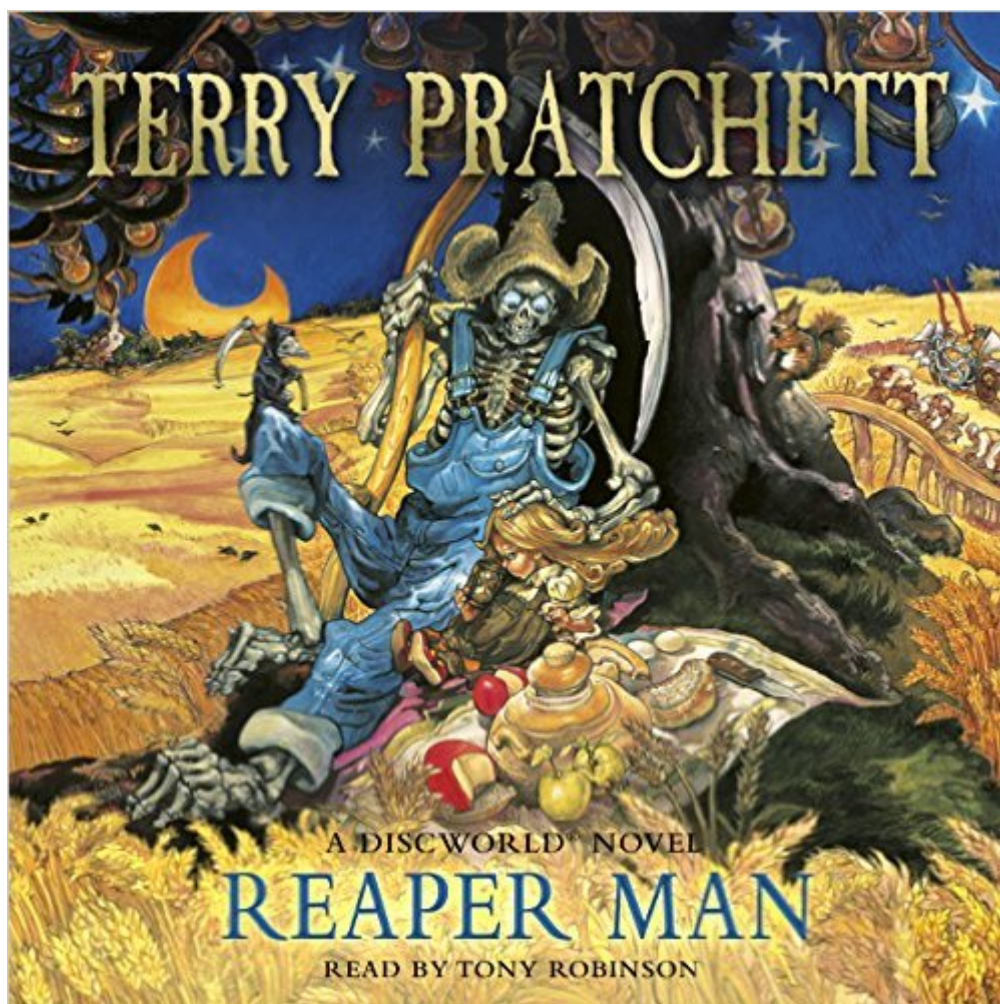


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Reaper Man



Synopsis

"Death has to happen. That's what being alive is all about. You're alive, and then you're dead. It can't just stop happening." But it can. And it has. So what happens after death is now less of a philosophical question than a question of actual reality. On the disc, as here, they need Death. If Death doesn't come for you, then what are you supposed to do in the meantime? You can't have the undead wandering about like lost souls. There's no telling what might happen, particularly when they discover that life really is only for the living.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

REAPER MAN is my introduction to Pratchett. Upon finishing it, I immediately ordered four more Pratchett novels. The man's a comic/cosmic genius. I had always been put off by what appeared to be the mass market packaging of his books. I thought he was just another pop fiction author. I couldn't have been more wrong. The usual comparison is to Douglas Adams, whom I also greatly admire, but I find that I respond even more viscerally to Pratchett. It's not too difficult to figure out who the main character is in this book. But this Reaper has less to do with a Durer print than he does with the character as filtered through the mind set of Monty Python in THE MEANING OF LIFE. "Bill Door," the Reaper's flustered attempt at a moniker as he assumes his earthly identity, is one of the drollest, funniest comic characters in recent literature. He is a master of understatement. His deadpan delivery is spot on. The puns and the throwaway lines come fast and furious, throughout the book. Yet Pratchett also adds a sense of poignancy as the Reaper engages in a terrestrial romance with the somewhat addled, but strong willed Miss Flitworth. We come to care

about what happens to them. Pratchett does a masterful job of juggling several subplots, involving Wizards, a Wolfman and several other equally bizarre, but comical secondary characters. I couldn't describe all these plots and subplots coherently if I tried. Suffice it to say that what would dissolve into pure incoherence in a lesser writer's hands, holds up like juggled hourglasses in Pratchett's hands. I had the impression that Pratchett couldn't be an important writer "and" be as prolific as he's been. Wrong.

Death, the grim reaper, is tasked with harvesting people's souls after they have died. He has always existed beyond Time and beyond life. But he has angered the Great Ones, and now he has to share the same fate as those he reaps: he is dying. He decides to take a holiday in order to make the most of the limited time he has left. But without Death present to claim people when they move on, things are bound to go wrong as life energy builds up and wreaks havoc on Discworld. Windle Poons, the oldest wizard at Unseen University, finds that upon his death he has nowhere to go. So he returns to his body until he can finally pass on. In his quest to find Death, he finds life. "Reaper Man" alternates between two story lines: a mostly serious one about Death and a mostly whimsical one about Poons and his fellow wizards as they battle a new life form that threatens to take over the disc. Although the character of Death was introduced in earlier Pratchett books, here he is fleshed out (if you will pardon the pun) into a fascinating character. He becomes a farm hand and switches to reaping crops instead of souls. He wrestles with the concept of saving a life instead of claiming one. He learns to get along with the townspeople and forms an interesting, and ultimately moving, relationship with Miss Flitworth, the elderly spinster who owns the farm. Now that he is faced with his own death, he begins to experience the vulnerabilities and emotions that other mortals face. I found Death to be a quite likable entity, and I think other readers will also. The late Windle Poons evokes a lot of laughs as he tries to make his way in the world of the still living. He hooks up with a group of the Undead when he joins the Fresh Start Club, an organization that fights for equal rights for the deceased.

Shortsighted management has forced another "downsizing". This time the victim of layoff is Death himself, "retired" by the Auditors. He does his job efficiently and he doesn't sass the boss. He's just become "too involved" with those due to receive attention from his infinitely sharp scythe. The Auditors want a firmer hand on the reaping blade. On the street with time on his hands, Death decides he's going to spend it. Wandering the Discworld, he "gets his feet under the table" as hired man at Miss Flitworth's farm. Although a bit confused about eating and sleeping, he's able to

respond with resolute affirmation when she asks, "Can you use a scythe?" He demonstrates a harvesting technique only Pratchett could devise. With Death no longer performing his role, strange events result. Unconfined, the life force manifests itself in bizarre ways. Death, visible to wizards, fails to arrive at an appointment. In consequence, Windle Poons is subjected to various indignities. His colleagues have a prejudice about zombies. Not having actually died, Windle decides to start to live. Over a century of breathing doesn't necessarily mean you've been living, and Windle, like Death, decides to see something of the [Disc]world. His colleagues, uncertain as to why Windle's still upright and subjected to some mild indignities of their own, seek the cause of unusual manifestations. If you're new to the Discworld, all this must sound pretty grotesque. Death "fired" only to become a reaper on a spinster's farm? Wizards who can see him and know precisely when he's due? Take heart, this isn't a bleak version of the Merlin legend, nor a Stephen King horror story. It's Terry Pratchett, a writer with an unmatched talent for looking at the world we live in.

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