal all the way,' said Leonard. 'What did you think the big auger on the nose is for?'

'That?' said Nobby. 'I thought that was for drillin' into the bottom of enemy ships—'

'What?' Leonard spun around in his seat, a look of horror on his face. 'Sink ships? Sink ships? With people on them?'

'Well... yes...'

'Corporal Nobbs, I think you are a very misguided young... man,' said Leonard stiffly. 'Use the Boat to sink ships? That would be terrible! In any case, no sailor would dream of doing such a dishonourable thing!'

'Sorry..'

'The auger, I would have you know, is for attaching us to passing ships in the manner of the remora, the sucker-fish which attaches itself to sharks. A few turns is all that is necessary for a firm attachment.'

'So... you couldn't bore all the way through the hull, then?'

'Only if you were a very careless and extremely thoughtless young man!'

The ocean waves may not be ploughable, but the crust of the river Ankh downstream from the city was known to sprout small bushes in the summertime. The Milka moved slowly, leaving a furrow behind it.

'Can't you go faster?' said Vimes.

'Why, certainly,' said Jenkins nastily. 'Where would you like us to put the extra mast?'

'The ship's just a dot,' said Carrot. 'Why aren't we gaining on them?'

'It's a bigger ship so it has got what we technically call more sails,' said

not
to be among them.

'Go and pull some ropes, Mr Jenkins,' he said.

He watched the captain stamp off. A few moments later there was a splash.

Vimes

looked over the side and saw a crate bob for a moment and then sink. And he felt

happy. Thief-taker, Rust had called him. The man had meant it as an insult, but

it'd do. Theft was the only crime, whether the loot was gold, innocence, land or

life. And for the thieftaker, there was the chase...

There were several more splashes. Vimes fancied the ship surged forward.

... the chase. Because the chase was simpler than the capture. Once you'd caught

someone it got complicated, but the chase was pure and free. Much better than

prodding at clues and peering at notebooks. He flees, I chase. Simple.

Vetinari's terrier, eh?

'Bingeley-bingeley beep!' said his pocket.

'Don't tell me,' said Vimes. 'It's something like "Five pee em, At Sea," yes?'

'Er... no,' said the Dis-organizer. 'Says here "Violent Row With Lord Rust", Insert Name Here.'

'Aren't you supposed to tell me what I'm going to do?' said Vimes, opening the

box.

'Er... what you should be doing,' said the demon, looking very worried.

'What

you should be doing. I don't understand it... er... something seems to be wrong...'

Angua stopped trying to rub the collar off against a bulkhead. It wasn't

while
drunk. It was possible, but you had to concentrate every step of the way.

There was a sound.

Her ears pricked up.

Something tapped once or twice under the hull. She hoped it was a reef.

That

meant... land, possibly... with any luck she could swim ashore...

Something clinked. She'd forgotten about the chain. It was hardly necessary. She

felt as weak as a kitten.

There was a rhythmic noise, like something chewing at the wood.

A tiny metal point splintered through the wall just in front of her nose, and rose an inch.

And someone spoke. It sounded far off and distorted, and perhaps only a werewolf

would have heard it, but words were happening, somewhere under her paws.

'—can stop pedalling now, Corporal Nobbs.'

'I am knackered, sarge. Is there anything to eat?'

'There's some more of that garlic sausage. Or there's the cheese. Or cold beans.'

'We're in a tin with no air and we're supposed to eat cheese? I ain't even going

to comment on the beans.'

'I'm very sorry gentlemen. Things were rather rushed and I had to take food which would keep.'

'It's just that it's getting a bit... crowded, if you get my meaning.'

'I will pay out the rope as soon as it's dark and we can surface and take on air.'

'Just so long as we get rid of the air we've got, that's all I'm saying...'

Angua's brows wrinkled as she tried to make sense of this. The voices were

stopped,
she might forget how to start again.
She stared at the point of metal. The point of metal with sharp edges.
The tiny human part of her mind raged at the wolf brain, trying to get it to
understand what it needed to do.

It was after midnight.

The lookout man knelt on the deck in front of 71-hour Ahmed and
trembled.

'I know what I saw, wali,' he moaned. 'And the others saw it too! Something
rose

up behind the ship and began chasing us! A monster!'

Ahmed looked at the captain, who shrugged. 'Who knows what lies on the
floor of

the sea, wali?'

'Its breath!' moaned the seaman. 'There was a great roar of breath like the
stink of a thousand privies! And then it spoke!'

'Really?' said Ahmed. 'This is not usual. What did it say?'

'I did not understand!' The man's face screwed up as he tried to assemble
the

unfamiliar syllables. 'It sounded like...' he swallowed, and went on, 'Ye
gods,

that was better out than in, sarge!''

Ahmed stared at him. 'And what did that mean to you?' he said.

'I do not know, wali!'

'You have not spent much time in Ankh-Morpork?'

'No, wali!'

'Then return to your post.'

The man stumbled out.

'We have lost speed, wali,' said the captain.

'Perhaps the sea monster is clutching at our keel?'

'It pleases you to joke, lord. But who knows what has been disturbed by the
rising of the new land?'

flow out
of pride. The word meant enemy. Everyone's. And if anyone else wasn't
around,
then one another's.

If he concentrated, he might believe that there was a darker shape about a
hundred yards behind the ship, very low in the water. Waves were breaking
where
waves shouldn't be. It looked as though the ship was being followed by a
reef.

Well, well...

71-hour Ahmed was not superstitious. He was superstitious, which put him
in a
minority among humans. He didn't believe in the things everyone believed
in but

which nevertheless weren't true. He believed instead in the things that were
true in which no-one else believed. There are many such substitutions,
ranging

from 'It'll get better if you don't pick at it' all the way up to 'Sometimes
things just happen.'

Currently he was disinclined to believe in sea monsters, especially ones
that

spoke in the language of AnkhMorpork, but he did believe that there were a
lot

of things in the world that he didn't know about.

In the far distance he could see the lights of a ship. It didn't seem to be
gaining on them.

This was much more worrying.

In the darkness 71-hour Ahmed reached over his shoulder and grasped
the handle

of his sword.

Above him, the mainsail creaked in the wind.

Er... I do believe it does, sir,' squeaked Sergeant Colon.

'However, I find that you have left me the use of my U, N and A, B, L, E,' the

Patrician went on, 'which incidentally lands me on this Three Times the Whole

Worde square and, I rather suspect, wins me the game.'

Sergeant Colon sagged with relief.

'A capital game, Leonard,' said Vetinari. 'What did you say it was called?'

'I call it the "Make Words With Letters That Have All Been Mixed Up Game", my lord.'

'Ah. Yes. Obviously. Well done.'

'Huh, an' I got three points,' mumbled Nobby' 'They was perfectly good words

that you wouldn't let me have, too.'

'I'm sure the gentlemen don't want to know those words,' said Colon severely.

'I'd have got ten points for that X.'

Leonard looked up. 'Strange. We seem to have stopped moving...'

He reached up and opened the hatch. Damp night air poured in, and there was the

sound of voices, quite close, echoing loudly as voices do when heard across water.

'Heathen Klatchian talk,' said Colon. 'What are they gabblin' about?'

""What nephew of a camel cut the rigging?"" said Lord Vetinari, without looking

up. 'Not just the ropes, look at this sail – here, give me a hand...'

'I didn't know you spoke Klatchian, my lord.'

'Not a word,' said Lord Vetinari.

'But you—'

'I did not,' said Vetinari calmly.

'Ah... right...'

Good. Unhitch us from his apparently stricken ship while we still have the cover of darkness and in the morning I wish to see this troublesome land.

In the

meantime, I suggest that everyone gets some sleep.'

Sergeant Colon did not get a lot of sleep. This was partly because he was woken

up several times by sawing and banging coming from the front of the Boat, and

partly because water kept dripping on his head, but mainly because the lull in

activity was causing him to consider his position.

Sometimes when he woke up he saw the Patrician hunched over Leonard's drawings,

a gaunt silhouette in the light of the candle – reading, making notes...

He was in the immediate company of a man even the Assassins' Guild was frightened of, another man

who would stay up all night in order to invent an alarm clock to wake him up in

the morning, and a man who had never knowingly changed his underwear.

And he was at sea.

He tried to look on the bright side. What was the main reason why he hated boats? The fact that they sank, right? But this one had the sinking built in right from the start And you didn't have to watch the waves going up and down,

because they were already above you.

All this was logical. It just wasn't very comforting.

When he awoke at one point there were faint voices coming from the other end of

the vessel.

'—don't quite understand, my lord. Why them?'

'They do what they're told, they tend to believe the last thing they heard, they're not bright enough to ask questions, and they have that certain

visible in

the gloom.

'Are we gaining on them?' he said.

Captain Jenkins nodded. 'We might be. There's a lot of sea between us.'

'And has all excess weight been thrown overboard?'

'Yes! What do you want me to do, shave my beard off?'

Carrot's face appeared over the edge of the hold, 'All the lads are bedded down,

sir.'

'Right.'

'I'll turn in for a few hours too, sir, if it's all right with you.'

'Sorry, captain?'

'I'll get my head down, sir.'

'But... but—' Vimes waved vaguely at the darkening horizon, 'I we're in hot pursuit of your girlfriend! Among other things,' he added.

'Yes, sir.'

'So aren't you... you mean you can... you want to... captain, you intend to go

and have a bit of a nap?'

'To be fresh for when we catch up with them. Yes, sir. If I spend the whole night staring out there worrying then I'll probably be a bit useless When we catch up with them, sir.'

It made sense. It really did make sense. Of course it made sense. Vimes could

see the sense all over it. Carrot had actually sat down and thought sensibly about things.

'You'll be able to get to sleep, will you?' he said weakly.

'Oh, yes. I owe it to Angua.'

'Oh. Well... goodnight, then.'

Carrot disappeared into the hold again.

'Good heavens,' said Jenkins. 'Is he real?'

'Yes,' said Vimes.

What?

'I reckon they're slowing down, I said!'

'Good.'

'So what're you going to do when we catch them?'

'Er. ...Vimes hadn't given this a lot of thought. But he recalled a very bad woodcut he'd once seen in a book about pirates.

'We'll swing across on to them with our cutlasses in our teeth?' he said.

'Really?' said Jenkins. 'That's good. I haven't seen that done in years. Only ever seen it done once, in fact.'

'Oh, yes?'

'Yes, this lad'd seen the idea in a book and he swung across into the other ship's rigging with his cutlass clenched, as you say, between his teeth.'

'Yes?'

'Topless Harry, we wrote on his coffin.'

'Oh.'

'I don't know if you've ever seen a soft-boiled egg after you've picked up your

knife and sli—'

'All right, I see the point. What do you suggest?'

'Grapnels. You can't beat grapnels. Catch 'em on the other ship and just pull

'em towards you.'

'And you've got grapnels?'

'Oh, yes. Saw some only today, in fact.'

'Good. Then—'

'As I recall,' Jenkins went on relentlessly, 'it was when your Sergeant Detritus

was chucking stuff over the side and he said, "What shall we do with dese bendy, hooky things, sir?" and someone, can't recall his name just at this minute, said, "They're dead weight, throw them over.'"

'Why didn't you say something?'

'Oh, well, I didn't like to,' said Jenkins. 'You were doing so well.'

'Don't mess me about, captain. Otherwise I'll clap you in irons.'

and starboard? I don't. I've never even drunk starboard. Shiver my timbers!
'Isn't it "shiver my timbers"?'
'I've been ill.' Captain Jenkins spun the wheel. 'Also, this is a frisky wind
and me and my crew know how to pull the strings that make the big square
canvas
things work properly. If your men tried it you'd soon find out how far it is to
land.'
'How far is it to land?'
'About thirty fathoms, hereabouts.'
The light was noticeably nearer.
'Bingeley-bingeley beep!'
'Good grief, what now?' said Vimes.
'Eight pee em. Er... Narrowly Escape Assassination by Klatchian Spy?'
Vimes went cold. 'Where?' he said, looking around wildly.
'Corner of Brewer Street and Broadway,' said the little sing-song voice.
'But I'm not there!'
'What's the point of having appointments, then? What's the point of my
making an
effort? You told me you wanted to know what you ought to—'
'Listen, you don't have an appointment for being assassinated!'
The demon went silent for a moment, and then said:
'You mean it should be on your To Do list?' Its voice was trembling.
'You mean like: "To Do: Die"?'
'Look, it's no good taking it out on me just because you're not on the right
time line!'
'What the hell does that mean?'
'Aha, I knew you didn't read the manual! Chapter xvii-2(c) makes it very
clear
that sticking to one reality is vitally important, otherwise the Uncertainty
Principle says—'
'Forget I asked, all right?'
Vimes glared at Jenkins and at the distant ship.

See, wait?' He said. 'Someone cut it!

'Who would do that?' said 71-hour Ahmed quietly.

'I do not know, but when I find him—'

'The dogs are almost on us,' said Ahmed. 'You and your men will work faster.'

'Who could have done such a thing?' said the captain. 'You were here, how could they—?'

His gaze flickered from the cut rope to the sword.

'Was there something you wished to say?' said Ahmed.

The captain hadn't got where he was by being stupid. He spun round.

'Get that sail up right now, you festering sons of bitches!' he screamed.

'Good,' said 71-hour Ahmed.

Detritus's crossbow was originally a three-man, siege weapon, but he had removed

the windlass as an unnecessary encumbrance. He cocked it by hand.

Usually the

mere sight of the troll pulling the string back with one finger was enough to make the strongwilled surrender.

He looked doubtfully at the distant light.

'It a million-to-one chance,' he said. 'Got to be closer'n this.'

'Just hit it below the waterline so they can't cut the rope" said Vimes.

'Right. Right.'

'What's the problem, sergeant?'

'We headin' for Klatch, right?'

'Well, in that direction, yes.'

'Only... I'm gonna be really stoopid in Klatch, 'cos a der heat, right?'

'I hope we're going to stop them before we get there, Detritus.'

'I ain't keen on bein' stoopid. I know people say, that troll Detritus, he ficker than a, than a—'

'—brick sandwich—' said Vimes, staring at the light.

'Right. Only I hearin' it get really, really hot in der desert...'

it.

Then green fire ran down the masts and, when it hit the deck, burst into dozens

of green balls that rolled, cracking and spitting, over the planks.

'Dey're usin' magic?' said Detritus. A green flame spluttered—over his helmet.

'What is this, Jenkins?' said Vimes.

'It ain't magic, it's worse'n magic,' said the captain, hurrying forward. 'All right, lads, get those sails down right now!'

'You leave them where they are!' shouted Vimes.

'You know what this is?'

'It dun't even feel warm,' said Detritus, poking the flame on the crossbow.

'Don't touch it! Don't touch it! That's St Ungulant's Fire, that is! It means we're going to die in a dreadful storm!'

Vimes looked up. Clouds were racing across—No, they were pouring into the sky

in great twisting billows, like ink streaming into water. Blue light flashed somewhere inside them. The ship lurched.

'Look, we got to lose some sail!' shouted Jenkins. 'That's the only way—'

'No—one touches anything!' shouted Vimes. Green fire skimmed along the tops of

the waves now. 'Detritus, arrest any man who touches anything!'

'Right.'

'We want to go fast, after all,' Vimes said, above the hissing and the distant crackle of thunder.

Jenkins gawped at him as the ship lunged beneath them.

'You're mad! Have you any idea what happens to a ship that tries to— You haven't

got any idea, have you? This ain't normal weather! You have to ride it out careful! You can't try to run ahead of it!'

Something slippery landed on Detritus's head and bounced onto the deck, where it

tried to slither away.

Mad! Ouch!

Something hard rebounded from his hat, hit the rail and rolled to a stop by Vimes's feet.

It was a brass knob.

'Oh, no,' moaned Jenkins, putting his arms over his head. 'Now it's bloody bedsteads again!'

The captain of the Klatchian ship was not an argumentative man when he was

anywhere near 71-hour

Ahmed. He just looked at the straining sails and calculated his chances of Paradise.

'Perhaps the dog who cut the sail loose did us a favour!' he shouted, above the

roar of the wind.

Ahmed said nothing. He kept looking back. The occasional burst of electric storm

light showed the ship behind, aflame with green light.

Then he looked at the cold fire streaming behind their own masts.

'Can you see that light on the edge of the flames?' he said.

'My lord?'

'Can you, man?'

'Er... no...'

'Of course you can't! But can you see where the light isn't?'

The captain stared at him and then looked up again in terrified obedience.

And

there was somewhere where the light wasn't. As the fizzing green tongues waved

in the wind they seemed to be edged with... blackness, perhaps, or a moving hole

in space.

'That's octarine!' shouted Ahmed, as another wave sloshed over the deck.

'Only

What do you think?

'I'm not a nautical man!'

'No, rains of bedsteads are not an everyday occurrence! Nor are coal scuttles!'

Jenkins added, as something black crashed off a rail and over the side. 'We just

get the normal stuff, you know! Rain! Snow! Sleet! Fish!'

Another squall blew across the bounding boat and the deck was suddenly covered

with flashing silver.

'Back to fish!' shouted Vimes. 'That's better, surely?'

'No! It's worse!'

'Why!'

Jenkins held up a tin.

'These are sardines!'

The ship thumped into another wave, groaned, and took flight again.

The cold green fire was everywhere. Every nail of the deck sprouted its flame,

every rope and ladder had its green outline.

And the feeling crept over Vimes that it was holding the ship together. He

wasn't at all sure that it was just light. It moved too purposefully. It

crackled, but it didn't sting. It looked as though it was having fun

The ship landed. Water washed over Vimes.

'Captain Jenkins!'

'Yes?'

'Why're we playing with this wheel? It's not as if the rudder's in the water!'

They let go. The spokes blurred for a moment, and then stopped as the fire wrapped itself around them.

Then it rained cake.

The Watch had tried to make themselves comfortable in the hold, but there were

difficulties. There wasn't any area of floor which at some point in every ten

'Yes, but dat shouldn't worry you, should it?' said Detritus. 'On account of you

bein' dead already?'

'So? I end up at the bottom of the sea knee-deep in whale droppings? And it'll

be a long walk home in the dark. Not to mention the problems if a shark tries to eat me.'

'I shall fear not. According to the Testament of Mezerek, the fishermen Nonpo

spent four days in the belly of a giant fish,' said Constable Visit.

The thunder seemed particularly loud in the silence.

'Washpot, are we talking miracles here?' said Reg eventually. 'Or just a very

slow digestive process?'

'You would be better employed considering the state of your immortal soul than

making jokes,' said Constable Visit severely.

'It's the state of my immortal body that's worrying me,' said Reg.

'I have a leaflet here which will bring you considerable—' Visit began.

'Washpot, is it big enough to be folded into a boat that'll save us all?'

Constable Visit pounced on the opening. 'Aha, yes, metaphorically it is—'

'Hasn't this ship got a lifeboat?' said Cheery hurriedly. 'I'm sure I saw one when we came on.'

'Yeah... lifeboat,' said Detritus.

'Anyone want a sardine?' said Cheery. 'I've managed to get a tin open.'

'Lifeboat,' Detritus repeated. He sounded like someone exploring an unpleasant

truth. 'Like... a big, heavy thing which would've slowed us down... ?'

'Yes, I saw it, I know I did,' said Reg.

'Yeah... dere was one,' said Detritus. 'Dat was a lifeboat, was it?'

'At the very least we ought to get somewhere sheltered and drop the anchor.'

It was in the nature of a D'reg to open doors carefully. There was generally an

enemy on the other side. Sooner or later.

He saw the collar lying on the floor, right by a little fountain of water trickling from the hull, and swore under his breath.

Ahmed waited just a moment, and then pushed the door back quietly. It rattled against the wall.

'I don't intend to harm you,' he said to the gloom of the bilges. 'If that was my intention, by now you'd—'

She wished she'd used the wolf. There would have been no problem with the wolf.

That was the problem. She'd easily win, but then she'd be nervy and frightened.

A human could stay on top of that. A wolf might not. She'd do the wrong things,

panicky things, animal things.

She pushed him hard as she dropped down from above the door, somersaulted

backwards, slammed the door and turned the key.

The sword came through the planking like a hot knife through runny lard.

There was a gasp beside her. She spun round and saw two men holding a net. They

would have thrown it over the wolf. What they hadn't been expecting was a naked

woman. The sudden appearance of a naked woman always caused a rethink of

anyone's immediate plans.

She kicked them both hard and ran in the opposite direction, opened the first

door at random and slammed it behind her.

It was the cabin with the dogs in it. They sprang to their feet, opened their

noun?

'I don't have to take that kind of language, thank you,' said Angua, ripping the silk in two with a practised hand.

She was aware that she had a slight advantage over male werewolves in that naked women caused fewer complaints, although the downside was that they got some pressing invitations. Some kind of covering was essential, for modesty and the prevention of inconvenient bouncing, which was why fashioning impromptu clothes out of anything to hand was a lesser-known werewolf skill.

Angua stopped. Of course, to the unpractised eye all Klatchians looked alike, but then to a werewolf all humans looked alike: they looked appetizing. She'd

learned to discern.

'Are you Prince Khufarah?'

'I am. And you are... ?'

The door was kicked open. Angua leapt towards the window and flung aside the bar restraining the shutters. Water funnelled into the cabin, drenching her, but she managed to scramble up and out.

'Just passing through?' the Prince murmured.

71-hour Ahmed strode to the window and looked out. Green-blue waves edged with fire fought outside as the ship heaved. No-one could stay afloat in a sea like that.

He turned and looked along the hull to where Angua was clinging to a trailing

turned with a faint squeaking noise.

Had they been able to place an ear to it, they would have heard the following:

'—idea while I was dozing off. Piece of pipe, two angled mirrors – the solution

to all our steering and air problems!'

'Fascinating. A Seeing-Things-Pipe-You-Can-Breathe-Down.'

'My goodness, how did you know it was called that, my lord?'

'A lucky guess.'

' 'ere, someone's re–designed my pedalling seat, it's comfortable—'

'Ah, yes, corporal, I took some measurements while you were asleep and rebuilt

it for a better anatomical configu—'

'You took measurements?'

'Oh, yes, I—'

'What, of my... saddlery regions?'

'Oh, please don't be concerned, anatomy is something of a passion with me—'

'Is it? Is it? Well, you can stop being passionate about mine for a start—'

'Here, I can see an island of some sort!'

The pipe squeaked around.

'Ah, Leshp. And I see people. To your pedals, gentlemen. Let us explore the

ocean's bottom...'

'I expect we shall, with him steering—'

'Shut up, Nobby.'

The pipe slid down into the waves. There was a little flurry of bubbles and a damp argument about whose job it should have been to put the cork in, and then

the patch of sea that had been empty was, somehow, a little bit emptier still.

and things, and this was the sea
He tried hard to reverse that train of thought, but it kept on rising from the depths like a... like a...

Why were there no fish? Oh, there'd been the storm last night, but generally you got better fishing in these parts after a storm because it... stirred... up...
The raft rocked.

He was beginning to think it might be a good idea to go home, but that'd mean leaving the land to the Klatchians, and that'd happen over his dead body. The treacherous internal voice said: Funnily enough, they never found Mr Hong's body. Not most of the important bits, anyway.

'I think, think, I think we'll be getting back now,' he said to his son.

'Oh, Dad,' said Les. 'Another dinner of limpets and seaweed?'

'Nothing wrong with seaweed,' said Jackson. 'It's full of nourishing... seaweed. 's got iron in it. Good for you, iron.'

'Why don't we boil an anchor, then?'

'None of your lip, son.'

'The Klatchians have got bread,' said Les. 'They brought flour with them.

And they've got firewood.' This was a sore point with Jackson. Efforts to make seaweed combust had not been successful.

'Yeah, but you wouldn't like their bread,' said Jackson. 'It's all flat and got no proper crust—'

A breeze blew the scent of baking over the water. It carried a hint of spices.

'They're baking bread! On our property!'

'Well, they say it's their—'

Jackson grabbed the piece of broken plank he used as an oar and began to scull furiously towards the shore. The fact that this only made the raft go round in

forth, that was just an... an arrangement. It's not as if they created the driftwood. It just turned up. Accident of geography. It is a natural resource, right? It don't belong to anyone-'

The raft hit something which made a metallic sound. But they were still a hundred yards from the rocks.

Something else, long and bent at the end, rose up with a creaking noise. It twisted around until it pointed at Jackson.

'Excuse me,' it said, in a tinny yet polite voice, 'but this is Leshp, isn't it?'

Jackson made a sound in his throat.

'Only,' the thing went on, 'the water's a little cloudy and I thought we might have been going the wrong way for the last twenty minutes.'

'Leshp!' squeaked Jackson, in an unnaturally highpitched voice.

'Ah, good. Thank you so much. Good day to YOU.

The appendage sank slowly into the sea again. The last sounds from it, erupting

on the surface in a cloud of bubbles, were,'... don't forget to put the cork in— You've forgot to put the cor—'

The bubbles stopped.

After a while Les said, 'Dad, what was—?'

'It wasn't anything!' snapped his father. 'That sort of thing doesn't happen!' The raft shot forward. You could have waterski'd behind it.

Another important thing about the Boat, thought Sergeant Colon gloomily as they slipped back into a blue twilight, was that you couldn't bale out the bilges. It was the bilges.

He was pedalling with his feet in water and he was suffering simultaneously from

claustrophobia and agoraphobia. He was afraid of everything in here and everything out there at the same time. Plus, there were unpleasantnesses out

Right. So... I've got a tattoo on my arm, right? Had it done eight years ago.
So... how come it's still there?'
Giant seaweeds winnowed the gloom.
'Interesting point,' quavered Colon. 'Er . . .
'I mean, OK, new tiny bits of skin float in, but that means it ought to be all
new and pink by now.'
A fish with a nose like a saw swam past.
In the middle of all his other fears, Sergeant Colon tried to think fast.
'What happens,' he said, 'Is that all the blue skin bits are replaced by other
blue skin bits. Offf other people's tattoos.'
'So... I've got other people's tattoos now?'
'Er... yes.'
'Amazing. 'cos it still looks like mine. 's got the crossed daggers and
"WUM".'
'Wum?'
'It was gonna be "Mum" but I passed out and Needle Ned didn't notice I
was
upside down.'
'I should've thought he'd notice that...'
'He was pissed too. C'mon, sarge, you know it's not a proper tattoo unless
no-one can remember how it got there.'
Leonard and the Patrician were staring out at the submarine landscape.
'What're they looking for?' said Colon.
'Leonard keeps talking about hieroglyphs,' said Nobby. 'What're they,
sarge?'
Colon hesitated, but not for long. 'A type of mollusc, corporal.'
'Cor, you know everything, sarge,' said Nobby admiringly. 'That's what
hieroglyphs are, is it? So, if we go any deeper, they'll be loweroglyphs?'
There was something slightly off-putting about Nobby's grin. Sergeant
Colon
decided to go for broke.
'Don't be daft, Nobby. "Loweroglyphs if you go lower..." Oh my me.'
'Sorry, sarge.'

It's lucky,' said Jenkins. He squinted into the haze.

'But your friend ain't heading for Gebra. Wonder where he's going?'

Vimes stared at the pale yellow mass on the horizon, and then up at Carrot.

'We'll get her back, don't worry,' he said.

'I wasn't actually worrying, sir. Although I am very concerned,' said Carrot.

'Er... right...' Vimes waved his arms helplessly, 'Er... everyone fit and well?'

The men in good heart, are they?'

'It would help morale no end if you were to say a few words, sir.'

The monstrous regiment of watchmen had lined up on the deck, blinking in the

sunshine. Oh, dear. Round up the unusual suspects. One dwarf, one human who was

brought up as a dwarf and thinks like a manual of etiquette, one zombie, one

troll, me and, oh no, one religious fanatic—

Constable Visit saluted. 'Permission to speak, sir.'

'Go ahead,' mumbled Vimes.

'I'm pleased to tell you, sir, that our mission is clearly divinely approved of, sir. I refer to the rain of sardines which sustained us in our extremity, sir.'

'We were a little hungry, I wouldn't say we were in extremi—'

'With respect, sir,' said Constable Visit firmly, 'the pattern is firmly established, sir. Yes, indeed. The Sykoolites when being pursued in the wilderness by the forces of Offlerian Mitolites, sir, were sustained by a rain of celestial biscuits, sir. Chocolate ones, sir.'

'Perfectly normal phenomenon,' muttered Constable Shoe. 'Probably swept up by

the wind passing a baker's shop—'

Visit glared at him, and went on: 'And the Murmurians, when driven into the mountains by

the tribes of Miskmik, would not have survived but for a magical rain of elephants, sir—'

'Elephants?'

'Well, one elephant, sir,' Visit conceded. 'But it splashed.'

it ran
into cold air, and precipitated...' He stopped, and continued irritably,
'Anyway, I don't believe it.'

'So... which particular deity is on our case?' said Vimes, hopefully.
'I shall definitely inform you as soon as I have ascertained this, sir.'
'Er... very good, constable.'

Vimes took a step back. 'I don't pretend this is going to be easy, men,' he
said. 'But our mission is to catch up with Angua and this bastard Ahmed
and
shake the truth out of him. Unfortunately, this means we will be following
him
through his own country, with which we are at war. This is bound to put a
few
barriers in our way. But we should not let the prospect of being tortured to
death dismay us, eh?'

'Fortune favours the brave, sir,' said Carrot cheerfully.

'Good. Good. Pleased to hear it, captain. What is her position vis a vis
heavily
armed, well prepared and excessively manned armies?'

'Oh, no—one's ever heard of Fortune favouring them, sir.'

'According to General Tacticus, it's because they favour themselves,' said
Vimes. He opened the battered book. Bits of paper and string indicated his
many

bookmarks. 'In fact, men, the general has this to say about ensuring
against
defeat when outnumbered, out—weaponed and outpositioned. It is...' he
turned the
page, ' "Don't Have a Battle." '

'Sounds like a clever man,' said Jenkins. He pointed to the yellow horizon.

'See all that stuff in the air?' he said. 'What do you think that is?'

'Mist?' said Vimes.

'Hah, yes. Klatchian mist! It's a sandstorm! The sand blows about all the
time.'

I think I saw something... said Vimes. He flicked to another page. Ah, yes, he says, "After the first battle of Sto Lat, I formulated a policy which has stood me in good stead in other battles. It is this: if the enemy has an impregnable stronghold, see he stays there."

'That's a lot of help,' said Jenkins.

Vimes slipped the book into a pocket.

'So, Constable Visit, there's a god on our side, is there?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'But probably also a god on their side as well?'

'Very likely, sir. There's a god on every side.'

'Let's hope they balance out, then.'

The Klatchian ship's boat hit the water with the gentlest of splashes. This was

because 71-hour Ahmed was standing by the winches with his sword at the ready,

which had the effect of making the men lowering the boat take some trouble over

their task.

'When we are away you may take the ship into Gebra,' he said to the captain.

The captain trembled. 'What shall I tell them, wali?'

'Tell them the truth... eventually. The commander of the garrison is a man of no

breeding and will torture you a little bit. Save up the truth until you need it.

That will make him happy. It will help you to say that I forced you.'

'Oh, I will. I will... tell that lie,' the captain added quickly.

Ahmed nodded, slid down the rope into the boat and set it adrift

The crew watched him row through the surf.

This wasn't a nice beach. It was a wrecking coast. Ribcages of broken ships

crumbled into the sand. Bones and driftwood and bleached white seaweed mounded

I could kill him from here, master. Just say the word.

'How sure are you? Because you'd better be really sure. First, if you miss him

you're dead and, second, if you hit him, you're still dead. Look up there.'

On the high distant dunes, dark against the sandfilled sky, there were mounted

figures. The mate dropped his bow.

'How did they know we were here?'

'Oh, they watch the sea,' said the captain. 'D'regs like a good shipwreck as much as anyone else. More, in fact. A lot more.'

As they turned away from the rail, something leapt from the hull and entered the water with barely a splash.

Detritus tried to lurk in the shade, but there was not a lot of it about. The heat came off the high desert ahead of them like a blowtorch.

'I'm gonna get ficked,' he muttered.

There was a shout from the lookout.

'He says someone's climbing the dunes,' said Carrot. 'Carrying someone else, he says.'

'Er... female?'

'Look, sir, I know Angua. She's not the useless type. She doesn't stand there

and scream helplessly. She makes other people do that.'

'Well... if you're sure...' Vimes turned to Jenkins. 'Don't bother to chase the ship, captain. Just keep heading for the shore.'

'I don't work like that, mister. For one thing, that's a damn difficult shore, the wind's always against you, and there's some very nasty currents. Many an

incautious sailorman has left his bones to bleach on those sands. No, we'll stand out a little way and you can lower the— well, if we had a boat any more,

lot of time looking out of the tiny windows, particularly interested in pieces of seaweed which, to Sergeant Colon, looked like pieces of seaweed.
'Do you note the fine strands of Dropley's Etoliated Bladderwrack?' said Leonard. 'That's the brown stuff. A marvellous growth which, of course, you will see as significant.'

'Could we just assume for the moment that I have neglected my seaweed studies in recent years?' said the Patrician.

'Really? Oh, the loss is entirely yours, I assure you. The point is, of course, that the Etoliated Bladderwrack is never usually found growing above thirty fathoms, and it's only ten here.'

'Ah.' The Patrician flicked through a stack of Leonard's drawings. 'And the hieroglyphs – an alphabet of signs and colours. Colours as a language... what a fascinating idea...'

'An emotional intensifier,' said Leonard. 'But of course we ourselves use something like it. Red for danger and so on. I never did succeed in translating it, though.'

'Colours as a language...' murmured Lord Vetinari.

Sergeant Colon cleared his throat. 'I know something about seaweed, sir.'

'Yes, sergeant?'

'Yessir! If it's wet, sir, it means it's going to rain.'

'Well done, sergeant,' said Lord Vetinari, without turning his head. 'I think it is quite possible that I will never forget you said that.'

Sergeant Colon beamed. He had Made A Contribution.

Nobby nudged him. 'What're we doing down here, sarge? I mean, what's it all

about? Poking around, looking at weird marks on the rocks, going in and out of caves... and the smell... well..

'It's not me,' said Sergeant Colon.

Yes, sergeant. Now we're going under the land.

The beach was a lot closer now. The watchmen couldn't help noticing that the sailors were all hurrying to the blunt end of the ship and hanging on to any small, lightweight and above all buoyant objects they could find.

'This seems close enough,' said Vimes. 'Right. Stop here.'

'Stop here? How?'

'Don't ask me, I'm no sailor. Aren't there some sort of brakes?'

Jenkins stared at him. 'You – you landlubber!'

'I thought you never used the word!'

'I never met one like you before! You even think we call the bows the sharp en—'

It was, the crew agreed later, one of the strangest landings in the history of bad seamanship. The shelving of the beach must have been right and the tide as

well, because the ship did not so much hit the beach as sail up it, rising out of the water as the keel de-barnacled itself on the sand. Finally the forces of

wind, water, impetus and friction all met at the point marked 'fall over slowly'.

It did so, earning the title of 'world's most laughable shipwreck'.

'Well, that might have been worse,' said Vimes, when the splintering noises had died away.

He eased himself out of a tangle of canvas and adjusted his helmet with as much

aplomb as he could muster.

He heard a groan from the lopsided hold.

'Is dat you, Cheery?'

'Yes, Detritus.'

'Is dis me?'

'No!'

'What for?' he said.

'Establish a defensible position. It's just one of those things soldiers do, sir.'

Vimes glanced at the birds. They were approaching with a kind of sidling sideways hop, ready to move in just as soon as anyone had been dead for a few

days. Then he flicked through *Tacticus* until the word 'beachhead' caught his eye.

'It says here "If you want your men to spend much time wielding a shovel, encourage them to become farmers,"' he said. 'So I think we'll press on. He can't have got very far. We'll be back soon.'

Jenkins waded out of the surf. He didn't look angry. He was a man who had passed

through the fires of anger and was now in some strange peaceful bay beyond them.

He pointed a quivering finger at his stricken ship and said 'Muh... ?'

'Pretty good shape, all things considered,' said Vimes.

'Muh?'

'I'm sure you and your salty sailors will be able to float it again.'

'Muh...'

Jenkins and his wading crew watched the regiment as it slithered and complained

its way up the side of the dune. Eventually the crew went into a huddle and drew

lots and the cook, who was always unlucky in games of chance, approached the captain.

'Never mind, captain,' he said, 'we can probably find some decent balks of timber in all this driftwood, and a few days' work with block and tackle should—'

'Muh.'

'Only... we'd better get started 'cos he said they won't be long...'

at the prints.

'Camel tracks,' said Vimes. 'Well, camels don't go all that fast. Let's—'

'I think Detritus is having real trouble, sir,' said Carrot.

The troll was standing with his knuckles on the ground. The motor of his cooling

helmet sounded harsh for a moment in the dry air, and then stopped as the sand

got into the mechanism.

'Feelin' fick,' he muttered. 'My brain hurts.'

'Quick, hold your shield over his head,' said Vimes. 'Give him some shade!'

'He's never going to make it, sir,' said Carrot. 'Let's send him back down to the boat.'

'We need him! Quick, Cheery, fan him with your axe!'

At which point, the sand stood up and drew a hundred swords.

'Bingeley—bingeley beep!' said a cheerful if somewhat muffled voice.

'Eleven eh

em, Get Haircut... er... that's right... isn't it?'

It wasn't large, but slabs of collapsing building had smashed together in such a

way that they made a cistern that the rain had filled half full.

Solid Jackson slapped his son on the back.

'Fresh water! At last!' he said. 'Well done, lad.'

'You see, I was looking at these sort of painting things, Dad, and then—'

'Yeah, yeah, pictures of octopuses, very nice,' said Jackson. 'Hah! The ball is

on the other foot now and no mistake! It's our water on our side of the island,

and I'd just like to see them greasy buggers claim otherwise. Let 'em keep their

damn driftwood and suck water out of fishes!'

'Yeah, Dad,' said Les. 'And we can trade them some of the water for wood and

See?

So they'll have to come begging to us, right? And then we deal on our terms, eh?'

He put his arm around his son's reluctant shoulders and waved a hand at the landscape.

'I mean, I started out with nothing, son, except that old boat that your grandad left me, but—'

'—you worked and scraped—' said Les wearily. worked and scraped—'
—and you've always kept your head above water—'

'—right, I've always kept my head above water—'

'And you've always wanted to leave me something that— —Ow!'

'Stop making fun of your dad!' said Jackson. 'Otherwise I'll wallop the other ear. Look, you see this land? You see it?'

'I see it, Dad.'

'It's a land of opportunity.'

'But there's no fresh water and all the ground's full of salt, Dad, and it smells bad!'

'That's the smell of freedom, that is.'

'Smells like someone did a really big fart, Dad— Ow!'

'Sometimes the two are very similar! And it's your future I'm thinking of, lad!'

Les looked at the acres of decomposing seaweed in front of him, He was learning to be a fisherman like his father before him because that's how

the family had always done it and he was too good-natured to argue, although he

actually wanted to be a painter like no-one in the family had ever been before.

He was noticing

things, and they worried him even though he couldn't quite say why.

But the buildings didn't look right. Here and there were definite bits of, well,

who owned this piece of old sea bottom was extremely pointless.
'Er... I'm thinking about my future too, Dad,' he said. 'I really am.'

Far below Solid Jackson's feet, the Boat surfaced. Sergeant Colon reached automatically for the screws that held the lid shut.

'Don't open it, sergeant!' shouted Leonard, rising from his seat.

'The air's getting pretty lived-in, sir_,'

'It's worse outside.'

'Worse than in here?'

'I'm almost certain.'

'But we're on the surface!'

'A surface, sergeant,' said Lord Vetinari. Beside him, Nobby uncorked the seeing device and peered through it.

'We're in a cave?' said Colon.

'Er... sarge... ' said Nobby.

'Capital! Well worked out,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Yes. A cave. You could say that.'

'Er... sarge?' said Nobby again, nudging Colon. 'This isn't a cave, sarge! It's bigger than a cave, sarge!'

'What, you mean... like a cavern?'

'Bigger!'

'Bigger'n a cavern? More like a... big cavern?'

'Yeah, that'd be about right,' said Nobby, taking his eye away from the device.

'Have a look yourself, sarge.'

Sergeant Colon peered into the tube.

Instead of the darkness he was half expecting, he saw the sea's surface, bubbling like a boiling saucepan. Green and yellow flashes of lightning danced

across the water, illuminating a distant wall that seemed practically a horizon...

A most unusual natural phenomenon, Leonard went on. 'I'd have thought it was

just a legend had I not seen it for myself...'

'Of course it's not floating,' said Sergeant Colon. 'Honestly, Nobby, how're you

ever going to find out anything when you ask daft questions like that?

Land's

heavier than water, right? That's why you find it at the bottom of the sea.'

'Yes, but he said pumice, and my gran had a pumice stone that worked a treat for getting tough skin off your feet in the tub and that'd float—'

'That sort of thing happens in bath tubs maybe,' said Colon. 'Not in real life. This is just a phenomena. It's not real. Next thing you'll be saying there's rocks up in the sky.'

'Yeah, but—'

'I am a sergeant, Nobby.'

'Yes. sarge.'

'It puts me in mind,' said Leonard, 'of those nautical stories about giant turtles that sleep on the surface, thus causing sailors to think they are an island. Of course, you don't get giant turtles that small.'

'Hey, Mr Quirm, this is an amazing boat,' said Nobby.

'Thank you.'

'I bet you could even smash up ships with it if you wanted.'

There was an embarrassed silence.

'Altogether an interesting experience,' said Lord Vetinari, making some notes.

'And now, gentlemen downward and onward, please...'

The watchmen drew their weapons.

'They're D'regs, sir,' said Carrot. 'But – this is all wrong...'

'What do you mean?'

'We're not dead yet.'

happen.

'Why don't you check, sir?' said Carrot, not taking his eyes off the watching D'regs.

'What?'

'I said, why don't you check, sir?'

'Right now?'

'It might be worth a try, sir.'

'That's crazy, captain.'

'Yes, sir. The D'regs have some very strange notions about crazy people, sir.'

Vimes pulled out the battered book. The D'reg nearest to him, with a grin almost

as wide and as curved as his sword, had a certain additional swagger that suggested chieftainship. A huge ancient crossbow was slung on his back.

'I say!' said Vimes. 'Could we just delay things a little?' He strode towards the man, who looked very surprised, and waved the book in the air. 'This is a

book by General Tacticus, don't know if you've ever heard of him, quite a big

name in these parts once, probably slaughtered your great-great-great-great-grandfather in fact, and I just want to take a moment to

see what he has to say about this situation. You don't mind, do you?'

The man gave Vimes a puzzled look.

'This might take a moment, there's no index, but I think I saw something--'

The chieftain took a step backwards and looked at the men next to him, who

shrugged.

'I wonder if you could help me with this word here?' Vimes went on, reaching the

man's side and holding the book under his nose. He got another puzzled grin.

some very serious legal trouble.

'Mr Vimes, I don't think—'

'Do it!'

The D'reg looked into his eyes while Carrot hawked his way through the demand.

The man was still grinning

Vimes couldn't risk shifting his gaze, but he sensed some puzzlement and confusion among the tribesmen.

Then, as one man, they charged.

A Klatchian fishing boat, whose captain knew which way the wind was blowing,

made its way back to the harbour of Al-Khali. It seemed to the captain that, despite the favourable wind, he wasn't making quite the speed he should.

He put

it down to barnacles.

Vimes awoke with a noseful of camel. There are far worse awakenings, but not as

many as you might think

By turning his head, which took some effort, he ascertained that the camel was

sitting down. By the sound of things, it was digesting something explosive.

Now, how had he got here... Oh, gods...

But it should have worked... It was classic. You threatened to cut off the head

and the body just folded up. That was how everyone reacted, wasn't it?

That was

practically how civilization worked...

Put it down to cultural differences, then.

On the other hand, he wasn't dead. According to Carrot, knowing the D'regs for

five minutes and still being alive at the end of it meant that they really,

Would you like to know about the appointments you missed?

'No! I'm dying to get these damn ropes untied!'

'Do you want me to put that on your To Do list?'

'Oh, you've woken up, sir.'

It sounded like Carrot's voice and it was the sort of thing he'd say. Vimes tried to turn his head.

What he saw was mainly a white sheet, but it then became Carrot's face, upside down.

'They asked if they should untie you but I said you hadn't been getting enough

rest lately,' Carrot went on.

'Captain, my arms and legs have gone to sleep . . . Vimes began.

'Oh, well done, sir! That's a start, at least.'

'Carrot?'

'Yes, sir?'

'I want you to listen very carefully to the order I am about to give you.'

'Certainly, sir.'

'The point I'm making is that it won't be a request or a suggestion or some sort of hint.'

'Understood, sir.'

'I have, as you know, always encouraged my officers to think for themselves and

not blindly obey me, but sometimes in any organization it is necessary for instructions to be followed to the letter and with alacrity.'

'Right, sir.'

'Untie me right now or you'll bloody well live to regret untying me!'

'Er, sir, I believe there is an inadvertent inconsistency in—'

'Carrot!'

'Of course, sir.'

His ropes were cut. He slid down onto the sand. The camel turned its head, looked at him with its nostrils for a moment, and then looked away.

'Yes, sir. But they only wanted to take us prisoner, sir. One of them did accidentally cut Reg's head off, but he did help him sew it on again, so no real

harm done there.'

'I thought D'regs didn't take prisoners... ?'

'Beats me too, sir. But they say if we try to escape they'll cut our feet off, and Reg says he hasn't got enough thread for everyone, sir.'

Vimes rubbed his head, Someone had hit him so hard his helmet was dented.

'What went wrong?' he said. 'I had their boss down!'

'As I understand it, sir, the D'regs think that any leader who is stupid enough

to be defeated so easily isn't worth following. It's a Klatchian thing.'

Vimes tried to persuade himself that there wasn't a hint of sarcasm in Carrot's

voice as he went on: 'They're not really very interested in leaders, sir, to tell you the truth. They look on them as a sort of ornament. You know... just someone to shout "Charge!", sir.'

'A leader has to do other things, Carrot.'

'The D'regs think "Charge!" pretty well covers all of them, sir.'

Vimes managed to stand up. Strange muscles twanged in his legs. He tottered forward.

'Here, let me give you a hand...' said Carrot, catching him.

The sun was setting. Ragged tents clustered below one of the dunes, and there was the glow of firelight. Someone was laughing. It didn't sound like a prison.

But then, thought Vimes, the desert was probably better than bus, He wouldn't even know which way to run, feet or no feet.

'The D'regs, like all Klatchians, are a very hospitable people,' said Carrot, as

The must be having fun.

'And this is Jabbar,' said Carrot. Exhibit A, who looked like a slightly older version of 71-hour Ahmed, stood up and salaamed to Vimes.

'Offendi,' he said.

'He's their... well, he's like an official wise man,' said Carrot.

'Oh, so he's not the one who tells them to charge?' said Vimes His head buzzed with the heat.

'No, that's the leader,' said Carrot. 'Whenever they have one.'

'So perhaps Jabbar tells them when it's wise to charge?' said Vimes brightly.

'It's always wise to charge, offendi,' said Jabbar. He bowed again. 'My tent is your tent,' he said.

'It is?' said Vimes.

'My wives are your wives..,'

Vimes looked panicky. 'They are? Really?'

'My food is your food...' Jabbar went on.

'Vimes stared down at the dish by the fire. It looked like a sheep or a goat had been the main course. And the man bent down, picked up a morsel and handed it to him.

Sam Vimes looked at the mouthful. And it looked back.

'The best part,' said Jabbar, and made appreciative suckling noises. He added something in Klatchian. There was some muffled laughter from the other men around the fire.

'This looks like a sheep's eyeball,' said Vimes, doubtfully.

'Yes, sir,' said Carrot. 'But it is unwise to—'

'You know what?' Vimes went on. 'I think this is a little game called "Let's see

the shadows,

'Well done! Extremely good! First time it have not worked in twenty year!

Now

sit down and have proper rice and sheep just like mother!

There was a certain feeling of relaxation. Vimes found himself pulled down.

Bottoms shuffled aside to make room for him and a big slab of bread

dripping

with meat was put in front of him. Vimes prodded at it as politely as he

dared,

and then took the usual

view that, if you can recognize at least half of it, it's probably OK to eat the

rest.

'So we're your prisoners, Mr Jabbar?'

'Honoured guests! My tent is—'

'But... how can I put this?... you want us to enjoy your hospitality for some time?'

'We have tradition,' said Jabbar. 'A man who is a guest in your tent, even if

he

is your worst enemy, you owe him hospitality for tree dace.'

'Tree dace, eh?' said Vimes.

'I learn language on...!' Jabbar waved a hand vaguely, 'you know, wooden

ting, a

camel of the sea—'

'Boat?'

'Right! But too many water!' He slapped Vimes on the back again, so that

hot fat

spilled into his lap. 'Any road up, lots speaking Morporkian these dace,

offendi. It is language of... merchant.' He put an inflection on the word that

suggested it was the same as 'earthworm'.

'So you have to know how to say things like "Give us all your money"?' said

Vimes.

'Why ask?' said Jabbar. 'We take it anyway. But now...!' he spat at the fire

with

then go,
they get rich again, our sons rob them. Such is wisdom.'

'Ah... it's a sort of agriculture,' said Vimes.

'Right! But if you plant merchants, they don't grow so good.'

Vimes realized that it was getting colder as the sun went down. In fact, a lot colder. He inched closer to the fire.

'Why is he called 71-hour Ahmed?' he said.

The murmur of conversation stopped. Suddenly all eyes were on Jabbar, except the

one that had ended up in the shadows.

'Not so diplomatic,' said Jabbar.

'We chase him up here, then suddenly we're ambushed by you. That seems—'

'I know nothing,' said Jabbar.

'Why won't you—?' Vimes began.

'Er, sir,' said Carrot urgently. 'That would be very unwise, sir. Look, I had a bit of a talk with Jabbar while you were... resting. It's a bit political, I'm afraid.'

'What isn't?'

'Prince Cadram is trying to unite the whole of Klatch, you see.'

'Dragging it kicking and screaming into the Century of the Fruitbat?'

'Why, yes, sir, how did—?'

'Just a lucky guess. Go on.'

'But he has been having trouble,' said Carrot.

'What kind?' said Vimes.

'Us,' said Jabbar proudly.

'None of the tribes like the idea, sir,' Carrot went on. 'They've always fought among themselves, and now most of them are fighting him. Historically, sir, Klatch isn't so much an empire as an argument.'

,'He say, you must be educated. You must be learning to pay taxes. We do not wish

to be educated about taxes,' said Jabbar.

'So you think you're fighting for your freedom?' said Vimes.

'You're really getting the hang of Klatch, aren't you?' said Vimes.

Jabbar rumbled something. There was more laughter.

'Er... Jabbar says a camel certainly does shit in the desert, sir, otherwise you

wouldn't have anything to light your cigar with, sir.'

Once again, there was one of those moments when Vimes felt that he was under

close scrutiny. Be diplomatic, Vetinari had told him.

He took another deep draw. 'Improves the flavour,' he said. 'Remind me to take

some home.'

In Jabbar's eyes, the judges held up at least a couple of grudging eights.

'A man on a horse came and said we must fight the foreign dogs—'

'That's us, sir,' said Carrot helpfully.

'—because you have stolen an island that is under the sea. But what is that to

us? We know no harm of you foreign devils, but the men who oil their beards in

Al-Khali we do not like. So we send him back.'

'All of him?' said Vimes.

'We are not barbaric. He was clearly a madman. But we kept his horse.'

'And 71-hour Ahmed told you to keep us, didn't he?' said Vimes.

'No—one orders the D'regs! It is our pleasure to keep you here!'

'And when will it be your pleasure to let us go? When Ahmed tells you?

Jabbar stared at the fire. 'I will not speak of him. He is devious and cunning and not to be trusted.'

'But you are D'regs, too.'

'Yes!' Jabbar slapped Vimes on the back again. 'We know what we are talking about!'

The Klatchian fishing boat was a mile or two out of harbour when it seemed to

fleet of fleets. The masts looked like a floating forest.

Down below, Lord Vetinari took his turn to peer through the pipe. 'So many ships,' he said. 'In such a short time, too. How very well organized.'

Very well organized. One might almost say... astonishingly well organized.

As

they say, "If you would seek war, prepare for war." '

'I believe, my lord, the saying is "If you would seek peace, prepare for war,"

Leonard ventured.

Vetinari put his head on one side and his lips moved as he repeated the phrase

to himself. Finally he said, 'No, no. I just don't see that one at all.'

He ducked back into his seat.

'Let us proceed with care,' he said. 'We can go ashore under cover of darkness.'

'Er... can we maybe go ashore under cover of cover?' said Sergeant Colon.

'In fact these extra ships will make our plan that much easier,' said the Patrician, ignoring him.

'Our plan?' said Colon.

'People within the Klatchian hegemony come in every shape and colour.'

Vetinari

glanced at Nobby. 'Practically every shape and colour,' he added. 'So our appearance on the streets should not cause undue comment.' He glanced

at Nobby

again. 'To any great extent.'

'But we're wearing our uniforms, sir,' said Sergeant Colon. 'It's not like we can say we're on our way to a fancy-dress party.'

'Well, I'm not taking mine off,' said Nobby firmly. 'I'm not running around in my drawers. Not in a port. Sailors are at sea a long time. You hear stories.'

'That'd be worse,' said the sergeant, without wasting time calculating how long

any sailor would need to be at sea before the vision of Nobby Nobbs would

—cos I've seen the pictures in that book The Perfumed Alotment that
Corporal

Angua was reading, and—'

'—no, listen, Nobby, you've got the wrong—'

'—I mean, blimey, I didn't know you could do that with a —'

'—Nobby, listen—'

'—and then there's this bit where she—'

'Corporal Nobbs!' Colon yelled.

'Yes, sarge?'

Colon leaned forward and whispered in Nobby's ear. The corporal's
expression

changed, slowly.

'They really—,

'Yes, Nobby.'

'They really—'

'Yes, Nobby.'

'They don't do that at home.'

'We ain't at home, Nobby. I wish we was.'

'Although you hear stories about the Agony Aunts, sarge.'

'Gentlemen,' said Lord Vetinari. 'I am afraid Leonard is being rather fanciful.

That may apply to some of the mountain tribes, but Klatch is an ancient
civilization and that sort of thing is not done officially. I should imagine
they'd give you a cigarette.'

'A cigarette?' said Fred.

'Yes, sergeant. And a nice sunny wall to stand in front of.'

Sergeant Colon examined this for any downside. 'A nice roll—up and a wall
to

lean against?' he said.

'I think they prefer you to stand up straight, sergeant.'

'Fair enough. No need to be sloppy just because you're a prisoner. Oh,
well. I

don't mind risking it, then.'

'Well done,' said the Patrician calmly. 'Tell me, sergeant... in your long

Life emerged from the burrows and fissures. Soon, the desert was filled with the buzz and click and screech of creatures which, lacking mankind's superior brainpower, did not concern themselves with finding someone to blame and instead tried to find someone to eat.

At around three in the morning Sam Vimes walked out of the tent for a smoke. The cold air hit him like a door. It was freezing. That wasn't what was supposed to happen in deserts, was it? Deserts were all hot sand and camels and... and... he struggled for a while, as a man whose geographical knowledge got severely cramped once you got off paved road... camels, yes, and dates. And possibly bananas and coconuts. But the temperature here made your breath tinkle in the air.

He waved his cigar packet theatrically at a D'reg who was lounging near the tent. The man shrugged.

The fire was just a heap of grey, but Vimes poked around in the vain hope of finding a glowing ember.

He was amazed at how angry he was. Ahmed was the key, he knew it. And now they were stuck out here in the desert, the man had gone, and they were in the hands of... quiet, likeable people, fair enough. Brigands, maybe, the dry land equivalent of pirates, but Carrot would have said they were jolly good chaps for all that. If you were content to be their guest then they were as nice as pie,

always
aeons deep. Terrors unfolded in the velvet shadows and while the nature of
the

talons may change, the nature of the beast does not.

He stood up quietly, and reached for his sword.

It wasn't there.

They'd taken it away. They'd not even—

'A fine night,' said a voice beside him.

Jabbar was standing by his shoulder.

'Who is out there?' Vimes hissed.

'An enemy.'

'Which one?'

Teeth gleamed in the shadows.

'We will find out, offendi.'

'Why would they attack you now?'

'Maybe they think we have something they want, offendi.'

More shadows slid across the desert.

And one rose up right behind Jabbar, reached down and picked him up. A

huge grey

hand dragged his sword out of his belt.

'What do you want me to do with him, Mr Vimes?'

'Detritus?'

The troll saluted with the hand that still held the D'reg.

'All present and correct, sir!'

'But—' And then Vimes realized. 'It's freezing cold! Your brain's working
again?'

'With rather more efficiency, sir.'

'Is this a djinn?' said Jabbar.

'I don't know, but I could certainly do with one,' said Vimes. He finally
managed to locate some matches in his pocket, and lit one. 'Put him down,
sergeant,' he said, puffing his cigar into life. 'Jabbar, this is Sergeant
Detritus. He could break every bone in your body, including some of the
small

concealment
and untruth and compromised by whispering very loudly. To Vimes's horror
the man
came round the edge of a tent holding a tiny lamp.

'Put that damn—'

But he didn't have time to finish the sentence because, somewhere out in
the
night, a man screamed. It was a high-pitched scream and was suddenly
cut off.

'Ah,' said Carrot, crouching down by Vimes and blowing out the lamp. 'That
was
Angua.'

'That was nothing like— oh. Yeah, I think I see what you mean,' Vimes said,
uneasily. 'She's out there, is she?'

'I heard her earlier. She's probably enjoying herself. She doesn't really get
much of a chance to let herself go in Ankh-Morpork.'

'Er... no... ' Vimes had a mental picture of a werewolf letting go. But surely,
Angua wouldn't—

'You two, uh... you're getting along OK, are you?' he said, trying to make
out
shapes in the darkness.

'Oh, fine, sir. Fine.'

So her turning into a wolf occasionally doesn't worry you? Vimes couldn't
bring
himself to say it.

'No... problems, then?'

'Oh, not really, sir. She buys her own dog biscuits and she's got her own
flap
in the door. When it's full moon I don't really get involved.'

There were shouts in the night and then a shape erupted from the
darkness,

streaked past Vimes, and disappeared into a tent. It didn't wait for a door. It

Thank you, she said, wrapping it around her. And before anyone says anything,

I just bit him on the bum. Hard. And that was not the soft option, let me tell you.'

Jabbar looked back into the desert, and then down at the sand, and then at Angua. Vimes could see him thinking, and put a fraternal arm around his shoulders.

'I'd better explain--' he began.

'There's a couple of hundred soldiers out there!' Angua snapped.

'--later.'

'They're taking up positions all round you! And they don't look nice! Has anyone

got any clothes that might fit? And some decent food? And a drink! There's no

water in this place!

'They will not dare attack before dawn,' said Jabbar.

'And what will you do, sir?' said Carrot.

'At dawn we will charge!'

'Ah. Uh. I wonder if I could suggest an alternative approach?'

'Alternative? It is right to charge! Charging is what dawn is for.'

Carrot saluted Vimes. 'I've been reading your book, sir. While you were...

asleep. Tacticus's got quite a lot to say about how to deal with overwhelming

odds, sir.'

'Yes?'

'He says take every opportunity to turn them into underwhelming odds, sir.

We

could attack now.'

'But it's dark, man!'

'It's just as dark for the enemy, sir.'

'I mean it's pitch black! You wouldn't know who the hell you were fighting!

Half

the time you'd be shooting your own side!'

into naked women?

'Sometimes days can go past and it doesn't happen at all,' Angua snapped.

'I'd

like some clothes, please. And a sword, if there's going to be fighting.'

'Um, I think Klatchians have a very particular view about women fighting—'

Carrot began.

'Yes!' said Jabbar. 'We expect them to be good at it, Blue Eyes. We are

D'regs!'

The Boat surfaced in the scummy dead water under a jetty. The lid opened slowly.

'Smells like home,' said Nobby.

'You can't trust the water,' said Sergeant Colon.

'But I don't trust the water at home, sarge.'

Fred Colon managed to get a foothold on the greasy wood. It was, in theory,

quite a heroic enterprise. He and Nobby Nobbs, the bold warriors, were venturing

forth in hostile territory. Unfortunately, he knew they were doing it because Lord Vetinari was sitting in the Boat and would raise his eyebrows in no uncertain manner if they refused.

Colon had always thought that heroes had some special kind of clockwork that

made them go out and die famously for god, country and apple pie, or whatever

particular delicacy their mother made. It had never occurred to him that they

might do it because they'd get yelled at if they didn't.

He reached down.

'Come on up, Nobby,' he said. 'And remember we're doing this for the gods, Ankh—Morpork and—' It seemed to Colon that a foodstuff would indeed be somehow

appropriate. 'And my mum's famous knuckle sandwich!'

Custard, said Nobby.

'Frightening, is it?'

'They wouldn't want to know about it, sarge.'

The docks of Al-Khali were like docks everywhere, because all docks everywhere

are connected. Men have to put things on and off boats. There are only a limited

number of ways to do this. So all docks look the same. Some are hotter, some are

damp, there are always piles of vaguely forgotten-looking things.

In the distance there was the glow of the city, which seemed quite unaware of

the enemy incursion.

"Get us some clothes so that we'll blend in," ' ' muttered Colon. 'That's all very well to say.'

'Nah, nah, that's easy,' said Nobby. 'Everyone knows how to do that one.'

You

lurk in an alley somewhere, right, and you wait until a couple of blokes come by

and you lure them into the alley, see, and there's a couple of thumps, and then

you come out wearing their clothes.'

'That works, does it?'

'Never fails, sarge,' said Nobby confidently.

The desert looked like snow in the moonlight.

Vimes found himself quite at ease with the Tacticus method of fighting. It was

how coppers had always fought. A proper copper didn't line up with a lot of other coppers and rush at people. A copper lurked in the shadows, walked quietly

and bided his time. In all honesty, of course, the time he bided until was the

Because he wasn't at all certain he could kill a man who wasn't actively trying to kill him. Of course, technically any armed Klatchian these days was actively trying to kill him. That was what war was about. But—

He raised his head over the top of the dune. A Klatchian warrior was looking the other way. Vimes crept—

'Bingeley-bingeley beep! This is your seven eh em alarm call, Insert Name Here!

At least I hope—'

'Huh?'

'Damn!'

Vimes reacted first and punched the man on the nose. Since there was no point in waiting to see what effect this would have, he threw himself forward and the two of them rolled down the other side of the freezing dune, struggling and punching.

'—but my real-time function seems erratic at the moment—'

The Klatchian was smaller than Vimes. He was younger, too. But it was unfortunate for him that he appeared to be too young to have learned the repertoire of dirty fighting that spelled survival in Ankh-Morpork's back streets. Vimes, on the other hand, was prepared to hit anything with anything.

The point was that the opponent shouldn't get up again. Everything else was decoration.

They slid to a halt at the bottom of the dune, with Vimes on top and the Klatchian groaning.

'Things To Do,' the Dis-organizer shrilled: 'Ache.'

And then... It was probably throat cutting time. Back home Vimes could have

I didn't want to be here, Mr Vimes! The words came fast, desperate.

'All right, all right, I'm not going to hurt you.'

Vimes lowered his fist and stood up, pulling the boy up after him.

'Talk later,' he muttered. 'Come on!'

'No! Everyone knows what the D'regs do to their captives!'

'Well I'm their captive and they'll have to do it to both of us, OK? Keep away from the more amusing food and you'll probably be OK.'

Someone whistled in the darkness.

'Come on, lad!' hissed Vimes. 'No harm's going to come to you! Well... less than'd come if you stayed here. All right?'

This time he didn't give the boy time to argue, but dragged him along. As he

headed towards the D'regs' camp, other figures slid down the dunes.

One of them had an arm missing and had a sword sticking in him.

'How did you get on, Reg?' said Vimes.

'A bit odd, sir. After the first one chopped my arm off and stabbed me, the rest

of them seemed to Keep out of my way. Honestly, you'd think they'd never seen a

man stabbed before.'

'Did you find your arm?'

Reg waved something in the air.

'That's another thing,' he said. 'I hit a few of them with it and they ran off screaming.'

'It's your type of unarmed combat,' said Vimes. 'It probably takes some getting used to.'

'Is that a prisoner you've got there?'

'In a way.' Vimes glanced around. 'He seems to have fainted. I can't think why.'

Reg leaned closer. 'These foreigners are a bit weird,' he said.

'Reg?'

'Yes?'

them.

Well, Colon thought of them as attackers. Technically, he supposed they were

defenders. Aggressive defenders.

'Just run all that past me again, will you?' he said.

'We find a couple of blokes about our height and weight—'

'We did that.'

'We lure them into this alley—'

'We did that.'

'I take a swing at them with a length of wood and hit you by accident in the dark and they get angry and turn out to be thieves and nick all our clothes.'

'We weren't supposed to do that.'

'Well it worked basically,' said Nobby, managing to get to his knees. — 'We could give it another go.'

'Nobby, you're in a port in a foreign city clad only in your, and I use this word with feeling, Nobby, your unmentionables. This is not the point to start talking about luring people into alleys. There could be talk.'

'Angua always says that nakedness is the national costume everywhere, sarge.'

'She was talking about herself, Nobby,' said Colon, sidling along in the shadows. 'It's different for you.'

He peered around the other end of the alley. There was noise and chatter from

the building that formed one of the walls. A couple of laden donkeys waited patiently outside.

'Nip out and grab one of those packs, right?'

'Why me, sarge?'

' 'cos you're the corporal and I'm the sergeant. And you've got more on than me.'

Grumbling under his breath, Nobby edged into the narrow street and unfastened a

tether as fast as he could. The animal followed him obediently.

Sergeant Colon pulled at the pack.

Beggars can't be choosers,' said Colon, struggling into the costume. Go

on,
put your fez on.'

'It makes me look like a twit, sarge.'

'Look, I'll put mine on, all right?'

'Then we'll be fez to fez, sarge.'

Sergeant Colon gave him a severe look. 'Did you have that one prepared, Nobby?'

'No, sarge, I just made it up in my head right then.'

'Well, look, no calling me sarge. That doesn't sound Klatchian.'

'Nor does Nobby, sa— Sorry...'

'Oh, I dunno... you could be... Knobi or Nrobi... or Gnobbee... Sounds pretty

pretty
Klatchian to me.'

'What's a good Klatchian name for you, then? I don't know hardly any,' said Nrobi.

Sergeant Colon didn't answer. He was peering round the corner again.

'His lordship did say we was not to hang about,' Nobby murmured.

'Yeah, but inside that tin can, well, it smells pretty lived-in, if you know what I mean. What I wouldn't give for—'

There was a bellow behind them. They turned.

There were three Klatchian soldiers. Or possibly watchmen. Nobby and Sergeant

Colon didn't look much further than the swords.

The leader growled a question at them.

'What did he say?' Nobby quavered.

'Dunno!'

'Where you from?' said the leader, in Morporkian.

'What? Oh... er... ' Colon hesitated, waiting for shiny death.

'Hah, yes.' The guard lowered his sword and jerked a thumb towards the docks.

'You get back to your detachment now!'

'Right!' said Nobby.

until

they were on the greasy jetty, which somehow felt like home.

'What was that all about, s— AI?' said Nobby. 'All they wanted to do was push us

around a bit! Typical Watch behaviour,' he added. 'Not ours, of course.'

'I suppose we had the right clothes on...'

'You didn't even tell them where we came from! And they spoke our language!'

'Well, they... I mean... anyone ought to be able to speak Morporkian,' said Colon, gradually regaining his mental balance. 'Even babies learn it. I bet it comes easy after learning somethin' as complicated as Klatchian.'

'What're we going to do with the donkey, AI?'

'Do you think it can pedal?'

'I doubt it.'

'Then leave it up here.'

'But it'll get pinched, AI.'

'Oh, these Klatchians'll pinch anything.'

'Not like us, eh, AI?'

Nobby looked at the forest of masts filling the bay.

'Looks like even more of 'em from here,' he said. 'You could walk from boat to

boat for a mile. What're they all here for?'

'Don't be daft, Nobby. It's obvious. They're to take everyone to Ankh—Morpork!'

'What for? We don't eat that much cur—'

'Invasion, Nobby! There's a war on, remember?'

They looked back at the ships. Riding lights gleamed on the water.

The bit of it that was immediately below them bubbled for a moment, and then the

hull of the Boat rose a few inches above the surface. The lid unscrewed and

Leonard's worried face appeared.

'Ah, there you are,' he said. 'We were getting concerned...'

bucolic stupidity. For some reason, I cannot think why, the guard must have assumed you were from there. And Morporkian is something of a lingua franca even

in the Klatchian empire. When someone from Hersheba needs to trade with someone

from Istanzia, they will undoubtedly haggle in Morporkian. This will serve us well, of course, The force that is being assembled here must mean that practically every man is a distant stranger with outlandish ways. Provided we do

not act too foreign, we should pass muster. This means not asking for curry with

swede and currants in it and refraining from ordering pints of Winkle's Old Peculiar, do I make myself clear?

'Er... what is it we're going to do, sir?'

'We will reconnoitre initially.'

'Ah, right. Yes. Very important.'

'And then seek out the Klatchian high command. Thanks to Leonard I have a

little... package to deliver. I hope it will end the war very quickly.'

Sergeant Colon looked blank. At some point in the last few seconds the conversation had run away with him.

'Sorry, sir... you said high command, sir.'

'Yes, sergeant.'

'Like... the top brass, or turbans or whatever... all surrounded by crack troops, sir. That's where you always put the best troops, around the top brass.'

'I expect this will be the case, yes. In fact, I rather hope it is.'

Sergeant Colon, once again, tried to keep up.

'Ah. Right. And we'll go and look for them, will we, sir?'

'I can hardly ask them to come to us, sergeant.'

'Right, sir. I can see that, It could get a bit crowded.'

At last, Lord Vetinari looked up.

'Is there some problem, sergeant?'

Oh, good, sir.

'Good.' Vetinari began to pull other items out of the liberated sack. There was a set of jugglers clubs, a bag of coloured balls and finally a placard, such as

might be placed to one side of the stage during an artiste's performance.

' "Culli, Gulli and Beti", ' he read. "Exotic tricks and dances". Hmm,' he added. 'It would seem there was a lady among the owners of this sack.'

The watchmen looked at the gauzy material that came out of the sack next.

Nobby's eyes bulged.

'What are them?'

'I believe they are called harem pants, corporal.'

'They're very—'

'Curiously, the purpose of the clothing of the nautch girl or exotic dancer has

—always been less to reveal and more to suggest the imminence of revelation,'

said the Patrician.

Nobby looked down at his costume, and then at Sergeant Al—Colon in his costume,

and said cheerfully, 'Well, I ain't sure it's going to suit you, sir.'

He regretted the words immediately.

'I hadn't intended that they should suit me,' said the Patrician calmly.

'Please

pass me your fez, Corporal Beti.'

The subtle, deceiving dawn-before-dawn slid over the desert, and the commander

of the Klatchian detachment wasn't happy about it.

The D'regs always attacked at dawn. All of them. It didn't matter how many of

them there were, or how many of you there were. Anyway, the whole tribe

overstretched... well, he hadn't actually said, because that sort of thing could get you into trouble in this man's army, but he'd thought it very hard. Half of them were keen kids who thought that if you went into battle shouting and waving your sword in the air the enemy just ran away. They'd never faced a D'reg chicken coming in at eye height. As for the rest of it... in the night people had run into one another, ambushed one another by mistake and were now as jittery as peas on a drum. A man had lost his sword and swore that someone had walked away with it stuck right through him. And some kind of rock had got up and walked around hitting people. With other people.

The sun was well up now.

'It's the waiting that's the worst part,' said his sergeant, next to him.

'It might be the worst part,' said the commander. 'Or, there again, the bit where they suddenly rise out of the desert and cut you in half might be the worst part.' He stared mournfully at the treacherously empty sand. 'Or the bit

where a maddened sheep tries to gnaw your nose off might be the worst part. In

fact, when you think of all the things that can happen when you're surrounded by

a horde of screaming D'regs, the bit where they aren't there at all is, I think you'll find, the best part.'

The sergeant wasn't trained for this sort of thing. So he said, 'They're late.'

'Good. Rather them than us.'

'Sun's right up now, sir.'

The commander looked at his shadow. It was full day, and the sand was mercifully

Why don't we rush 'em, sir?

'You haven't fought D'regs before, sergeant?'

'No, sir. I've been pacifying the Mad Savatars in Uhistan, though, and they're—'

'The D'regs are worse, sergeant. They pacify right back at you.'

'I didn't say how mad the Savatars were, sir.'

'Compared to the D'regs, they were merely slightly vexed.'

The sergeant felt that his reputation was being impugned.

'How about I take a few men and investigate, sir?'

The commander glanced at the sun again. Already the air was too hot to breathe.

'Oh, very well. Let's go.'

The Klatchians advanced on the camp. There were the tents, and the ash of fires.

But there were no camels and horses, merely a long scuffed trail leading off among the dunes.

Morale began to rise a little. Attacking a dangerous enemy who isn't there is

one of the more attractive forms of warfare, and there was a certain amount of

assertion about how lucky the D'regs were to have run away in time, and some

extemporizing on the subject of what the soldiers would have done to the D'regs

if they'd caught them...

'Who's that?' said the sergeant.

A figure appeared between the dunes, riding on a camel. His white robes fluttered in the breeze.

He slid down when he reached the Klatchians, and waved at them.

'Good morning, gentlemen! May I persuade you to surrender?'

'Who are you?'

'Captain Carrot, sir. If you would be kind enough to lay down your weapons no-one will get hurt.'

not to charge?

'It was tricky, but I think they've got the idea,' said Carrot.

The commander considered his position. There were D'regs on either side.

His

troop were practically huddling together. And this red-headed, blue-eyed man was

smiling at him.

'How do they feel about the merciful treatment of prisoners?' he ventured.

'I think they could get the hang of it. If I insist.'

The commander glanced at the silent D'regs again.

'Why?' he said. 'Why aren't they fighting us?' he said.

'My commander says he doesn't want unnecessary loss of life, sir,' said Carrot.

'That's Commander Vimes, sir. He's sitting on that dune up there.'

'You can persuade armed D'regs not to charge and you have a commander?'

'Yes, sir. He says this is a police action.'

The commander swallowed. 'We give in,' he said.

'What, just like that, sir?' said his sergeant. 'Without a fight?'

'Yes, sergeant. Without a fight. This man can make water run uphill and he has a

commander. I love the idea of giving in without a fight. I've fought for ten years and giving in without a fight is what I've always wanted to do.'

Water dripped off the Boat's metal ceiling and blobbed on to the paper in front

of Leonard of Quirm. He wiped it away. It might have been boring, waiting in a

small metal can under a nondescript jetty, but Leonard had no concept of the

term.

Absentmindedly, he jotted a brief sketch of an improved ventilation system.

He started to watch his own hand. Almost without his guidance, taking its

enemy
ships. And here and here a tube...

He stopped and stared at his drawing for a while. Then he sighed and started to tear it up.

Vimes watched from the dune. He couldn't hear much from up here, but he didn't need to.

Angua sat down beside him. 'It's working, isn't it?' she said.

'Yes.'

'What's he going to do?'

'Oh, he'll take their weapons and let 'em go, I suppose.'

'Why do people follow him?' said Angua.

'Well, you're his girlfriend, you ought –'

'That's different. I love him because he's kind without thinking about it. He doesn't watch his own thoughts like other people do. When he does good things

it's because he's decided to do them, not because he's trying to measure up to

something. He's so simple. Anyway, I'm a wolf living with people, and there's a

name for wolves that live with people. If he whistled, I'd come running.'

Vimes tried not to show his embarrassment.

Angua smiled. 'Don't worry, Mr Vimes. You've said it yourself. Sooner or later,

we're all someone's dog.'

'It's like hypnotism,' said Vimes hurriedly. 'people follow him to see what's going to happen next. They tell themselves that they're just going along with it

for a while and can stop any time they want to, but they never want to. It's damn magic.'

about

people—'

'Oh, you'd better believe that!'

'—but Carrot takes an interest. He doesn't even think about it. He makes space

in his head for people. He takes an interest, and so people think they're interesting. They feel... better when he's around.'

Vimes glanced down. Her fingers were drawing aimlessly in the sand again. We're

all changing in the desert, he thought. It's not like the city, hemming your thoughts in. You can feel your mind expand to the horizons. No wonder this is

where religions start. And suddenly here I am, probably not legally, just trying

to do my job. Why? Because I'm too damn stupid to stop and think before I give

chase, that's why. Even Carrot knew better than to do that. I'd have just chased

after Ahmed's ship without a thought, but he was bright enough to report back to

me first. He did what a responsible officer ought to do, but me...

'Vetinari's terrier,' he said aloud. 'Chase first, and think about it afterwards—'

His eye caught the distant bulk of Gebra. Out there was a Klatchian army, and

somewhere over there was the AnkhMorpork army, and he was a handful of people

and no plan because he'd chased first and

'But I had to,' he said. 'Any copper wouldn't have let a suspect like Ahmed get

,

Once again he had the feeling that the problem he was facing wasn't really a

is that your demon diary,' said Angua.

Vimes rolled his eyes. 'Yes. Although it seems to be talking about someone else.'

'... er... three pee em,' the demon muttered slowly, '... day not filled in...
Check Wall Defences...'

'See? It thinks I'm in Ankh-Morpork! It cost Sybil three hundred dollars and it

can't even keep track of where I am.'

He flicked his cigar butt away and stood up.

'I'd better get down there,' he said. 'After all, I am the boss.'

He slithered his way down the dune and strolled towards Carrot, who salaamed to

him.

'A salute would do, captain, thanks all the same.'

'Sorry, sir. I think I got a bit carried away.'

'Why've you made them strip off?'

'Makes them a bit of a laughing stock when they return, sir. A blow to their pride.' He leaned closer and whispered, 'I've let their commander keep his clothes on, though. It doesn't do to show up the officers.'

'Really?' said Vimes.

'And some want to join us, sir. There's Goriffs lad and a few others. They were

just dragooned into the army yesterday. They don't even know why they're fighting. So I said they could.'

Vimes took the captain aside. 'Er... I don't remember suggesting that any of the

prisoners joined us,' he said quietly.

'Well, sir... I thought, what with our army approaching, and since quite a lot of these lads are from various corners of the empire and don't like the Klatchians any more than we do, I thought that a flying column of guerrilla fighters—'

'We aren't soldiers!'

'Er, I thought we were soldiers—'

'Yes, friend?' said Jabbar. It was the voice of someone who recognized dawn, noon and sunset, and just let everything in between happen whenever it liked.

'So why's he called 71-hour Ahmed? What's so special about the extra hour?'

Jabbar grinned nervously.

'Did he do something after seventy-one hours?' said Vimes.

Jabbar folded his arms. 'I will not say.'

'He told you to keep us here?'

'Yes.'

'But not to kill us.'

'Oh, I would not kill my friend Sir Sam Mule—'

'And don't give me all that eyeball rubbish,' said Vimes. 'He wanted time to get

somewhere and do something, right?'

'I will not say.'

'You don't need to,' said Vimes. 'Because we are leaving. And if you kill us...

well, probably you can. But 71-hour Ahmed would not like that, I expect.'

Jabbar looked like a man making a difficult decision.

'He will be coming back!' he said. 'Tomorrow! No problem!'

'I'm not waiting! And I don't think he wants me killed, Jabbar. He wants me alive. Carrot?'

Carrot hurried over. 'Yes, sir?'

Vimes was aware that Jabbar was staring at him in horror.

'We've lost Ahmed,' he said. 'Even Angua can't pick up his trail with the sand

blowing all over the place. We've got no place here. We're not needed here.'

'But we are, sir!' Carrot burst out. 'We could help the desert tribes—'

'Oh, you want to stay and fight?' said Vimes. 'Against the Klatchians?'

'Against the bad Klatchians, sir.'

NO. I swore to him.

'But D'regs are oath-breakers. Everyone knows that.'

. Jabbar gave Vimes a grin. 'Oh, oaths. Stupid things. I gave him my word.'

'He won't break it, sir,' said Carrot. 'D'regs are very particular about things like that. It's only when they swear on gods and things that they'll ever break

an oath.'

'I will not tell you where he is,' said Jabbar. 'But...' he grinned again, but there was no humour in it, 'how brave are you, Mr Vimes?'

'Stop complaining, Nobby.'

'I'm not complaining. I'm just sayin' these trousers are a bit draughty, that's all I'm saying.'

'They look good on you, though.'

'And what're these tin bowls supposed to be doing?'

'They're supposed to be protecting the bits you haven't got, Nobby.'

'The way this breeze is blowing, I could do with some to protect the bits I have.'

'Just try and act ladylike, will you, Nobby?'

Which would be hard, Sergeant Colon had to admit. The lady for whom the clothes

had been made had been quite tall and somewhat full-figured, whereas Nobby

without his armour could have hidden behind a short stick if you attached a toast rack to it about two-thirds of the way up. He looked like a gauzy accordion with a lot of jewellery. In theory, the costume would have been quite

revealing, if Corporal Nobbs was something you wished to see revealed, but there

were so many billows and folds now that all one could reliably say was that he

was in there somewhere. He was leading the donkey, which seemed to like him.

attention,
although a few people did turn round to watch Corporal Nobbs. Goats and chickens

ambled out of the way as they passed.

'Watch out for people trying to sell you dirty postcards, Nobby,' said Colon.

'My uncle was here once and he said some bloke tried to sell him a pack of dirty

postcards for five dollars. Disgusted, he was.'

'Yeah, 'cos you can get 'em in the Shades for two dollars,' said Nobby.

'That's what he said. And they were Ankh–Morpork ones. Trying to flog us our own

dirty postcards? I call that disgusting, frankly.'

'Good morning, sultan!' said a cheerful and somehow familiar voice. 'New in town, are we?'

All three of them turned to a figure that had magically appeared from the mouth

of an alleyway.

'Indeed, yes,' said the Patrician.

'I could see you were! Everyone is, these days. And it is your lucky day, shah!

I am here to help, right? You want something, I got it!'

Sergeant Colon had been staring at the newcomer. He said, in a faraway voice,

'Your name's going to be something like... Al–jibla or something, right?'

'Heard about me, have you?' said the trader jovially.

'Sort of, yeah,' said Colon slowly. 'You're amazingly... familiar.'

Lord Vetinari pushed him aside. 'We are strolling entertainers,' he said. 'We were hoping to get an engagement at the Prince's palace... Perhaps you

could

help?'

The man rubbed his beard thoughtfully, causing various particles to cascade into

the little bowls in his tray.

those bearded faces he saw himself and Nobby, who at home would always saunter

over to anything on the street that looked interesting.

'You are jugglers, are you?' said one of them. 'Let's see you juggle, then.'

Lord Vetinari gave them a blank look and then glanced down at the tray around

Al-jibla's neck. Among the more identifiable foodstuffs were a number of green melons.

'Very well,' he said, and picked up three of them.

Sergeant Colon shut his eyes.

After a few seconds he opened them again because a guard had said, 'All right,

but anyone can do it with three.'

'In that case perhaps Mr Al-jibla will throw me a few more?' said the Patrician,

as the balls spun through his hands.

Sergeant Colon shut his eyes again.

After a short while a guard said, 'Seven is pretty good. But it's just melons.'

Colon opened his eyes.

The Klatchian guard twitched his robe aside. Half a dozen throwing knives glinted. And so did his teeth.

Lord Vetinari nodded. To Colon's growing surprise he did not seem to be watching

the tumbling melons at all.

'Four melons and three knives,' he said. 'If you would care to give the knives

to my charming assistant Beti...'

'Who?' said Nobby.

'Oh? Why not seven knives, then?'

'Kind sirs, that would be too simple,' said Lord Vetinari.[13] 'I am but a humble tumbler. Please let me practice my art.'

'Beti?' said Nobby, glowering under his veils.

avoid

a brief cigarette in the sunshine. He was also aware that other people were drifting over to watch the show.

'To me, please... Al,' said the Patrician, nodding.

Colon tossed him the knives, slowly and gingerly. He's going to try to stab the

guards, he thought. It's a ruse. And then everyone's going to tear us apart.

Now the circling blur glinted in the sunlight. There was a murmur of approval

from the crowd.

'Yet somehow dull,' said the Patrician.

And his hands moved in a complex pattern that suggested that his wrists must

have moved through one another at least twice.

The tangled ball of hurtling fruit and cutlery leapt into the air.

Three melons dropped to the ground, cut cleanly in two.

Three knives thudded into the dust a few inches from their owner's sandals.

And Sergeant Colon looked up and into a growing, greenish, expanding

The melon exploded, and so did the audience, but both their laughter and the

humour was slightly lost on Colon as he scraped over-ripe pith out of his cars.

The survival instinct cut in again. Stagger around backwards, it said. So he staggered around back-wards, waving his legs in the air. Fall down

heavily, it

said. So he sat down, and almost squashed a chicken. Lose your dignity, it said;

of all the things you've got, it's the one you can most afford to lose.

Lord Vetinari helped him up. 'Our very lives depend on your appearing to be a

stupid fat idiot,' he hissed, putting Colon's fez back on his head.

'I ain't very good at acting, sir--'

'Good!'

across the
three halves, switching them at bewildering speed. 'Round and round they
go,
just like that! Now... where's the egg? What about you, shah?'
Al-jibla smirked.

' 's the one on the left,' he said. 'It always is.'
Lord Vetinari lifted the melon. The board below was eggless.
'And you, noble guardsman?'

' 's got to be the one in the middle,' said the guard.

'Yes, of course... oh dear, it isn't...'

The crowd looked at the last melon. They were street people. They knew
the

score. When the object can be under one of three things, and it's already
turned

out not to be under two of them, then the one place it was certainly not
going

to be was under the third. Only some kind of gullible fool would believe
something like that. Of course there was going to be a trick. There always
was a

trick. But you watched it, in order to see a trick done well.

Lord Vetinari raised the melon nevertheless, and the crowd nodded in
satisfaction. Of course it wasn't there. It'd be a pretty poor day for street
entertainment if things were where they were supposed to be.

Sergeant Colon knew what was going to happen next, and he knew this
because for

the last minute or so something had been pecking at his head.

Aware that this was probably his moment, he raised his fez and revealed a
very

small fluffy chick.

'Have you got a towel? I am afraid it has just gone to the toilet on my head,
sir.'

There was laughter, some applause and, to his amazement, a tinkling of
coins

to
fry in the wrath of the ascendant Nobbs.
'I meant no offence, oh doe-eyed one—'
'Oh? Pastry-faced, am W Nobby flung out an arm in a crash of bracelets
and
knocked the man over. 'You've got a lot to learn about women, young man!'
And
then, because a Nobbs could never resist a prone target, the petite Beti
drew
back a steel-capped boot
'Beti!' snapped the Patrician.
'Oh, right, yeah, right,' said Nobby, with veiled contempt. 'Everyone can tell
me what to do, right? Just because I happen to be the woman around here
I'm just
supposed to accept it all, eh?'
'No, you just ain't supposed to kick him inna fork,' hissed Colon, pulling him
away. 'It don't look good.' Although he noted, the women in the crowd
seemed to
be disappointed by the sudden curtailment of the performance.
'And there are many strange stories we can tell you!' shouted the Patrician.
'Beti certainly could,' murmured Colon, and was kicked sharply on his
ankle.
'And many strange sights we can show you!'
'Beti cert— Aargh!'
'But for now we will seek the shade of yonder caravanserai...'
'What're we doing?'
'We're going to the pub.'
The crowd began to disperse, but with occasional amused glances back at
the
trio.
One of the guards nodded at Colon. 'Nice show,' he said. 'Especially the bit
where your lady didn't remove any veils— He darted behind his colleague as
Nobby

backed
on to the privies but because of a small fountain in the middle of the
cobble.

And it was cool, much cooler than in the street, even though the vine
leaves
scarcely hid the sky.

'Didn't know you could juggle, sir,' Colon whispered to Lord Vetinari.

'You mean you can't, sergeant?'

'Nossir!'

'How strange. It's hardly a skill, is it? One knows
what the objects are and where they want to go. After that it's just a case of
letting them occupy the correct positions in time and space.'

'You're dead good at it, sir. Practise often, do you?'

'Until today, I've never tried.' Lord Vetinari looked at Colon's astonished
expression. 'After Ankh-Morpork, sergeant, a handful of flying melons
present a

very minor problem indeed.'

'I'm amazed, sir.'

'And in politics, sergeant, it is always important to know where the chicken
is.'

Colon raised his fez. 'Is this one still on my head?'

'It seems to have gone to sleep. I wouldn't disturb it, if I were you.'

'Here, you, juggler... she can't come in here!'

They looked up. Someone with a face and apron that said 'barman' in seven
seven

hundred languages was standing over them, a wine jug in each hand.

'No women in here,' he went on.

'Why not?' said Nobby.

'No women asking questions, neither.'

'Why not?'

' 'cos it is written, that's why.'

'Where'm I supposed to go, then?'

The barman shrugged. 'Who knows where women go?,'

So why are you, I hear, always putting up kitchen furniture?

'Well, obviously, you've got to listen to—'

'In fact Klatchian history is full of famous examples of women who even went to

war with their men,' said the Patrician.

'What? On the same side?'

'Prince Arkven's wife Tistam used to ride into the battle with her husband and,

according to legend, killed ten thousand thousand men.'

'That's a lot of men.'

'Legends are prone to inflation. However, I believe there is good historical evidence that Queen Sowawondra of Sumtri had more than thirty thousand people

put to death during her reign. She could be quite touchy, they say.'

'You should hear my wife if I don't put the plates away,' said Sergeant Colon

gloomily.

'Now we are integrated with the local population, sergeant,' said the Patrician,

'we must find out what is happening. Although an invasion is clearly planned, I

feel sure Prince Cadram will have reserved some forces in case of land attack.

It would be nice to know where they are, because that's where he will be.'

'Right.'

'You think you can handle this?'

'Yessir. I know Klatchians, sir. Don't you worry about that.'

'Here's some money. Buy drinks for people. Mingle.'

'Right.'

'Not too many drinks, but as much mingling as you are capable of.'

'I'm a good mingler, sir.'

'Off you go, then.'

'Sir?'

He sat down. The men on either side of him obediently shunned along. Now then, how did you... ah, right... anyone knew how Klatchians talked... 'Greetings, fellow brothers of the dessert,' he said. 'I don't know about you, but I could just do with a plate of sheep's eyeballs, eh? I bet you boys can't wait to be back on your camels, I know I can't. I spit upon the defiling dogs of Ank-Morpork. Anyone had any baksheesh lately? You can call me Al.'

'Excuse me, are you the lady who is with the clowns?' Corporal Nobbs, who had been trudging along gloomily, looked up. He was being addressed by a pleasant-faced young woman. A woman actually talking to him by choice was a novelty. Smiling while doing so was unheard of. 'Er yeah. Right. That's me.' He swallowed... 'Beti.' 'My name is Bana. Would you like to come and talk with us?' Nobby looked past her. There were a number of women of varying ages sitting around a large well. One of them waved at him shyly. He blinked. This was uncharted territory. He looked down at his clothes, which were already the worse for wear. His clothes always looked the worse for wear five minutes after he'd put them on. 'Oh, don't worry,' said the girl. 'We know how it is. But you looked so alone. And perhaps you can help us... They were among the group now._ There were women of every legitimate shape and size, and so far none of them had said 'Yuk,' an experience hitherto unchronicled in Nobby's personal history. In a detached, light-headed way, Corporal Nobbs felt that he was entering Paradise, and it was only an unfortunate detail that he'd come to via the wrong door. 'We are trying to comfort Netal,' said the girl. 'Her betrothed won't marry her

the words 'mother-in-law' would be all the way through.

'Oh, Mrs Atbar,' said Netal, 'he said it was his duty. Anyway, all the boys have had to go.'

'Men!' said Nobby, rolling his eyes.

'I expect you'd know a lot about the pleasures of men, then,' said Mother-in-Law sourly.

'Mother!'

'Who, me?' said Nobby, forgetting himself for a moment. 'Oh, yeah. Lots.'

'You do?'

'Why not? Beer's favourite,' said Nobby. 'But you can't beat a good cigar, as long as it's free.'

'Hah!' Mother-in-Law picked up a basket of washing and stamped away, followed by

most of the older women. The others laughed. Even the disappointed Netal smiled.

'I think that's not what she meant,' said Bana. To a chorus of giggles, she leaned down and whispered in Nobby's ear.

His expression did not change but it did seem to solidify.

'Oh, that,' he said.

There were some worlds of experience which Nobby had only contemplated on a map,

but he knew what she was talking about. Of course he'd patrolled certain parts

of the Shades in his time – the ones where young ladies tended to hang around

without very much to do, and probably catching cold too – but those areas of

police work that in other places might be of interest to a Vice Squad now tended

Or, that, he mumbled. 'Well, I've seen a thing or two, he added. Largely on

postcards, he had to admit.

'It must be wonderful to have so much freedom,' said Bana.

'Er.. .'

Netal burst out crying again. Her friends fluttered around her.

'I don't see why the men have to go off like this,' said Bana. 'My betrothed has

gone too.'

There was a cackle from a very old woman sitting by the well. 'I can tell you why, dears. Because it's better than growing melons all day. It's better than women.'

'Men think war is better than women?'

'It's always fresh, it's always young, and you can make a good fight last all day.'

'But they get killed!'

'Better to die in battle than in bed, they say' She cracked a toothless grin.

'But there are good ways for a man to die in bed, eh, Beti?'

Nobby hoped the glow of his ears wasn't singeing his veil. Suddenly, he felt he'd caught up with his future. Ten damn pence worth of it hit him in the face.

' 'scuse me,' he said. 'Are any of you Nubilians?'

'What are Nubilians?' said Bana.

'It's a country round here,' said Nobby. He added hopefully, 'Isn't it?'

Not a single face suggested that this was so.

Nobby sighed. His hand reached up to his ear for a cigarette end, but it came

down again empty.

'I'll tell you this, girls,' he said. 'I wish I'd settled for the tendollar version. Don't you just sometimes want to sit down and cry?'

'You look even sadder than Netal,' said Bana. 'Isn't there some way we can cheer

you up?'

your toolbox—

'Now, come on it's not his fault, let's show a little charity.' The speaker cleared his throat. 'Good morning, friend,' he said. 'May we invite you to share our couscous?'

Sergeant Colon peered at the bowl, and then dipped in a finger and tasted it.

'Hey, this is semolina! You've got semolina! It's just ordinary semol—' He stopped, and coughed. 'Yeah, right. Thanks. Got any strawberry jam?'

The host looked at his friends. They shrugged.

'We know not of this "strawberry hjam" of which you speak,' he said carefully,

We prefer it with lamb.' He offered Colon a long wooden skewer.

'Oh, you gotta have strawberry jam,' said Colon, carried away. 'When we were

kids we'd stir it in and... and...' He looked at their faces, 'O' course, that was back in Ur,' he said.

The men nodded at one another. Suddenly it was all dear.

Colon belched loudly.

From the looks he got from everyone else, he was the only one who'd heard of

this common Klatchian custom.

'So,' he said, 'where's the army these days? Approximately?'

'Why do you ask, o full-of-gas one?'

'Oh, we thought we could make a bit of cash entertaining the troops,' said Colon. He was immensely proud of this idea. 'You know... a smile, a song, a lack

of exotic dancing. But that means we got to know where they are, see?'

'Excuse me, fat one, but can you understand what I am saying?'

'Yes, it's very tasty,' Colon hazarded.

'Ah. I thought so. So he's a spy. But whose?'

'Really? Who would be so stupid as to use a joke like this as a spy?'

'Ankh-Morpork?'

Am... politics.

'Let's call the watch, then.'

'Are you mad? We've been talking to him! They will be... inquisitive.'

'Good point. I know...'

Faifal gave Colon a big grin.

'I did hear the entire army has marched away to En al Sams la Laisa, 'he said.

'But don't tell anyone.

'Have they?' Colon glanced at the other men. They were watching him with curiously deadpan expressions.

'Sounds like a massive place, with a name like that,' he said.

'Oh, huge,' said his neighbour. One of the other men made a noise that you might

think was a suppressed chuckle.

'It's a long way, is it?'

'No, very close. You're practically on top of it,' said Faifal. He nudged a colleague, whose shoulders were shaking.

'Oh, right. Big army, is it?'

'Could easily be very big, yes.'

'Fine. Fine,' said Colon. 'Er... anyone got a pencil? I could've sworn I had one when—'

There was a noise outside the tavern. It was the sound of many women laughing,

which is always a disquieting noise to men.[16] Customers peered suspiciously

through the vines.

Colon and the rest of the crowd looked around an urn at the group by the well.

An old lady was rolling on the ground, laughing, and various younger ones were

leaning against one another for support.

He heard one of them say, 'What did he say again?'

Really? Oh, I've got a thousand and one of em. Well, anyway, he went and saw

the wise old blacksmith, right, and he said—'

'You can't go round telling stories like that, cor— Beti,' Colon panted as he lumbered to a halt.

Nobby realized that a change had come over the group. Now he was surrounded by

women who were in the presence of a man. A known man, he corrected himself.

Several of them were blushing. They hadn't blushed before.

'Why not?' said Beti nastily.

'You'll offend people,' said Colon uncertainly.

'Er, we are not offended, sir,' said Bana, in a small humble voice. 'We think Beti's stories are very... instructive. Especially. the one about the man who went into the tavern with the very small musician.'

'And that was pretty hard to translate,' said Nobby, 'because they don't really

know what a piano is in Klatch. But it turns out there's this kind of stringed—'

'And it was very interesting about the man with his arms and legs in plaster,'

said Neta.

'Yeah, and they laughed even though they don't have the same kind of doorbells

here,' said Nobby. 'Here, you don't have to go—'

But the group around the well was dispersing. Water jugs were being picked up

and carried away. A kind of preoccupied busyness came over the women.

Bana nodded at Beti. 'Er... thank you. It's been very... interesting. But we must go. It was so kind of you to talk to us.'

'Er, no, don't go...'

A faint suggestion of perfume hung in the air.

Beti glared at Colon. 'Sometimes I really want to give you a right ding

through
the nearest open one.

There had been some narrow spiral stairs inside, but her stall was pretty narrow and steps didn't worry a donkey that was used to the streets of Al-Khali. It was only a disappointment when the steps came to an end and there was still no hay.

'Oh no,' said someone behind Colon. 'There's a donkey up the minaret again.'

There were groans all round.

'What's wrong with that? What goes up must come down,' said Colon.

'You don't know?' said one of his dining companions. 'You don't have minarets in

Tar?'

'Er--' said Colon.

'We have plenty of donkeys,' said Lord Vetinari. There was general laughter,

most of it directed at Colon.

One of the men pointed to the dim interior of the minaret.

'Look. ... see?'

'A very narrow, winding staircase,' said the Patrician. 'So... ?'

'There's nowhere to turn at the top, right? Oh, any fool can get a donkey up a

minaret. But have you ever tried getting an animal to go backwards down a narrow

staircase in the dark? Can't be done.'

'There's something about a rising staircase,' said someone else. 'It attracts donkeys. They think there's something at the top.'

'We had to push the last one off, didn't we.?' said one of the guards.

'Right. It splashed,' said his comrade in arms.

'No one is pushing Valerie off anything,' snarled Beti. 'Any one of you tries anything like that and, s'welp me, you'll feel the wrong end of--' He

I don't know if they ever got that man down on the flagpole, 'vetinam went on.

'Oh, most of 'im, they did,' said Colon.

'Tell you what, tell you what,' said the guard hurriedly, 'suppose we get a rope

round it—'

'—her—' Beti growled.

'Her, right, and then —'

'You'd need at least three men up there and there ain't no room!'

'Sir, I've got an idea,' whispered one of the guards.

'I should make it quick,' said Colon. "cos there's no stopping Beti once she gets going.'

The guards held a whispered argument.

'We'd get into trouble if we do that! You know all that stuff we were told about

the war effort! That's why they were all confiscated!'

'No one will miss it for five minutes!'

'Yeah, but you want to tell the prince we lost one?'

'All right, but do you want to explain to her?'

They both looked at Beti. 'And they're easy to steer, after all,'" one whispered.

'Valerie?' said Sergeant Colon.

'There is a problem?' Beti demanded.

'No! No. It's a fine name for a donkey, N— Beti.'

'No-one is to do anything,' said one of the guards. 'We will return.'

'What was all that about?' said Colon, watching them go.

'Oh, they've probably gone to get a carpet,' said someone.

'Very nice, but I don't see how that'd help,' said Bets.

'A flying one.'

'Oh, right,' said Colon. 'They've got one of those up at the University—,

'Ur has a university?'

'Oh, indeed,' said the Patrician. 'How do you think Al learned what a donkey looks like?'

round, and it won't come down backwards.

'I shall consider the situation,' said the Patrician.

He ambled back into the tavern for a moment, and returned. They saw him enter

the door and they heard him climbing the staircase.

'Should be good,' said a man behind Colon.

After a while the braying stopped.

'Can't turn round, see. Far too narrow,' said the elevated donkey expert.

'Can't

turn round, won't go backwards. Well-known fact.'

'There's always a know-all, right, Beti?' said Colon.

'Yeah. Always.'

The tower was full of silence. Several members of the crowd found their attention drawn to it.

'I mean, if you could get three or four men up the stairs, which you can't, you

could sort of move it a leg at a time, if you didn't mind being kicked and bitten to death...'

'All right, all right, back away from the tower, will you?'

The guards were back. One of them was carrying a rolled-up carpet.

'All right, all right, give us room—'

'I can hear hooves,' said someone.

'Oh, yeah, like our friend in the fez is getting the donkey down the stairs?'

'Hang on, I can hear them too,' said Colon.

Now all eyes stared at the door.

Lord Vetinari emerged, holding a length of rope.

The voice behind Colon said, 'All right, it's just a bit of rope. He was probably banging a couple of coconut shells together.'

'You mean, ones that he found in the minaret?'

'He had them with him, obviously.'

'You mean, he carries coconut shells around?'

'You can't turn a donkey round in— all right, that's a fake donkey head...'

'It's moving its ears!'

You mean you can't spot it?

The crowd craned to see.

'Er... you had an inflatable donkey—'

'Can you think of any reason why I should go around with an inflatable donkey?'

'Well, you—'

'One that you wouldn't mind explaining to your own dear mother?'

'If you're going to put it like that—'

' 's easy,' said Al-jibla. 'There's a secret compartment in the minaret. Must be.'

'No, you've got it all wrong, it's just an illusion of a donkey... Well, all right, it's a good illusion.. .'

By now half the people were around the donkey and the others were clustered in

the doorway of the minaret, looking for secret panels.

'I think, Al and Beti, this is where we walk away,' said Lord Vetinari, behind Colon. 'Just down this little alley here. And when we turn that corner, we run.'

'What've we got to run for?' said Beti.

'Because I've just picked up the magic carpet.'

Vimes was already lost. Oh, there was the sun, but that was just a direction. He

could feel it on the side of his face.

And the camel rocked from side to side. There was no real way of judging distance, except by haemorrhoids.

I'm blindfolded on the back of a camel ridden by a D'reg, who everyone says are

the most untrustworthy people in the world. But I'm almost positive he's not going to kill me.

'So,' he said, as he rocked gently from side to side, 'you may as well tell me.

Why 71-hour Ahmed?'

a mitigating circumstance, but that it ought to be mentioned out of completeness.

'Who was she?'

'El-Ysa was a village. He poisoned a well. There had been a dispute over religion,' he added. 'One thing led to another... but even so, to break the tradition of hospitality... '

'Yes, I can see that's a terrible thing. Almost... impolite.'

'The hour was important. Some things should not be done.'

'You're right there, at least.'

By mid-afternoon Jabbar let him take off the blindfold. Wind-carved heaps of

black rock stood out of the sand. Vimes thought it was the most desolate place

he'd ever seen.

'They say once it was green,' said Jabbar. 'A well watered land.'

'What happened?'

'The wind changed.'

At sunset they reached a wadi between more wind-scoured rocks, and it was only

the length of the shadows, deepening the shallow indentations, that began to

give them back an ancient shape.

'They're buildings, aren't they?' said Vimes.

'There was a city here, a long time ago. Did you not know?'

'Why should I know?'

'Your people built it. It was called Tacticum. After a warrior of yours.'

Vimes looked at the crumbled walls and fallen pillars.

'He had a city named after him...' he said to no one in particular.

Jabbar nudged him. 'Ahmed is watching you,' he said.

'I can't see him anywhere.'

'Of course. Get down. And I hope we meet again in whatever is your paradise.'

'Right, right...'

Vimes shook the box. 'Something wrong with you?' he demanded. 'You're still giving me someone else's appointments, you idiot box!' 'Er... the appointments are correct for Commander Samuel Vimes. . . 'That's me!' 'Which one of you?' said the demon. 'What?' '... beep...'

It refused to say more. Vimes considered throwing it away, but Sybil would be hurt if she found out. He thrust it back into his pocket and tried to concentrate on the scenery again. His seat might have been part of a pillar once. Vimes saw other pieces some way away, and then realized that a heap of apparent rubble was a fallen wall. He followed this, his footsteps echoing off the Cliffs, and realized that he was walking between old buildings, or where buildings had been. Here was the wreck of some stairs, there the stump of a pillar. One was a little higher than the others. He pulled himself up and found, on its flat top, two huge feet. A statue must have stood here. It probably stood, if Vimes knew anything about statues, in some kind of noble attitude. Now it had gone, and there were just feet, broken off at the ankles. They weren't exceptionally noble.

As he lowered himself again he saw, protected because this side was out of the wind, some lettering carved deeply into the plinth. He tried to make it out in the fading light:

'AB HOC POSSUM VIDERE DOMUM TUUM'

It's the echoes here, Arimed went on. I could be anywhere. I could have a crossbow aimed at you right now. 'You won't fire it, though. We've both got too much at stake.' 'Oh, there is honour among thieves, is there?' 'I don't know,' said Vimes. Oh, well... time to see if he was dead right or just dead. 'Is there honour among policemen?'

Sergeant Colon's eyes went big.

'Swing my weight to one side?' he said.

'That's how magic carpets are steered,' said Lord Vetinari calmly.

'Yes, but supposing I swing myself off?'

'We'll have a lot more room,' said Beti unfeelingly. 'C'mon, sarge, you know how

to throw your weight around.'

'I ain't throwing my weight anywhere,' said Colon firmly. He was lying full length on the carpet, both hands gripping it as hard as possible. 'It's not natural, just a bit of broadloom between you and certain splash.'

The Patrician looked down. 'We're not over water, sergeant.'

'I know what I meant, sir!'

'Can we slow down a bit?' said Beti. 'The breeze is invading my privacy, if you get my drift.'

Lord Vetinari sighed. 'We're not going very fast as it is. I suspect this is a very old carpet.'

'There's a frayed bit here,' said Beti.

'Shut up,' said Colon.

'Look, I can poke my finger right through—'

'Shut up.'

'Notice how it kind of wobbles when you move?'

'Shut up.'

'Here, look, those palm trees down there look really small.'

'Nobby, you're scared of heights,' said Colon. 'I know you're scared of heights.'

Well, at least we now have transport,' said Lord Vetinari, his tone suggesting that the show was over. 'Unfortunately, I had no time to find out where the army is.'

'Ah! I can help you there, sir!' Colon tried to salute, and then made a grab for the carpet again. 'I found out by cunning, sir!' 'Really?'

'Yessir! It's at a place called... er... En al Sams la Laisa, sir.'

The carpet drifted onwards for a moment, in silence.

'"The Place where the Sun Shineth Not"?' said the Patrician.

There was more silence. Colon was trying not to look at anyone.

'Is there a somewhere called Gebra?' said Nobby, sulkily.

'Yes, Be— corporal. There is.'

'They've gone there. Of course, you've only got a woman's word for it.'

'Well done, corporal. We shall head up the coast.'

Lord Vetinari relaxed. In a busy and complex life he'd never met people quite

like Nobby and Colon. They talked all the time yet there was something almost...

restful about them.

He watched the dusty horizon carefully as the ancient carpet curved around.

Under his arm was the metal cylinder Leonard had made for him.

Drastic times required drastic measures.

'Sir?' said Colon, his voice muffled by the carpet.

'Yes, sergeant?'

'I've got to know... How did you... you know... get the donkey down?'

'Persuasion, sergeant.'

'What? Just talking?'

'Yes, sergeant. Persuasion. And, admittedly, a sharp stick.'

'Ah! I knew—'

He stopped. But Ahmed continued.

'—just another camel-driver with a towel on his head? Oh, dear. And you'd been

doing so well up to now, Sir Samuel. The Prince was very impressed.'

'Oh, come on. You were all but making suggestive comments about melons. What was

I supposed to think?'

'Don't fret, Sir Samuel. I consider it all a compliment. You can turn round. I wouldn't dream of harming you unless you do something... foolish.'

Vimes turned. He could just make out a shape in the afterglow.

'You were admiring this place,' said Ahmed. 'Tacticus's men had it built when he

tried to conquer Klatch. It's not really a city by today's standards, of course.

It was really just making a point. "Here we are and here we stay," as it were.

And then the wind changed.'

'You murdered Snowy Slopes, didn't you?'

'The term is executed. I can show you the confession he signed beforehand.'

'Of his own free will?'

'More or less.'

'What?'

'Let us say, I pointed out to him the alternatives to signing the confession. I was kind enough to leave you the pad. After all, I wanted to keep your interest.

And don't look like that, Sir Samuel. I need you.'

'How can you tell how I look?'

'I can guess. The Assassins' Guild had a contract on him in any case. And by a

happy chance I am Guild member.'

'You?' Vimes tried to bite down on the word. And then: why not him? Kids got

sent a thousand miles to be taught in the Assassins' Guild school...

Still the same sausages.

'Once tasted, never forgotten.'

'True.'

'No, don't move too quickly, Sir Samuel. Otherwise

I'm afraid I shall be cutting your own throat. You don't trust me, and I don't trust you.'

'Why did you drag me here?'

'Drag you? I had to sabotage my own ship so you wouldn't lose me!'

'Yes, but... you... knew how I'd react.' Vimes's heart began to sink.

Everyone

knew how Sam Vimes would react...

'Yes. Would you like a cigarette, Sir Samuel?'

'I thought you sucked those damn cloves.'

'In Ankh-Morpork, yes. Always be a little bit foreign wherever you are, because

everyone knows foreigners are a little bit stupid. Besides, these are rather good.'

'Fresh from the desert?'

'Hah! Yes, everyone knows Klatchian cigarettes are made from camel dung.' A

match flared, and for a moment Vimes caught a glimpse of the hooked nose as

Ahmed lit the cigarette for him. 'That is one area where, I regret to say, prejudice has some evidence on its side. No. these are all the way from Sumtri.

An island where, it is said, the women have no souls. Personally, I doubt it.'

Vimes could make out a hand, holding the packet. just for a moment he wondered

if he could grab and

'How is your luck?' said Ahmed.

'Running out, I suspect.'

'Yes. A man should know the length of his luck. Shall I tell you how I know you

whose policemen are you?

'I draw my pay, let us say, as the wali of Prince Cadram.'

'I shouldn't think he's very happy with you right now, then. You were supposed

to be guarding his brother, weren't you?' So was I, Vimes thought. But what the hell...

'Yes. And we thought the same way, Sir Samuel. You thought it was your people, I thought it was mine. The difference is, I was right. Khufurah's death was plotted in Klatch.'

'Oh, really? That's what they wanted the Watch to think—'

'No, Sir Samuel. The important thing is what someone wanted you to think.'

'Really? Well, you've got that wrong. All the stuff with the glass and the sand

on the floor, I saw through ...that... straight... away...'

His voice faded into silence.

After a while Ahmed said, almost sympathetically, 'Yes, you did.'

'Damn.'

'Oh, in some ways you were right. Ossie was paid in dollars, originally. And then, later on, someone broke in, making sure they dumped most of the glass

outside, and swapped the money. And distributed the sand. I must say that I

thought the sand was going a bit too far, too. No-one would be that stupid.

But

they wanted to make sure it looked like a bungled attempt.'

'Who was it?' said Vimes.

'Oh, a small-time thief. Bob-Bob Hardyoyo. He didn't even know why he was doing

it, except that someone was willing to pay him. I commend your city, commander.

For enough money, you can find someone to do anything.'

own people – well, the world is watching. The world would soon find out. Starting a war over a rock? Well... that sort of thing makes countries uneasy.

They've all got rocks off their coast. But starting a war because some foreign dog had killed a man on a mission of peace... that, I think, the world would understand.'

'Lacking in intelligence?' said Vimes.

'Oh, don't be too depressed, commander. That business with the fire at the embassy. That was sheer bravery.'

'It was bloody terror!'

'Well, the dividing line is narrow. That was one thing I hadn't expected.'

In the rolling, clicking snooker table of Vimes's mind the black ball hit a pocket.

'You had expected the fire, then?'

'The building should have been almost empty–,

Vimes moved. Ahmed was lifted off his feet and slammed against a pillar, with

both of Vimes's hands around his neck.

'That woman was trapped in there!'

'It... was... necessary!' said Ahmed hoarsely. 'There... had... to be a... diversion! His... life was... in danger, I had to get him out! I did... not know... about the... woman until too late... I give you my word...'

Through the red veil of anger Vimes became aware of a prickle in the region of

his stomach. He glanced down at the knife that had appeared magically in the

other man's hand.

'Listen to me . . .' hissed Ahmed. 'Prince Cadram ordered his brother's death...'

What better way to demonstrate the... perfidy of the sausage–eaters..

killing a

peace–maker...'

Vimes relaxed his grip. Hmm? I thought he was snifty as soon as I saw him!
'I suspect that you thought he was Klatchian as soon as you saw him, but I take your point.'
'And you could read this code, could you?'
'Oh, come now. Don't you read Vetinari' work upside down when you're standing in front of his desk? Besides, I am Prince Cadram's policeman. ..'
'So he's your boss, right?'
'Who is your boss, Sir Samuel? When push comes to shove?'
The two men stood locked together. Ahmed's breath wheezed.
Vimes stood back. 'These messages... you've got them?'
'Oh, yes. With his seal on them.' Ahmed rubbed his neck.
'Good grief. The originals? I'd have thought they'd be under lock and key.'
'They were. In the embassy. But in the fire many hands were needed to carry important documents to safety. It was a very... useful fire.'
'A death warrant for his own brother... well, you can't argue against that in court...'
'What court? The king is the law.' Ahmed sat down. 'We are not like you. You kill kings.'
'The word is "execute". And we only did it once, and that was a long time ago,'
said Vimes. 'Is that why you brought me here? Why all this drama? You could have come to see me in Ankh-Morpork!'
'You are a suspicious man, commander. Would you have believed me? Besides, I had to get Prince Khufurah out of there, before he, ahah, "died of his wounds".'
'Where's the Prince now?'
'Close. And safe. He is safer in the desert than he would ever be in Ankh-Morpork, I can assure you.'

mountain.

My companions are a sword and a camel] and, frankly, neither are good conversationalists, believe me. Oh, the towns and cities have their guards, of a

sort. They are uncomplicated thinkers. But it is my job to go into the waste places and chase bandits and murderers, five hundred miles from anyone who would

be on my side, so I must inspire dread and strike the first blow because I will not have a chance to strike a second one. I am an honest man of a sort, I think.

I survive. I survived seven years in an Ankh-Morpork public school patronized by the sons of gentlemen. Compared to that, life among the D'regs holds no terrors,

I assure you. And I administer justice swiftly and inexpensively.'

'I heard about how you got your name...'

Ahmed shrugged. 'The man had poisoned the water. The only well for twenty miles.

That killed five men, seven women, thirteen children and thirty-one camels.

And

some of them were very valuable camels, mark you. I had evidence from the man

who sold him the poison and a trustworthy witness who had seen him near the well

on the fateful night. Once I had testimony from his servant, why wait even an

hour?'

'Sometimes we have trials,' said Vimes brightly.

'Yes. Your Lord Vetinari decides. Well, five hundred miles from anywhere the law

is me.' Ahmed waved a hand. 'Oh, no doubt the man would suggest there were

part of a big crime? The Prince wants to unite the whole of Klatch.

Personally,

I like the little tribes and countries, even their little wars. But I don't mind if they fight Ankh-Morpork because they want to, or because of your horrible

personal habits, or your unthinking arrogance... there's a lot of reasons for fighting Ankh-Morpork. A lie isn't one of them.'

'I know what you mean,' said Vimes.

'But what can I do alone? Arrest my Prince? I am his policeman, as you are Vetinari's.'

'No. I'm an officer of the law.'

'All I know is, there must be a policeman, even for kings.'

Vimes looked pensively at the moonlit desert.

Somewhere out there was the Ankh-Morpork army, what there was of it.

And

somewhere waiting was the Klatchian army. And thousands of men who might have

quite liked one another had they met socially would thunder towards one another

and start killing, and after that first rush you had all the excuses you needed

to do it again and again...

He remembered listening, when he was a kid, to old men in his street

talking

about war. There hadn't been many wars in his time. The city states of the Sto

Plains mainly tried to bankrupt one another, or the Assassins' Guild sorted everything out on a one-to-one basis. Most of the time people just bickered, and

while that was pretty annoying it was a lot better than having a sword stuck in

your liver.

most of their days sitting on a bench in the sun had, between them, five arms,
five eyes, four and a half legs and two and three-quarter faces. And seventeen
ears (Crazy Winston would bring out his collection for a good boy who looked
suitably frightened).
'He wants to start a war...' Vimes had to open his mouth because otherwise
there
was no room to get his head around such a crazy idea. This man who everyone said
was honest, noble and good wanted a war.
'Oh, certainly,' said Ahmed. 'Nothing unites people like a good war.'
How could you deal with someone who thought like that? Vimes asked himself. A
mere murderer, well, you had a whole range of options. He could deal with a mere
murderer. You had criminals and you had policemen, and there was a sort of
see-saw there which balanced out in some strange way. But if you took a man
who'd sit down and decide to start a war, what in the name of seven hells could
you balance him with? You'd need a policeman the size of a country. You couldn't blame the soldiers. They'd just joined up to be pointed in the right direction.
Something clicked against the fallen pillar. Vimes glanced down and pulled the
baton out of his pocket. It glinted in the moonlight
What damn good was something like this? All it really meant was that he
was
allowed to chase the little criminals, who did the little crimes. There was

pulled
it so hard that its owner stumbled right into his upswinging boot.
Then he jerked away, struggling to untangle his sword from the unfamiliar robes.
He ducked another shadowy figure's wild slice and managed to make an elbow
connect with something painful.
As he rose he looked into the face of a man with an upraised sword—
—there was a silken sound—
—and the man swayed backwards, his head looking surprised as it fell away
from
the body.
Vimes dragged his headdress off.
'I'm from Ankh-Morpork, you stupid sods!'
A huge figure rose in front of him, a sword in each hand.
'I'LL CUT YER TONKER OFF'F YER YER GREASY— Oh, is that you, Sir Samuel?'
'Huh? Willikins?'
'Indeed, sir.' The butler straightened up.
'Willikins?'
'Do excuse me one moment, sir KNOCK IT OFF YOU MOTHERLOVIN
SONS OF BITCHES I had
no apprehension of your presence, sir.'
'This one's fightin' back, sarge!'
Ahmed had his back to a pillar. A man already lay at his feet. Three others
were
trying to get close enough to the wali while staying away from the whirling
wall
he was creating with his sword.
'Ahmed! These are on our side!' Vimes yelled.
'Oh, really? Pardon me.'
Ahmed lowered his sword and removed the cigarette holder from his
mouth. He

supplied.

'It is true that I endeavoured to uphold the good name of Ankh—Morpork, sir.

Anyway, after we—'

'—and one bloke, sarge, stabbed 'im right in the—'

'Please, Private Bourke, I am apprising Sir Samuel of events,' said Willikins.

'Sarge ort to get a medal, sir!'

'Those few of us who survived tried to get back, sir, but we had to conceal ourselves from other patrols and were just considering lying up until dawn in

this edifice when we espied you and this gentleman here.'

Ahmed was watching him with his mouth open.

'How many were in this Klatchian patrol, sergeant?' he said.

'Nineteen men, sir.'

'That's a very precise count, in this light.'

'I was able to enumerate them subsequently, sir.'

'You mean they were all killed?'

'Yes, sir,' said Willikins calmly. 'However, we ourselves lost five men, sir.

Not including Privates Hobbley and Webb, sir, who regrettably seem to have

passed away as a result of this unfortunate misunderstanding. With your permission, sir, I will remove them.'

'Poor devils,' said Vimes, aware that it was not enough but that nothing else would be, either.

'The fortunes of war, sir. Private Hobbley, Ginger to his friends, was nineteen

and lived in Ettercap Street, where until recently he made bootlaces.'

Willikins

took the dead man's arms and pulled. 'He was courting a young lady called Grace,

a picture of whom he was kind enough to show me last night. A maid at Lady

'But... one minute they're alive—

'Your friend here knows how it works. You

'He's a butler!

'So? It's kill or be killed, even for butlers. You're not a natural warrior, Sir Samuel.'

Vimes thrust the baton in his face.

'I'm not a natural killer! See this? See what it says? I'm supposed to keep the

peace, I am! If I kill people to do it, I'm reading the wrong manual!

Willikins appeared silently, hefting the other corpse. 'I was not privileged to know much about this young man,' he said, as he carried him behind a

rock. 'We

called him Spider, sir,' he went on, straightening up. 'He played the harmonica

rather badly and spoke longingly of home. Will you be taking tea, sir?

Private

Smith is having a brew-up. Er...' The butler coughed politely.

'Yes, Willikins?'

'I hardly like to broach the subject, sir...'

'Broach it, man!'

'Do you have such a thing as a biscuit about you, sir? I hesitate to provide tea

without biscuits, but we have not eaten for two days.'

'But you were on patrol!'

'Forage party, sir.' Willikins looked embarrassed.

Vimes was bewildered. 'You mean Rust didn't even wait to take on food?'

'Oh, yes, sir. But as it transpired—'

'We knew there was somethin' wrong when the mutton barrels started to explode,'

muttered Private Bourke. 'The biscuits was pretty lively too. Turned out bloody

Rust'd bought a lot of stuff even a rag'ead wouldn't eat—'

'And we eat anything,' said 71-hour Ahmed solemnly.

The hot wind flapped the banners. The sunlight sparkled on the spears.

Lord

Rust surveyed his army and found that it was good. But small.

He leaned towards his adjutant.

'Let us not forget, though, that even General Tacticus was outnumbered ten to

one when he took the Pass of Al-Ibi,' he said.

'Yes, sir. Although I believe his men were all mounted on elephants, sir,' said

Lieutenant Hornett. 'And had been well provisioned,' he added meaningfully.

'Possibly, possibly. But then Lord Pinwoe's cavalry once charged the full might

of the Pseudopolitan army and are renowned in song and story.'

'But they were all killed, sir!'

'Yes, yes, but it was a famous charge, nevertheless. And every child knows, do

they not, the story of the mere one hundred Ephebians who defeated the entire

Tsortean army? A total victory, hey? Hey?'

'Yes, sir,' said the adjutant glumly.

'Oh, you admit it?'

'Yes, sir. Of course, some commentators believe the earthquake helped.'

'At least you will admit that the Seven Heroes of Hergen beat the Big-Footed

People although outnumbered by a hundred to one?'

'Yes, sir. That was a nursery story, sir. It never really happened.'

'Are you calling my nurse a liar, boy?'

'No, sir,' said Lieutenant Hornett hurriedly.

'Then you'll concede that Baron Mimbledrone single-handedly beat the armies of

the Plum Pudding Country and ate their Sultana?'

poised

to thrust at the black heart of the Klatchian aggressor!

'Yes, sir. But – and I realize this is a remote chance, sir it might be that while we're thrusting at the heart of the Klatchian aggressor—'

'—black heart—' Rust corrected him.

'—black heart of the Klatchian aggressor, sir, the arms of the Klatchian aggressor, those companies there and there, sir, will sweep around in the classic pincer movement.'

'The thrusting wall of steel served us magnificently in the second war with Quirm!

'We lost that one, sir.'

'But it was a damn dose–run thing!'

'We still lost, sir.'

'What did you do as a civilian, lieutenant?'

'I was a surveyor, sir, and I can read Klatchian. That's why you made me an officer.'

'So you don't know how to fight?'

'Only how to count. sir.'

'Pah! Show a little courage, man. Although I'll wager you won't need to. No stomach for a battle, Johnny Klatchian. Once he tastes our steel, he'll be off!'

'I certainly hear what you say, sir,' said the adjutant, who had been surveying

the Klatchian lines and had formed his own opinion about the matter.

His opinion was this: the main force of the Klatchian army had, in recent years,

been fighting everyone. That suggested, to his uncomplicated mind, that by now

the surviving soldiers were the ones who were in the habit of being alive at the

end of battles. And were also very experienced at facing all kinds of enemies.

numbers.

It had all sounded straightforward in Ankh–Morpork, he thought. We were going to sail into Klatch and be in Al–Khali by teatime, drinking sherbet with pliant young women in the Rhoxi. The Klatchians would take one look at our weapons and run away.

Well, the Klatchians had taken a good look this morning. So far they hadn't run.

They appeared to be sniggering a lot.

Vimes rolled his eyes. It worked... but how did it work?

He'd heard plenty of good speakers, and Captain Carrot was not among them. He

hesitated, lost the thread, repeated himself and in general made a mess of the

whole thing.

And yet...

And yet...

He watched the faces that were watching Carrot. There were the D'regs, and some

of the Klatchians who had stayed behind, and Willikins and his reduced company.

They were listening.

It was a kind of magic. He told people they were good chaps, and they knew they

weren't good chaps, but the way he told it made them believe it for a while.

Here was someone who thought you were a noble and worthy person, and somehow it

would be unthinkable to disappoint them. It was a mirror of a speech, reflecting

back to you what you wanted to hear. And he meant it all.

each man held by the collar in one big fist.

'What's going on, you two?'

'He called me the brother of a pig, sir!'

'Liar! You called me a greasy dishcloth-head!'

Carrot shook his head. 'And you were both doing so well, too,' he said sadly.

'There really is no call for this. Now I want you, Hashel, and you, Vincent, to shake hands, right? And apologize, yes? We've all had a rather trying time, but

I know you're both fine fellows underneath it all—'

Vimes heard Ahmed murmur, 'Oh, well, now it's all over...'

'—so if you'll just shake hands we'd say no more about it.'

Vimes glanced at 71-hour Ahmed. The man was wearing a sort of waxen grin.

The two scufflers very gingerly touched hands, as if they were expecting a spark

to leap the gap.

'And now you, Vincent, apologize to Mr Hashel...'

There was a reluctant 'ry'.

'And we're sorry for what?' Carrot prompted.

'...sorry for calling him a greasy dishcloth-head...'

'Well said. And you, Hashel, apologize to Private Bourke.'

The D'reg's eyes scurried around their sockets, looking to find a way out that

would allow their body to come too. Then he gave up.

'ry...'

'For... ?'

'ry for calling him a brother of a pig...'

Carrot lowered both men.

'Good! I'm sure you'll get along splendidly once you get to know each other—'

'I didn't just see that, did I?' said Ahmed. 'I didn't just see him talk like a

Carrot walked over to a kneeling camel and climbed into the saddle.
'That's "Evil Brother-in-Law of a jackal",' said Ahmed. 'Jabbar's camel! It bites everyone who ride it!'

'Yes, but this is Carrot.'

'It even bites Jabbar!'

'And you notice how he knew how to get on a camel?' said Vimes. 'How he wears

the robes? He's fitting in. The boy was raised in a dwarf mine. It took him about a month to know my own damn city better than I do.'

The camel rose. Now the flag, Vimes thought, give him the flag. When you go to

war, there's got to be a flag.

On cue, Constable Shoe passed up the spear with the tightly rolled cloth around

it. The constable looked proud. He'd stitched the thing in conditions of great secrecy half an hour before. One thing about a zombie, you always knew someone

who had a needle and thread.

But don't unfurl it, Vimes thought. Don't let them see it. It's enough for them to know they're marching under a flag.

Carrot brandished the spear.

'And I promise you this,' he shouted, 'if we succeed, no one will remember.

And

if we fail, no one will forget!'

Probably one of the worst rallying cries, Vimes thought, since General Pridley's

famous 'Lees all get our throats cut, boys!' but it got a huge cheer. And once

again he speculated that there was magic going on at some bonedeeep level. People

followed Carrot out of curiosity.

'All right, you've got an army, I suppose,' said Ahmed. 'And now?'

This carrier looked at vines, and then spat in his eye.

Prince Cadram and his generals surveyed the distant enemy, from horseback. The various Klatchian armies were drawn up in front of Gebra. Compared to them, the Ankh–Morpork regiments looked like a group of tourists who had missed their coach.

'Is that all?' he said.

'Yes, sire,' said General Ashal. 'But, you see, they believe that fortune favours the brave.'

'That is a reason to field such a contemptible little army?'

'Ah, sire, but they believe that we will turn and run as soon as we taste some cold steel.'

The Prince looked back at the distant banners. 'Why?'

'I couldn't say, sire. It appears to be an item of faith.'

'Strange.' The Prince nodded to one of his bodyguards. 'Fetch me some cold steel.'

After some hurried discussion a sword was handed up very gingerly, handle first.

The prince peered at it, and then licked it with theatrical care. The watching soldiers laughed.

'No,' he said at last. 'No, I have to say that I don't feel the least apprehensive. Is this as cold as steel gets?'

'Lord Rust was probably being metaphorical, sire.'

'Ah. He is the sort who would be. Well, let us go forward and meet him. We must be civilized, after all.'

He urged his horse forward. The generals fell in behind him.

The prince leaned down towards General Ashal again.

matters not that you won or lost, but that you took part.

The Prince's lips moved as he tried this out once or twice. Finally he said:

'And, knowing this, people still take orders from him?'

'It would seem so, sire.'

Prince Cadram shook his head. We can learn from AnkhMorpork, his father had

said. Sometimes we can learn what not to do. And so he'd set out to learn. First he'd learned that Ankh-Morpork had once ruled quite a slice of Klatch. He'd visited the ruins of one of its colonies. And so he'd found out the name of

the man who had been audacious enough to do this, and had got agents in Ankh-Morpork to find out as much about him as possible.

General Tactitus, he'd been called. And Prince Cadram had read a lot and remembered everything, and 'tactics' had been very, very useful in the widening

of the empire. Of course, this had its own drawbacks. You had a border, and

across the border came bandits. So you sent a force to quell the bandits, and in

order to stamp them out you had to take over their country, and soon you had

another restless little vassal state to rule. And now that had a border, over which came, sure as sunrise, a fresh lot of raiders. So your new tax-paying subjects were demanding protection from their brother raiders, neglecting to pay

their taxes, and doing a little light banditry on the side. And so once again you stretched your forces, whether you wanted to or not...

He sighed. For the serious empire-builder there was no such thing as a final

frontier. There was only another problem. If only people would understand...

Nor was there such a thing as a game of war. General Tacticus knew that. Learn

And we are offering him breakfast, sire. It would be most impolite of him to refuse.'

'What a good idea. Have we got an adequate supply of sheeps' eyes?'

'I took the liberty of telling the cooks to save some up for this very eventuality, sire.'

'Then we must see he gets them. After all, he will be our honoured guest.

Well,

let us do this thing properly. Please try to look as if you hate the taste of cold steel.'

The Klatchians had set up an open-sided tent on the sand between the two armies.

In the welcome shade a low table had been laid. Lord Rust and his company were

already waiting, and had been for more than half an hour.

They stood up and bowed awkwardly as Prince Cadram entered. Around the tent the

Klatchian and Ankh-Morpork honour guards eyed one another suspiciously, every

man trying to get the drop on the others.

'Tell me... Do any of you gentlemen speak Klatchian?' said Prince Cadram, after

the lengthy introductions.

Lord Rust's grin stayed fixed. 'Hornett?' he hissed.

'I'm not quite certain what he said, sir,' said the lieutenant nervously.

'I thought you knew Klatchian!'

'I can read it, sir. That's not the same...'

'Oh, don't worry,' said the Prince. 'As we say in

Klatch, this clown's in charge of an army?'

Around the tent, the Klatchian generals suddenly went poker-faced.

'Hornett?'

'Er... something about... to own, to control... er... '

Cadram smiled at Lord Rust. 'I'm not entirely familiar with this custom,' he said. 'You often meet your enemies before battle?'

There's... er... something going on...

There was a column of dust in the distance. Something was approaching fast.

'One moment,' said General Ashal.

He came back from his saddle with an ornate metal tube, covered in the curly

Klatchian script. He squinted into one end and pointed the other at the cloud.

'Mounted men,' he said. 'Camels and horses.'

'That's a Make-Things-Bigger device, isn't it?' said Lord Rust. 'My word, you

are up to date. They were invented only last year.'

'I didn't buy this, my lord. I inherited it from my grandfather--' The general looked through the eyepiece again. 'About forty men, I'd say.'

'Dear me,' murmured Prince Cadram. 'Reinforcements, Lord Rust?'

'They've... the rider in the lead is holding a... a banner, I think, still rolled up--'

'Certainly not, sire!' said Lord Rust. Behind him, Lord Selachii rolled his eyes.

'--ah, now he's unfurling it... it's... a white flag, sire.'

'Someone wishes to surrender?'

The general lowered his telescope. 'It doesn't... I don't... they seem to be in a great hurry to do so, sire.'

'Send a squad to apprehend them,' said Prince Cadram.

'We will do so too,' added Lord Rust hurriedly, nodding to the lieutenant.

'Ah, a joint effort,' said the Prince.

A few seconds later groups of men detached themselves from each army and rode

out on an interception course.

Everyone saw the sudden glints of sunlight from the approaching cloud.

Weapons

had been drawn.

'Fighting under a flag of surrender? That's... immoral!' said Lord Rust.

He stopped. Some confusion had resulted. The foray parties had their instructions, but no-one had told them what to do if they ran into the other foray party. And it was composed, after all, of men they were about to fight, and everyone knew they were treacherous greasy towel heads or perfidious untrustworthy sausage-eating madmen. And this was a battlefield. And everyone was frightened and, therefore, angry. And everyone was armed. Sam Vimes heard the shouting behind him but had other things on his mind at this point. It is impossible to ride a running camel without concentrating on your liver and kidneys, in the hope that they won't be pounded out of your body. The thing's legs weren't moving right, he was sure. Nothing on normal legs could be jolting him around so much. The horizon jerked backwards and forwards and up and down.

What was it Ahmed had said?

Vimes hit the camel hard and yelled, 'Huthuthut!'

It accelerated. The jolts ran together, so that his body was no longer being jolted but was in effect in a permanent state of jolt.

Vimes thrashed it again and tried to yell, 'Huthuthut!' although the word came

out more like 'Hngngngn!' In any case, the camel found some extra knees somewhere.

There was more shouting behind him. Turning his head as much as he dared, he saw

several of his accompanying D'regs falling behind. He was certain he heard Carrot yell, but he couldn't be certain because of his own screaming.

'Stop, you bastard!' he yelled.

The tent was coming up fast. Vimes slapped the stick down again and hauled on

Ghign?

The guards around the tent were hesitating, but that wouldn't last long.

The wind caught the white flag on Carrot's lance, making it snap.

'Sir, this is all right, isn't it? I mean, usually a white flag—'

'Might as well show what we're fighting for, eh?'

'I suppose so, sir.'

D'regs had surrounded the tent. The air was full of dust and screams.

'What happened back there?'

'A bit of fracas, sir. Our—' Carrot hesitated and then corrected himself. 'That is, Ankh-Morpork soldiers and Klatchians have started fighting, sir. And the D'regs are fighting both of them.'

'What, before the battle's officially declared? Can't you get disqualified for that?'

Vimes looked back at the guards and pointed to the flag.

'You know what this flag is?' he said. 'Well, I want you to'

'Aren't you Mr Vimes?' said one of the Morporkians. 'And that's Captain

Carrot,

isn't it?'

'Oh, hello, Mr Smallplank,' said Carrot. 'Feeding you well, are they?'

'Yessir!'

Vimes rolled his eyes. That was Carrot again, knowing everyone. And the man had called him 'sir'...

'We just need to go through,' said Carrot. 'We won't be a minute.'

'Well, sir, these tow—' Smallplank hesitated. Certain words didn't come so easily when the subjects were standing very close to you, looking very big and

tooled up. 'These Klatchians are on guard too, you see—'

A stream of blue smoke was blown past Vimes's ear.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' said 71-hour Ahmed. He had a D'reg crossbow in each

hand. 'You will note that the soldiers behind me are also well armed? Good.

My

71—hour Ahmed, raising both crossbows.

'Hey,' said Vimes, 'you can't—'

The bows twanged. The men dropped, yelling.

'However,' said Ahmed, handing the bows to a D'reg behind him, who handed him

another loaded one, 'out of deference to the sensibilities of Commander Vimes

here, I'm settling for one in the thigh and one in the toes. We are, after all, on a mission of peace.

He turned to Vimes. 'I'm sorry, Sir Samuel, but it's important that people know

where they stand with me.

'These two don't,' said Vimes.

'They'll live.'

Vimes moved closer to the wall.

'Huthuthut?' he hissed. 'You told me that it meant—'

'I thought it would prove a good example to all if you were in the lead,'

Ahmed

whispered. 'The D'regs will always follow a man who is in a hurry for the fray.'

Lord Rust stepped out into the sunlight and glared at Vimes.

'Vimes? What the hell are you doing?'

'Not turning a blind eye, my lord.'

Vimes pushed past and into the shade. There was Prince Cadram, still seated. And

there were a lot of armed men. These, he noted almost in passing, didn't have

the look of ordinary soldiers. They had the much tougher look of loyal bodyguards.

'So,' said the Prince, 'you come in here armed, under a flag of peace?'

'Are you Prince Cadram?' said Vimes.

'And you, too, Ahmed?' said the Prince, ignoring Vimes.

Ahmed nodded, and said nothing.

with a dying situation.

'Mr—?' he began.

'Sir Samuel Vimes, Ankh-Morpork City Watch,' said Vimes.

'Well, Mr Samuel, when I raise my hand the men behind me will cut you d—'

'I will kill the first man that moves,' said Ahmed.

'Then the second man that moves will kill you, traitor!' shouted the Prince.

'They'll have to move very fast,' said Carrot, drawing his sword.

'Any volunteers to be the third man?' said Vimes. 'Anyone?'

General Ashal moved, but only very gently, holding up a hand. The

bodyguards

relaxed slightly.

'What was that... lie you uttered about a murder?' he said.

'Have you gone mad, Ashal?' said the Prince.

'Oh, sire, before I can disbelieve these pernicious lies, I do need to know

what

they are.'

'Vimes, you have gone insane,' said Rust. 'You can't arrest the commander

of an

army!'

'Actually, Mr Vimes, I think we could,' said Carrot. 'And the army, too. I

mean,

I don't see why we can't. We could charge them with behaviour likely to

cause a

breach of the peace, sir. I mean, that's what warfare is.'

Vimes's face split in a manic grin. 'I like it.'

'But in fairness our — that is, the Ankh-Morpork army — are also—'

'Then you'd better arrest them too,' said Vimes. 'Arrest the lot of 'em.

Conspiracy to cause an affray,' he started to count on his fingers, 'going

equipped to commit a crime, obstruction, threatening behaviour, loitering

within

tent, loitering within tent, hah, travelling for the purposes of committing a

crime, malicious lingering and carrying concealed weapons.'

'I don't think that one—' Carrot began.

Here it's the one right on the end of Ahmed's crossbow. That wouldn't frighten a

D'reg, but you... I reckon you don't think like them. Tell your men to stand down. I want the order to go out right now.'

'Even Ahmed would not shoot his prince in cold blood,' said Prince Cadram.

Vimes snatched the crossbow. 'I wouldn't ask him to!' He took aim. 'Give that order!'

The Prince stared at him.

'Count of three!' shouted Vimes.

General Ashal leaned down and whispered something to the Prince. The man's

expression stiffened and he glanced back at Vimes again.

'That's right,' said Vimes. 'It runs in the family.'

'It would be murder!'

'Would it? In wartime? I'm from Ankh-Morpork Aren't I supposed to be at war with

you? Can't be murder if there's a war on. That's written down somewhere.'

The general leaned down and whispered.

'One,' said Vimes.

Now there was a hurried argument.

'Two.

'My prince wishes me to say--' the general began.

'All right, slow down,' said Vimes.

'If it makes you any happier, I will send out the order,' said the general. 'Let the messengers leave.'

Vimes nodded and lowered the bow. The Prince shifted uneasily.

'And the Ankh-Morpork army will stand down as well,' said Vimes.

'But, Vimes, you're on our side--' Rust began.

'Bloody hell, I'm going to shoot someone today and it could just be you, Rust,'

Vimes snarled.

But I've done it. And we've only got six cells back at the Yard, and we keep the coal in one of them.

You can't do it.

Was this the army that invaded your country, ma'am? No, officer, they were taller than that...

How about this one? Im not sure – get them to march up and down a bit... Carrot's voice could be heard outside, slightly muffled:

'Now... can you all hear me? You gentlemen in the back there? Anyone who can't hear me, please raise... all right, has anyone got a megaphone? Some cardboard I could roll up? In that case I'll shout... '

'What now?' said the Prince.

'I'm taking you back to Ankh-Morpork—'

'I don't think so. That would be an act of war.'

'You are making a mockery of the whole business, Vimes!' said Lord Rust.

'So long as I'm doing something right, then.' Vimes nodded at Ahmed.

'Then you can answer for your crime here, sire,' he said.

'In what court?' said the Prince.

Ahmed leaned closer to Vimes. 'What was your plan from here on?' he whispered.

'I never thought we'd get this far!'

'Ah. Well... it has been interesting, Sir Samuel.'

Prince Cadram smiled at Vimes. 'Would you like some coffee while you are considering your next move?' he said. He gestured to an ornate silver pot on the table.

'We've got proof,' Vimes said. But he could feel the world dropping away.

The point about burning your boats is that you shouldn't be standing on them when you drop the match.

Hand-to-Hand Fighting in Peach Pie Street... Seventy-eight eight
eight...

Rally Survivors in Sator Square... Things To Do Today: Build Build Build
Barricades...'

He was aware of surreptitious movement behind him, and then slight
pressure.

Ahmed was standing back to back with him.

'What is that thing talking about?'

'Search me. Sounds like it's in a different world, doesn't it... ?'

He could feel events racing towards a distant wall. Sweat filled his eyes. He
couldn't remember when he'd last had a proper sleep. His legs twinged. His
arms

ached, pulled down by the heavy bow.

'...bingeley... Eight oh two eh em, Death of Corporal Littlebottombottom...

Eight oh three eh em... Death of Sergeant Detritus... Eight oh
threethreethree

eh em and seven seconds seconds... Death of Constable Visit... Eight oh
three eh

em and nineninenine seconds... Death of death of death of...'

'They say that in Ankh-Morpork one of your ancestors killed a king,' said
the

Prince. 'And he also came to no good end.'

Vimes wasn't listening.

'...Death of Constable Dorfl... Eight oh three eh em and fourteenteen
seconds...'

The figure in the throne seemed to take up the whole world.

'Death of Captain Carrot Ironfoundersson... beep...'

And Vimes thought: I nearly didn't come. I nearly stayed in Ankh-Morpork.

He had always wondered how Old Stoneface had felt, that frosty morning
when he

picked up the axe that had no legal blessing because the King wouldn't
recognize

He kept his aching gaze sighted along the bow. 'Yes?'

A hand darted down and grabbed the arrow out of its groove. Vimes blinked. His

finger automatically squeezed the trigger. The string slammed back with a thunk.

And the look on the Prince's face, he knew, would keep him warm on cold nights,

if there were ever cold nights again.

He'd heard them all die. But they weren't dead. And yet the damn thing had sounded so... accurate...

Lord Vetinari dropped the arrow fastidiously, like a society lady who has had to

handle something sticky.

'Well done, Vimes. I see you've got the donkey up the minaret. Good morning,

gentlemen.' He gave the company a happy smile. 'I see I am not too late.'

'Vetinari?' said Rust, seeming to wake up. 'What are you doing here? This is a

battlefield—'

'I wonder.' The Patrician gave him a very brief smile of his very own.

'Outside

there seem to be a lot of men sitting around. Many of them seem to be having

what I believe is known in military parlance as a brew-up. And Captain Carrot is

organizing a football match.'

'He's what?' said Vimes, lowering the bow. Suddenly the world had to be real

again. If Carrot was doing something as dumb as that, things were normal.

'Quite a large number of fouls so far, I'm afraid. But I wouldn't call it a battlefield.'

'Who's winning?'

'Ankh-Morpork, I believe. By two hacked shins and a broken nose.'

that?

'I thought this might become necessary,' said Vetinari. 'It took some preparation, but I am certain it will work. I hope they're readable. We did our

best to keep the damp off them.'

A thick roll of paper dropped out onto the floor.

'Commander, have you nothing you should be doing?' he added.

'Refereeing, perhaps?'

Vimes picked up the roll and read the first few lines.

'Whereas... heretofore, etc, etc... City of Ankh-Morpork... Surrender?'

'What?' said Rust and the Prince together.

'Yes, surrender,' said Vetinari cheerfully. 'A little piece of paper and it's all over. I think you'll find it all in order.'

'You can't--' Rust began.

'You can't--' said the Prince.

'Unconditionally?' said General Ashal sharply.

'Yes, I think so,' said Vetinari. 'We give up all claim to Leshp in favour of Klatch, we withdraw all troops from Klatch and our citizens from the island, and

as for reparations... shall we say a quarter of a million dollars? Plus various favourable trade arrangements, mostfavoured-nation status and so on and so on.

It's all here. Feel free to read it at your leisure.'

He passed the document over the head of the Prince and into the hands of the

general, who flicked through the pages.

'But we haven't got--' Vimes began. Perhaps I did get killed, he thought. I'm on

the other side, or someone hit me very hard on the head and this is all some

kind of mirage

'It's a forgery!' snapped the Prince. 'It's a trick!'

were a
very rich city, but we haven't got any actual money. The wealth of Ankh-Morpork

is in its people, we're told. And you couldn't remove it with big pliers.
He felt the wind change.

And Vetinari watching him.

And there was something about General Ashal. A certain hunger...

'I agree with Rust,' he said. 'This is dragging the good name of Ankh-Morpork in

the mud. 'To his mild surprise he managed to say that without smiling.

'We lose nothing, sire,' General Ashal insisted. 'They withdraw from Klatch and

Leshp—'

'Damned if we will!' screamed Lord Rust.

'Right! And have everyone know we've been beaten?' said Vimes.

'Outwitted?'

He looked at the Prince, whose gaze was hunting from man to man, but occasionally staring at nothing, as if he was watching some inner vision.

'A quarter of a million is not enough,' the Prince said.

Lord Vetinari shrugged. 'We can discuss it.'

'There is much that I need to buy.'

'Things of a sharp metallic nature, no doubt,' said Vetinari. 'Of course, if we are talking about goods rather than money, there is room for... flexibility.. .'

And now we're going to arm him too, Vimes thought.

'You'll be out of the city in a week!' Rust screamed.

Vimes thought the general smiled briefly. Ankh—Morpork without Vetinaro... ruled

by people like Rust. His future was looking bright indeed.

'The surrender will need to be ratified and formally witnessed, however,' said

Ashal.

'May I suggest Ankh—Morpork?' said Lord Vetinari.

'No. On neutral territory, of course,' said the general.

hinge upon your concerns over the doings of one man.

Once again Vimes felt that the words he was hearing were not the words that were being said.

'I won't—' he began.

'There are larger issues here.'

'But—'

'Sterling work, nevertheless.'

'There are big crimes and little crimes, is that it?' said Vimes.

'Why don't you take some well-earned rest, Sir Samuel? You are,' Vetinari flashed one of his lightning-fast smiles, 'a man of action. You deal in swords,

and chases, and facts. Now, alas, it is the time for the men of words, who deal

in promises and mistrust and opinions. For you the war is over. Enjoy the sunshine. I trust we shall all be returning home shortly. I would like you to stay, Lord Rust.. .'

Vimes realized that he'd been switched off. He spun round and marched out of the tent.

Ahmed followed him. 'That's your master, is it?'

'No! He's just the man who pays my wages!'

'Often hard to know the difference,' said Ahmed sympathetically.

Vimes sat down on the sand. He wasn't certain how he'd been managing to stand

up. There was some kind of a future now. He hadn't the faintest idea what was in

it, but there was one. There hadn't been one five minutes ago. He wanted to talk

now. That way, he didn't have to think about the Dis-organizer's death roll.

It

had sounded so... accurate...

make a law for countries and not just for people, and people like him would have—'

Ahmed pulled him upright and patted him on the shoulder.

'I know how it is,' he said. 'I dream too.'

'You do?'

'Yes. Generally of fish.'

There was a roar from the crowd.

'Someone's scored a convincing foul, by the sound of it,' said Vimes.

They slid and staggered up the side of a dune, and watched.

Someone broke from the scrum and, punching and kicking, staggered towards the

Klatchian goal.

'Isn't that man your butler?' said Ahmed.

'Yes.'

'One of your soldiers said he bit a man's nose off.'

Vimes shrugged. 'He's got a very pointed look if I don't use the sugar tongs,

I

know that.'

A white figure marched authoritatively through the mill of players, blowing a whistle.

'And that man, I believe, is your king.'

'No.'

'Really? Then I am Queen Punjitrurn of Sumtri.'

'Carrot's a copper, same as me.'

'A man like that could inspire a handful of broken men to conquer a country.'

'Fine. just so long as he does it on his day off.'

'And he too takes orders from you? You are a remarkable man, Sir Samuel.

But you

would not, I think, have killed the Prince.'

'No. But you'd have killed me if I had.'

'Oh, yes. Flagrant murder in front of witnesses. I am, after all, a copper.'

there. As you know, there is always work for policemen.

'You thinking of returning to Ankh—Morpork at any time?'

'You'd like to see me there, Sir Samuel?'

'It's an open city. But be sure to call in at Pseudopolis Yard when you arrive.'

'Ah, and we can reminisce about old times.'

'No. So you can hand over that sword. We'd give you a receipt and you can pick

it up when you leave.'

'I'd take some persuading, Sir Samuel.'

'Oh, I think I'd only ask once.'

Ahmed laughed, nodded at Vimes and rode away.

For a few minutes he was a shape at the base of a column of dust, and then a shifting dot in the heat haze, and then the desert

swallowed him.

The day wore on. Various Klatchian officials and some of the Ankh—Morpork people

were summoned to the tent. Vimes wandered close to it a few times and heard the

sound of voices raised in dispute.

Meanwhile, the armies dug in. Someone had already erected a crude signpost, its

arms pointing to various soldiers' homes. Since these were all in part of AnkhMorpork the arms all pointed exactly the same way.

He found most of the Watch sitting out of the wind, while a wizened Klatchian

woman cooked quite a complicated meal over a small fire. They all seemed to be

fully alive, with the usual slight question

the case of Reg Shoe.

'Where've you been, Sergeant Colon?' said Vimes.

eyes
dosed. The rock was the slumbering shape of Detritus.

'Anyway, you just started doing the cooking like you was expecting to have to do

it,' said Colon.

'Kebab, sir?' said Nobby. 'There's plenty.'

'You certainly got a lot of food from somewhere,' said Vimes.

'Klatchian quartermaster, sir,' said Nobby, grinning beneath his veil. 'Used my

sexual wiles on him, sir.'

Vimes's kebab stopped halfway to his mouth and dripped lamb fat onto his legs.

He saw Angua's eyes slam open and stare in horror at the sky.

'I told him I'd take my clothes off and scream if he didn't give me some grub,

sir.'

'That'd scare the daylights out of me, sure enough,' said Vimes. He saw Angua

breathe out again.

'Yeah, I reckon if I played my cards right I could be one of them fatal femmies,' said Nobby. 'I've only got to wink at a man and he runs a mile.

Could

be useful, that.'

'I told him he could change back into his uniform, but he says he feels more comfortable like this,' whispered Colon to Vimes. 'I'm getting a bit worried,

to

tell you the truth.'

I can't handle this, Vimes thought. This isn't in the book of rules.

'Er... how can I explain this... ?' he began.

'I don't want any of them in—you—endoes,' said Nobby. 'It's a good idea to walk

a mile in someone else's shoes, that's all I'm saying.'

'Well, so long as it's just sh—'

into Gebra to get four thousand oranges. Shortly the combined ANKI-Morpork regimental bands will put on a display of counter-marching while playing a selection of military favourites.'

'Have they practised counter-marching?' said Angua.

'I don't think so.'

'Should be good, then.'

'Carrot,' said Vimes, 'I don't wish to pry, but how, in the middle of a desert, did you find a football?' And the voice in the back of his mind insisted: you heard him die, you heard them all die... somewhere else.

'Oh, these days I carry a deflated one in my pack, sir. A very pacifying object, a football. Are you all right, sir?'

'Eh? What? Oh. Yes. Just a bit... tired. So who's winning?' Vimes patted his pockets, and found his last cigar.

'It's broadly speaking a tie, sir. I had to send four hundred and seventy-three men off, though. Klatch is now well ahead on fouls, I'm sorry to say.'

'Sport as a substitute for war, eh?' said Vimes. He rooted in the ashes of Nobby's fire and pulled out a halfconsumed... well, it helped to think of it as a desert coal.

Carrot gave him a solemn look— 'Yes, sir. No-one's using weapons. And have you noticed how the Klatchian army is getting smaller? Some of the chiefs from distant parts are taking their men away. They say there's no point in staying if there's not going to be a war. I don't think they really wanted to be here in any case, to tell you the truth. And I don't think it's going to be easy to get them to come back—'

There was shouting behind them. Men were coming out of the tent, arguing. Lord Rust was among them. He looked around, talking to his companions. Then he

so are you! And so is your stupid, mongrel, cowardly watch! What do you say to

that, Vimes? Eh?

The watchmen sat like statues, waiting for Vimes to say something. Or even move.

'Eh? Vimes?'

Rust sniffed. 'What's that smell?'

Vimes slowly shifted his gaze to his fingers. Smoke was rising. There was a faint sizzling.

He stood up and brought his fingers up in front of Rust's face.

'Take it,' he said.

'That's... just some trick...'

'Take it,' said Vimes.

Mesmerized, Rust licked his fingers and gingerly took the ember. 'It doesn't hurt—'

'Yes, it does,' said Vimes.

'In fact it— Aargh!'

Rust jumped back, dropped the ember and sucked his blistered fingers.

'The trick is not to mind that it hurts,' said Vimes. 'Now go away.'

'You won't last long,' Rust sneered. 'You wait until we're back in the city.'

You

just wait.' He strode off, holding his stricken hand.

Vimes went back and sat down by the fire. After a while he said: 'Where's he

gone now?'

'Back to the lines, sir. I think he's ordering the men home.'

'Can he see us?'

'No.'

'You sure?'

'There's too many people in the way, sir.'

'You're quite sure?'

'Not unless he can see through camels, sir.'

He squinted into the sun.

'That... that can't be Vimes, can it?'

The crew stared.

'Let's get aboard right now!'

A figure started down the face of the dune. It moved very fast, much faster than

a man could run on the shifting sand, and moved in a zig-zag fashion. As it drew

nearer, it turned out to be a man standing on a shield.

It slid to a halt a few feet away from the astonished Jenkins.

'Good of you to wait, captain!' said Carrot. 'Very many thanks! The others will

be down in a minute.'

Jenkins looked back to the top of the dune. There were other, darker figures

there now.

'Those are D'regs!' he shouted.

'Oh, yes. Lovely people. Have you met them at all?'

Jenkins stared at Carrot. 'Did you win?' he said.

'Oh, yes. On penalties, in the end.'

Green-blue light filtered through the tiny windows of the Boat.

Lord Vetinari pulled the steering levers until he was pretty certain that they were heading towards a suitable ship and said:

'What is it I can smell, Sergeant Colon?'

'It's Bet— It's Nobby, sir,' said Colon, pedalling industriously.

'Corporal Nobbs?'

Nobby almost blushed. 'I bought a bottle of scent, sir. For my young lady.'

Lord Vetinari coughed. 'What exactly do you mean by "your young lady"?' he said.

'Well, for when I get one,' said Nobby.

'Ah.' Even Lord Vetinari sounded relieved.

Not far enough, possibly?

But Nobby rusted even irony. 'I got it in the same shop that sarge got the hump, sir.'

'Ah... yes.'

There wasn't very much space in the Boat, and most of it was taken up with Sergeant Colon's souvenirs. He'd been allowed a brief shopping expedition 'to take home something for the wife, sir, otherwise I'll never hear the last of it'.

'Mrs Colon will like a stuffed camel hump, will she, sergeant?' said the Patrician doubtfully.

'Yessir. She can put things on it, sir.'

'And the set of nested brass tables?'

'To put things on, sir.'

'And the' – there was a clanking – 'set of goat bells, ornamental coffee pot, miniature camel saddle and this... strange glass tube with little bands of different coloured sand in it... what are these for?'

'Conversation pieces, sir.'

'You mean people will say things like "What are they for?", do you?'

Sergeant Colon looked pleased with himself.

'See, sir? We're talking about 'em already.'

'Remarkable.'

Sergeant Colon coughed and indicated with a tilt of his head the hunched figure

of Leonard, who was sitting in the stern with his head in his hands.

'He's a bit quiet, sir,' he whispered. 'Can't seem to get a word out of him.'

'He has a lot on his mind,' said the Patrician.

The watchmen pedalled onwards for a while, but the close confines of the Boat

encouraged a confidentiality that would never have been found on land.

'Sorry to hear you're getting the sack, sir,' said Colon.

'Really,' said Lord Vetinari.

the right direction. He steered the boat until he heard the thump of hull hitting hull, and gave the auger a few turns.

'Am I being sacked, sergeant?' he said, sitting back.

'Well, eh, I heard Lord Rust's people say that if you rat... rat...'

'Ratify,' said Lord Vetinari.

'Yeah, if you ratify that surrender next week, they'll get you exiled, sir.'

'A week is a long time in politics, sergeant.'

Colon's face widened in what he thought of as a knowing grin. He tapped the side of his nose.

'Ah, politics,' he said. 'Ah, you should've said.'

'Yeah, they'll laugh at the other foot then, eh?' said Nobby.

'Cot some secret plan, I'll be bound,' said Colon. 'You know where the chicken is all right.'

'I can see there's no fooling such skilled observers of the carnival that is life,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Yes, indeed, there is something I intend to do.'

He adjusted the position of the camel-hump pouffe, which in fact smelled of goat

and was beginning to leak sand, and lay back.

'I'm going to do nothing. Wake me up if anything interesting happens.'

Nautical things happened. The wind spun about so much that a weather-cock might

as well be harnessed to grinding corn. At one point there was a fall of anchovies.

And Commander Vimes tried to sleep. Jenkins showed him a hammock, and Vimes

realized that this was another sheep's eyeball. No-one could possibly sleep in

something like that. Sailors probably kept them up for show and had real beds

tucked away somewhere.

'Sorry, Reg. What you scratchin' for?

'I think I picked up a filthy foreign disease.'

'Sorry?' Angua again. 'What can a zombie catch?'

'Don't like to say...'

'You're talking to someone who knows every brand of flea powder they sell in

Ankh–Morpork, Reg.'

'Oh, if you must know... Mice, miss. It's shameful. I keep myself dean, but they

just find a way—'

'Have you tried everything?'

'Excepting ferrets.'

'If his lordship goes, who'll take over?' That was Cheery. 'Lord Rust?'

'He'd last five minutes.'

'Maybe the guilds will get together and—'

'They'll fight like—'

'—ferrets,' said Reg. 'The cure's worse than the disease.'

'Cheer up, there'll still be a Watch.' That was Carrot.

'Yes, but Mr Vimes'll be out on his ear. 'cos of politics.'

Vimes decided to keep his eyes closed.

A silent crowd was waiting on the quayside when the ship finally docked.

They

watched Vimes and his men walk down the gangway. There were one or

two coughs,

and then someone called out:

'Say it ain't so, Mr Vimes!'

At the foot of the gangplank Constable Dorfl saluted stiffly.

'Lord Ruses Ship Cot In This Morning, Sir,' the golem said.

'Anyone seen Vetinari?'

'No, sir.'

'Afraid to show his face!' someone shouted.

Even in human form a werewolf's ears are pretty sensitive.

She wandered back to the quayside and looked downriver.

A wall of white water a few feet high was running up the Ankh. As it passed,

boats were lifted and rocked.

It sloshed by her, sucking at the quay and making Jenkins's boat dance for a

moment. There was a crash of crockery somewhere aboard.

Then it was gone, a line of surf heading towards the next bridge. For a moment

the air smelled not of the Ankh's eau de latrine but of sea winds and salt.

Jenkins appeared out of his cabin and looked over the side.

'What was that? The tide changing?' Angua called up.

'We came up on the tide,' said Jenkins. 'Beats me. One of those phenomena, I expect.'

Angua went back to the group. Vimes was already red in the face.

'It has been signed by quite a lot of the major guilds, sir,' Carrot was saying.

'In fact they're all here except the Beggars and the Seamstresses.'

'Really? Well, piss on 'em! Who are they to give me an order like that?'

'Angua saw the look of pain cross Carrot's face.

'Uh... someone has to give us orders, sir. In a general sort of way. We aren't

supposed to make up our own. That's sort of... the point.'

'Yes... but... not like...'

'And I suppose they represent the will of the people—'

'That bunch? Don't give me that rubbish! We'd have been slaughtered if we'd

fought! And then we'd be in just the same position as we—'

'This does look legal, sir.'

'It's... ridiculous!'

'It's not as if we are accusing him, sir. We just have to make sure he turns up

Nobby and
Colon behind him. At least, if it wasn't Sergeant Colon it was a very
strangely
deformed camel.

'I think I caught quite a lot of that, commander,'
said Lord Vetinari. 'Please do your duty.'

'All you've got to do is to go to the palace, sir. Let's—'

'You're not going to handcuff me?'

Vimes's mouth dropped open. 'Why should I do that?'

'Treason is very nearly the ultimate crime, Sir Samuel. I think I should
demand

handcuffs.'

'All right, if you insist.' Vimes nodded at Dorfl. 'Cuff him, then.'

'You haven't any shackles, by any chance?' said Lord Vetinari, as Dorfl
produced

a pair of handcuffs. 'We may as well do this thing properly—'

'No. We don't have any shackles.'

'I was only trying to help, Sir Samuel. Shall we be going?'

The crowd weren't jeering. That was almost frightening. They were just
waiting,

like an audience watching to see how the trick was going to be done. They
parted

again as the Patrician headed towards the centre of the city. He stopped
and

turned.

'What was the other thing... oh yes, I don't have to be dragged on a hurdle,
do

I?'

'Only if you're actually executed, my lord,' said Carrot, cheerfully.

'Traditionally, traitors are dragged to their place of execution on a hurdle.

And then you're hung, drawn and quartered.' Carrot looked embarrassed. 'I
know

about the hanging and quartering but I'm not sure how you're drawn, sir.'

WHAT KIND OF A THING ARE YOU?

'I am the Dis-organizer Mk II, with many handy hard-touse features, Insert Name

Here!'

SUCH AS?

Even the Dis-organizer's tiny mind felt slightly uneasy. The voice it was speaking to didn't sound right.

'I know what time it is everywhere,' it ventured.

SO DO I.

'Er... I can maintain an up-to-the-minute contacts directory...' The Dis-organizer felt movements that suggested the new owner had mounted a horse.

REALLY? I HAVE A GREAT MANY CONTACTS.

'There you are, then,' said the demon, trying to hold on to its rapidly draining

enthusiasm. 'So I make a note of them, and when you want to contact them again—'

THAT IS GENERALLY NOT NECESSARY. MOSTLY, THEY STAY CONTACTED.

'Well... do you have many appointments?' There were hoofbeats, and then no sound

but rushing wind.

MORE THAN YOU COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE. NO... I THINK, PERHAPS, YOUR TALENTS COULD BE BETTER EMPLOYED ELSEWHERE...

There was more rushing wind, and then a splash.

The Rats Chamber was crowded. Guild leaders were entitled to be there, but there

were plenty of other people who considered they had a right to be in at the death too. There were even some of the senior wizards. Everyone wanted to be

able to say to their grandchildren 'I was there'. [17]

'Good morning, he said. Can we make this quick? It's going to be a busy day.'

'It pleases you to continue to make Ankh–Morpork a laughing stock,' Rust began.

His glance flicked to Vimes for a moment, and wrote him out of the universe.

'This is not a formal trial, Lord Vetinari. It is an arraignment so that the charges may be known. Mr Slant tells me that it will be many weeks before a full trial can be mounted.'

'Expensive weeks no doubt. Shall we get on with it?' said Vetinari.

'Mr Slant will read the charges,' said Rust. 'But in a nutshell, as you are well aware, Havelock, you are charged with treason. You surrendered most ignobly—'

'—but I did not—'

'—and quite illegally waived all rights to our sovereignty of the country known

as Leshp—'

'—but there is no such place.'

Lord Rust paused. 'Are you quite sane, sir?'

'The surrender terms were to be ratified on the island of Leshp, Lord Rust.

There is no such place.'

'We passed it on the way here, man!'

'Has anyone looked recently?'

Angua tapped Vimes on the shoulder.

'A strange wave came up the river just after we arrived, sir—'

There was some urgent conversation among the wizards, and

Archchancellor

Ridcully stood up.

'There seems to be a bit of a problem, your lordships. The Dean says it really

isn't there.'

In theory they can't just appear either, my lord, but this one did.

'Perhaps it's sunk again,' said Carrot.

Now Rust glared at Vetinari.

'Did you know about this?' he demanded.

'How could I know something like that?'

Vimes watched the faces around the room.

'You do know something about this!' said Rust. He glanced towards Mr Slant, who

was leaving hurriedly through a large volume.

'All I know, my lord, is that Prince Cadram has, at a politically dangerous time

for him, given up a huge military advantage in exchange for an island which seems to have sunk under the sea,' said Lord Vetinari. 'The Klatchians are a

proud people. I wonder what they will think?'

And Vimes thought about General Ashal, standing beside Prince Cadram's throne.

Klatchians like successful leaders, he thought. I wonder what happens to the

unsuccessful ones? I mean, look at what when we think—

Someone nudged him.

' 's us, sir,' said Nobby. 'They said they didn't have any hurdles but they do a

ping-pong table for ten dollars. There's a small trampoline we could drag him on

but sarge thinks that'd be a bit ridiculous.'

Vimes walked out of the room, dragging Nobby with him, and pushed the little man

against the wall.

'Where did you get to with Vetinari, corporal? And remember I know when you tell

me lies. Your lips move.

'We... we... we... just went on a little voyage, sir. He said I wasn't to say we

Oh, it's just a souvenir I picked up in foreign parts, sir. It kind of fingers, if you know what I mean.'

Vimes shrugged and went back into the Rats Chamber.

'—and I resent most strongly the suggestion that I would have negotiated with

His Highness in the knowledge that... ah, Sir Samuel. The keys to the handcuffs, please.'

'You knew! You knew all the time!' Rust shouted.

'Is Lord Vetinari charged with anything?' said Vimes.

Mr Slant was scrabbling through another volume. He looked quite flustered, for a

zombie. His greengreen shade was distinctly greener.

'Not as such...' he muttered.

'But he will be!' said Lord Rust.

'Well, when you find out what it is you be sure and let me know, and I'll go and

arrest him for it,' said Vimes, unlocking the handcuffs.

He was aware of cheering outside. Nothing stayed secret very long in Ankh-Morpork. The damn island wasn't there any more. And, somehow, it had all

worked out.

He met Vetinari's eyes. 'Piece of luck for you,— eh?' he said.

'Oh, there's always a chicken, Sir Samuel. If you look hard enough.'

The day turned out to be nearly as trying as war. At least one carpet made the

flight from Klatch, and there was a constant stream of messages between the

palace and the embassy. A crowd still hung around outside the palace.

Things

were happening, and even if they did not know what they were they weren't going

Sir.

'A few days ago you were biting people's noses off!'

'Ah, you must not believe Private Bourke, sir,' said the butler, as Vimes stepped in. 'It was only one nose.'

'And now you've hurried back to polish the silver?'

'It does not do to let standards slip, sir.' He stopped. 'Sir?'

'Yes?'

'Did we win?'

Vimes looked into the round pink face.

'Er... we didn't lose, Willikins,' he said.

'We couldn't let a foreign despot raise a hand to Ankh-Morpork, could we, sir?'

said the butler. There was a slight tremble in his voice.

'I suppose not...'

'So it was right, what we did.'

'I suppose so...'

'The gardener was saying that Lord Vetinari put one over on the Klatchians, sir...'

'I don't see why not. He's done it with everyone else.'

'That would be very satisfactory, sir. Lady Sybil is in the Slightly Pink Drawing Room, sir.'

She was knitting inexpertly when Vimes came in, but rose and gave him a kiss.

'I heard the news,' she said. 'Well done.' She looked him up and down. As far as

she could see, he was all there.

'I'm not sure that we won...'

'Getting you back alive counts as a win, Sam. Although of course I wouldn't say

that in front of Lady Selachii.' Sybil waved the knitting at him. 'She's organized a committee to knit socks for our brave lads at the front, but it turns out you're back. And I haven't even worked out how to turn a heel yet. She's probably going to be annoyed.'

Fred's here. Vetinari wants you, said Sybil.
'Already? But we haven't even started dinner.'

'I'm coming with you, Sam. He can't keep on calling you out at all hours, you know.'

Sam Vimes tried to look as serious as any man can when he's holding a loofah.

'Sybil, I'm the Commander of the Watch and he's the ruler of the city. It's not like going to complain to the teacher because I'm not doing well in geography...'

'I said I'm coming with you, Sam.'

The Boat slipped down its rails and into the water. A stream of bubbles came up.

Leonard sighed. He had very carefully refrained from putting the cork in.

The

current n-tight roll it anywhere. He hoped it'd roll to the deepest pit of the ocean, or even right over the Rim.

He walked unnoticed through the crowds until he came to the palace. He let

himself into the secret corridor and avoided the various traps without thinking,

since he himself had designed them.

He reached the door to his airy room and unlocked it. When he was inside he

locked it again, and pushed the key back under the door. And then he sighed.

So that was the world, was it? Clearly a mad place, with madmen in it.

Well,

from now on he'd be careful. It was clear that some men would try to turn anything into a weapon.

He made himself a cup of tea, a process slightly delayed while he designed a

Lady Sybil? This is an unexpected surprise,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Good evening, Sir Samuel, and may I say what a nice scarf you're wearing. And Captain Carrot.

Please sit down. We have a lot of business to finish.'

They sat.

'Firstly,' said Lord Vetinari, 'I have just drafted a proclamation for the town criers. The news is good.'

'The war is officially over, is it?' said Carrot.

'The war, captain, never happened. It was a... misunderstanding.'

'Never happened?' said Vimes. 'People got killed!'

'Quite so,' said Lord Vetinari. 'And this suggests, does it not, that we should try to understand one another as much as possible?'

'What about the Prince?'

'Oh, I am sure we can do business with him, Vimes.'

'I don't think so!'

'Prince Khufurah? I thought you rather liked the man.'

'What? What happened to the other one?'

'He appears to have gone on a long visit to the country,' said the Patrician.

'At some speed.'

'You mean the kind of visit where you don't even stop to pack?'

'That kind of visit, yes. He seems to have upset people.'

'Do we know which country?' said Vimes.

'Klatchistan, I believe – I'm sorry, did I say something funny?'

'Oh, no. No. Just a thought crossed my mind, that's all.'

Vetinari leaned back. 'And so once again peace spreads her tranquil blanket.'

'I shouldn't think the Klatchians are very happy, though.'

'It is in the nature of people to turn on their leaders when they fail to be lucky,' Vetinari added, his expression not changing. 'Oh, there will no doubt be

problems. We will just have to... discuss them. Prince Khufurah is an amiable

traffic? Vimes's brain tried to do a u-turn.

'Yes. Our ancient streets are becoming very congested these days. I hear there

is a carter in Kings' Way who settled down and raised a family while in the queue. And the responsibility for keeping the streets clear is, in fact, one of the most ancient ones incumbent on the Watch.'

'Maybe, sir, but these days—'

'So you will set up a department, Vimes, to regulate matters. To deal with things. Stolen carts and so on. And keeping the major crossroads clear.

And

perhaps to fine carters who park for too long and impede the flow. And so on.

Sergeant Colon and Corporal Nobbs would, I think, be eminently fitted for this

work which, I suspect, should easily be self-financing. What is your opinion?'

A chance to be 'self-financing' and not get shot at, thought Vimes. They'll think they've died and gone to heaven.

'Is this some sort of a reward for them, sir?'

'Let us say, Vimes, that where one finds one has a square peg, one should look

for a square hole.'

'I suppose that's all right, sir. Of course, that means I'll have to promote someone—'

'I am sure I can leave the details to you. A small bonus for each of them would

not be out of order. Ten dollars, say. Oh, there is one other thing, Vimes.

And

I am particularly glad that Lady Sybil is here to hear this. I am persuaded to change the title of your office.'

'Yes?'

'"Commander" is rather a mouthful. So I have been reminded that a word that

A discussion.

Lady Sybil sighed. 'Oh, very well. It's up to you, Sam. You know that.'

'There are... associated matters,' said Lord Vetinari, when the door closed behind her.

'No!'

'Perhaps you should hear them.'

'No! You've done this to me before! We've got the Watch set up, we've almost got

the numbers, the widows and orphans fund is so big the men are queueing up for

the dangerous beats, and the dartboard we've got is nearly new! You can't bribe

me into accepting this time! There is nothing we want!'

'Stoneface Vimes was a much-maligned man, I've always thought,' said Vetinari.

'I'm not accepting— What?' Vimes skidded in mid-anger.

'I've always thought that, too,' said Carrot loyally.

Vetinari stood up and went to stand by the window, looking down at Broad Way

with his hands behind his back.

'The thought occurs that this might be time for... reconsideration of certain ancient assumptions,' said Vetinari.

The meaning enveloped Vimes like a chilly mist.

'You're offering to change history?' he said. 'Is that it? Rewrite the—'

'Oh, my dear Vimes, history changes all the time. It is constantly being re-examined and re-evaluated, otherwise how would we be able to keep historians

occupied? We can't possibly allow people with their sort of minds to walk around

with time on their hands. The Chairman of the Guild of Historians is in full agreement with me, I know, that the pivotal role of your ancestor in the

city's

history is ripe for fresh... analysis.'

And a coronet, I believe, with knobs on—

'You can take that coronet with the knobs on and—'

'—which I hope you will wear on formal occasions, such as, for example, the unveiling of the statue which has for so long disgraced the city by its absence.'

For once, Vimes managed to get ahead of the conversation.

'Old Stoneface again?' he said. 'That part of it, is it? A statue to old Stoneface?'

'Well done,' said Lord Vetinari. 'Not of you, obviously. Putting up a statue to someone who tried to stop a war is not very, um, statuesque. Of course, if you

had butchered five hundred of your own men out of arrogant carelessness, we'd be

melting the bronze already. No. I was thinking of the first Vimes who tried to make a future and merely made history. I thought perhaps somewhere in

Peach Pie

Street—'

They watched one another like cats, like poker players.

'Top of Broad Way,' Vimes said hoarsely. 'Right in front of the palace.'

The Patrician glanced out of the window. 'Agreed. I shall enjoy looking at it.'

'And right up close to the wall. Out of the wind.'

'Certainly.'

Vimes looked nonplussed for a moment. 'We lost people—'

'Seventeen, caught in skirmishes of one sort or another,' said Lord Vetinari.

'I want—'

'Financial arrangements will be made for widows and dependants.'

Vimes gave up.

'Well done, sir!' said Carrot.

The new duke rubbed his chin.

'But that means I'll have to be married to a duchess,' he said. 'That's a big fat word, duchess. And Sybil's never been very interested in that sort of thing.'

that
they knew that she knew that they knew...

'All right,' he said, 'but, look I thought only a king could make someone a duke. It's not like all these knights and barons, that's just, well, political, but something like a duke needs a—'

He looked at Vetinari. And then at Carrot. Vetinari had said that he'd been reminded...

'I'm sure, if ever there is a king in Ankh—Morpork again, he will choose to ratify my decision,' said Vetinari smoothly. 'And if there never is a king, well, I see no practical problems.'

'I'm bought and sold, aren't I?' said Vimes, shaking his head. 'Bought and sold.'

'Not at all,' said Vetinari.

'Yes, I am. We all are. Even Rust. And all those poor buggers who went off to

get slaughtered. We're not part of the big picture, right? We're just bought and sold.'

Vetinari was suddenly in front of Vimes, his chair hitting the floor behind his desk.

'Really? Men marched away, Vimes. And men marched back. How glorious the battles would have been that they never had to fight!' He hesitated, and then shrugged.

'And you say bought and sold? All right. But not, I think, needlessly spent.'

The Patrician flashed one of those sharp, fleeting little smiles to say that something that wasn't very funny had nevertheless amused him. 'Veni, vici...

Vetinari.'

Seaweed floated away on aimless currents. Apart from the driftwood, there was nothing to show that Leshp had ever been.

And you'll have to do your share of the padding.

'Of course.'

The birds glided and turned, white scribbles against the dear blue sky.

'To Ankh—Morpork!'

'To Klatch!'

Down below, as the sunken mountain of Leshp settled further onto the sea bed,

the Curious Squid jetted back along its curious streets. They had no idea why,

at enormous intervals, their city disappeared up into the sky, but it never went

away for very long. It was just one of those things. Things happened, or sometimes they didn't. The Curious Squid just assumed that it all worked out,

sooner or later.

A shark swam by. If anyone had risked placing an car to its side, they would

have heard: 'Bingeleybingeley beep! Three pee em... Eat, Hunger, Swim.

Things To

Do Today: Swim, Hunger, Eat. Three oh five pee em: Feeding Frenzy...'

It wasn't the most interesting of schedules, but it was very easy to organize.

Unusually, Sergeant Colon had put himself on the patrol roster. It was good to

get out in the cool air. And also, for some reason, the news had got around that

the Watch were somehow bound up with what seemed, in some indefinable way, to

have been a victory, which meant that a Watch uniform was probably good for the

odd free pint at the back door of the occasional pub.

He patrolled with Corporal Nobbs. They walked with the confident tread of men

my word, he said.

'Special Ankh—Morporck curry,' said Mr Goriff. 'Containing yellow curry powder, big lumps of swede, green peas and soggy sultanas the—'

'—size of eggs!' said Nobby.

'Thank you very much,' said Colon. 'How's your lad, then, Mr Goriff?'

'He says you have set him an example and now he will be a watchman when he grows up.'

'Ah, right,' said Colon happily. 'That'll please Mr Vimes. You just tell him—'

'In Al—Khali,' said Goriff. 'He is staying with my brother.'

'Oh. Well... fair enough, then. Er... thanks for the curry, anyway.'

'What sort of example do you think he meant?' said Nobby, as they strolled away.

'The good sort, obviously,' said Colon, through a mouthful of mildly spiced swede.

'Yeah, right.'

Chewing slowly and walking even slower, they headed towards the docks.

'I was gonna write Bana a letter,' said Nobby, after a while.

'Yeah, but... she thought you was a woman, Nobby.'

'Right. So she saw, like, my inner self, shorn of...'

Nobby's lips moved as he concentrated, 'shorn of surface thingy. That's what

Angua said. Anyway, then I thought, well, her boyfriend'll be coming back, so I

thought I'd be noble about it and give her up.'

'cos he might be a big stropy bloke, too,' said Sergeant Colon.

'I never thought about that, sarge.'

They paced for a while.

'It's a far, far better thing I do now than I have ever done before,' said Nobby.

'Right,' said Sergeant Colon. They walked on in silence for a while and he

Overhead, the weather-vanes started to creak round.

'Made me a lot more understanding about women, that experience,' said Nobby.

Colon, a much-married man, said nothing.

'I met Verity Pushpram this afternoon,' Nobby went on, 'and I said how about coming out with me tonight and I don't mind about the squint at all and I've got this expensive exotic perfume which'll totally disguise your smell, and she said bugger off and threw an eel at me.'

'Not good, then,' said Colon.

'Oh, yeah, sarge, 'cos she used to just cuss when she saw me. And I've still got the eel, and there's a good feed off it, so I look upon it as a very positive step.'

'Could be. Could be. just so long as you give someone that scent soon, eh?

Only

even the people across the street are starting to complain.'

Their feet, moving like bees towards a flower, had found their way to the waterfront. They looked up at the Klatchian's Head, on its spike.

'It's only wooden,' said Colon.

Nobby said nothing.

'And it's, like, part of our traditional heritage an' that,' Colon went on, but hesitantly, as if he didn't believe his own voice.

Nobby blew his nose again, an exercise which, with all its little arpeggios and flourishes, went on for some time.

The sergeant gave in. Some things didn't seem quite the same any more, he had to

admit. 'I've never really liked the place. Let's go to the Bunch of Grapes then, all right?'

wouldn't you?

'Well, I did point out that you could wear the official ducal regalia, dear.'

'Yes, I've seen it. White silk stockings are not me.'

'Well, you've got the calves for them—'

'I think I'll stick with the commander's costume,' said Vimes quickly.

Archchancellor Ridcully hurried up. 'Ah, we're ready for you now, Lord Vi—'

'Call me Sir Samuel,' said Vimes. 'I can just about live with that.'

'Well, we've found the Bursar in one of the attics, so I think we can make a start. If you'd take your place...'

Vimes walked to the head of the procession, feeling every gaze on him, hearing

the whispers. Maybe you could get chucked out of the peerage? He'd have to look

that up. Although, considering what lords had got up to in the past, it would have to be for something really, really awful.

Still, the drawings of the statue looked good. And he'd seen what was going to

go in the history books. Making history, it turned out, was quite easy. It was what got written down. It was as simple as that.

'Jolly good,' Ridcully bellowed, above the buzz. Now, if we all step smartly and

follow Lor— Com— Sir Samuel we ought to be back here for lunch no later than

half past one. Is the choir ready? No—one is treading on anyone else's robes?

Then orf we go!

Vimes set out at the mandatory slow walking pace. He heard the procession start

up behind him. There were no doubt problems, as there always are on civic occasions which have to involve the old and deaf and the young and stupid.

Several people were probably already walking in the wrong direction.

with vermine. They could forget that, too.

He'd spent a desperate hour in the library, and all that stuff about the gold knobs and silk stockings was so much marsh gas. Tradition? He'd show them

tradition. What the original dukes wore, as far as he could see, was good sensible chain mail with blood on it, preferably other people's—

There was a scream from the crowd. His head jerked round and he saw a stout

woman sitting on the ground, waving her arms.

' 'e stole my bag! And 'e never showed me 'is Thieves' Guild badge!'

The procession shunted to a halt as Vimes stared at the figure legging it across

Sator Square.

'You stop right there, Sidney Pickens!' he yelled, and leapt forward.

And, of course, very few people do know how Tradition is supposed to go.

There's

a, certain mysterious ridiculousness about it by its very nature – once there was a reason why you had to carry a posy of primroses on Soul Cake

Tuesday, but

now you did it because... that's what was Done. Besides, the intelligence of that creature known as a crowd is the square root of the number of people in it.

Vimes was running, so the University choir hurried after him. And the people

behind the choir saw the gap opening up and responded to the urge to fill it.

And then everyone was just running, because everyone else was running.

There were occasional whimpers from those whose heart, lungs or legs weren't up

to this kind of thing, and a bellow from the Archchancellor who had tried to stand firm in the face of the frantic stampede and was now having his head repeatedly trodden into the cobbles.

And apprentice thief Sidney Pickens ran because he'd taken one look over his

the
chase.

THE END

[1] The palms are held at right angles to one another and flapped together rather than clapped, while the flapper stares intently at the audience as if to say 'We're going to have some applause here or else the whole school is in detention.'

[2] Women always do this.

[3] The possibility that they were not guilty of anything was one that he didn't even think worthy of consideration.

[4] A term invented by the wizard Denephew Boot*, who had found that by a system of rewards and punishments he could train a dog, at the ringing of a bell, to immediately eat a strawberry meringue.

*His parents, who were uncomplicated country people, had wanted a girl. They were expecting to call her Denise.

[5] Plain clothes was the problem. Both the men had been used to uniforms all their lives. Sergeant Colon's only suit had been bought by a man two stone

Orniman
with his countrymen's almost pathological interest in evangelical religion
and
spent all his wages on pamphlets; he even had his own printing press. The
results were handed out to anyone interested and everyone who wasn't
interested
as well. Even Detritus couldn't clear a crowd faster than Visit, Vimes said.
And
on his days off he could be seen tramping the streets with his colleague,
Smite—TheUnbeliever—With—Cunning—Arguments. So far they hadn't made
a single
convert. Vimes thought that Visit was probably a really nice man
underneath it
all, but somehow he could never face the task of finding out.

[7] And would not, therefore, be officially burgled. AnkhMorpork had a very
direct approach to the idea of insurance. When the middle-man was cut
out, that
wasn't a figure of speech.

[8] It is a long-cherished tradition among a certain type of military thinker
that huge casualties are the main thing. If they are on the other side then
this
is a valuable bonus.

[9] One of the universal rules of happiness is: always be wary of any helpful
item that weighs less than its operating manual.

[10] Thinking up good names was, oddly enough, one area where Leonard
Quirm's
genius tended to give up.

[11] Except in the particular case of Sidney Lopsides, who was paid two
dollars

[14] Corporal Nobbs's appearance could best be summarized this way. One of the minor laws of the narrative universe is that any homely featured man who has, for some reason, to disguise himself as a woman will apparently become attractive to some otherwise perfectly sane men with, as the ardent scrolls say, hilarious results. In this case the laws were fighting against the fact of Corporal Nobby Nobbs, and gave up.

[15] And Mr Harris of the Blue Cat Club. His admission caused a lot of argument in the Guild, who knew competition when they saw it, but Mrs Palm overruled opposition on the basis, she said, that unnatural acts were only natural.

[16] Usually because they suspect the joke's on them.

[17] Although of course wizards aren't allowed to, because they're not supposed to have grandchildren.