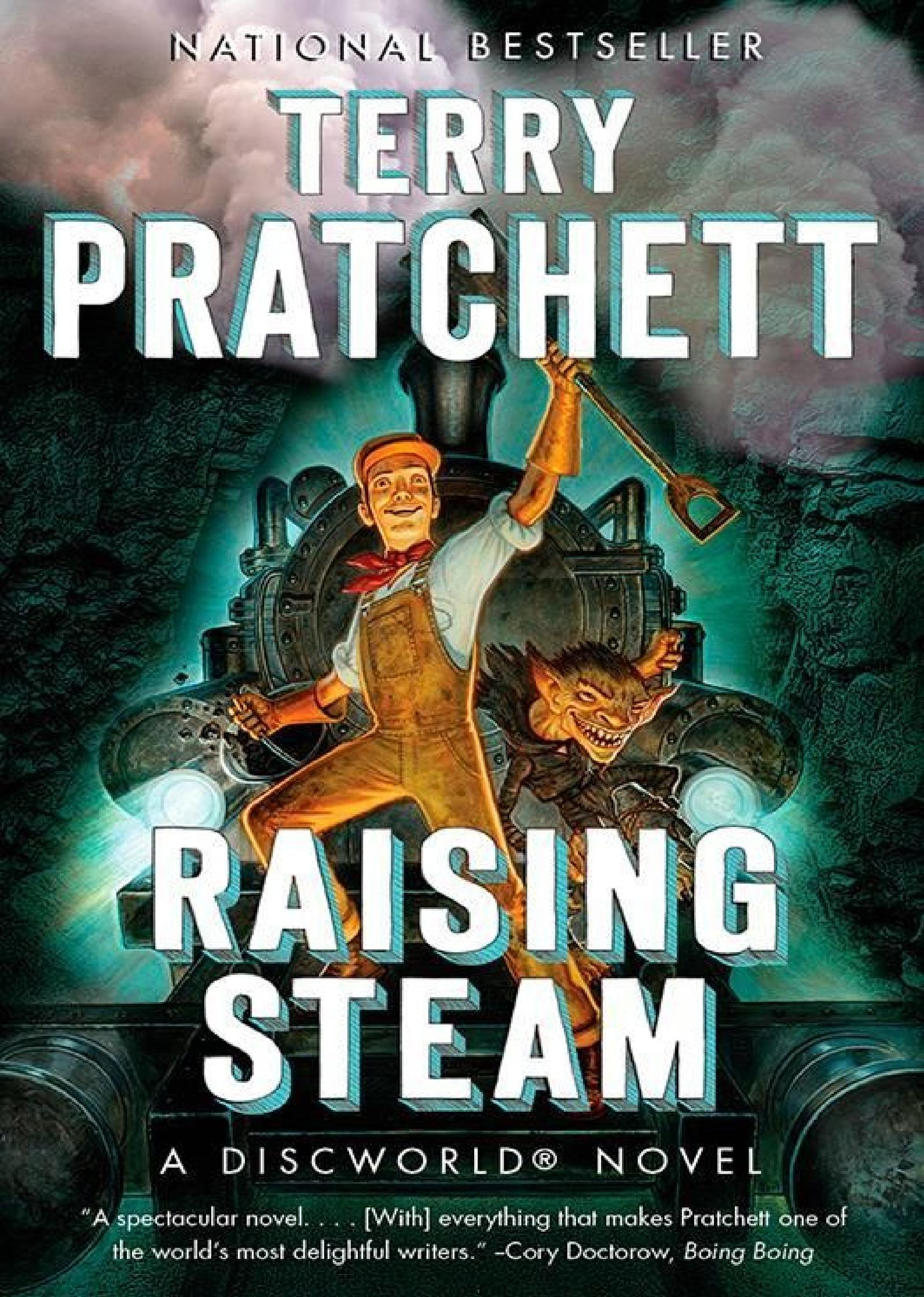


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RAISING STEAM

A Discworld® Novel

Terry Pratchett



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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To David Pratchett and Jim Wilkins, both fine engineers who taught their sons to be curious.

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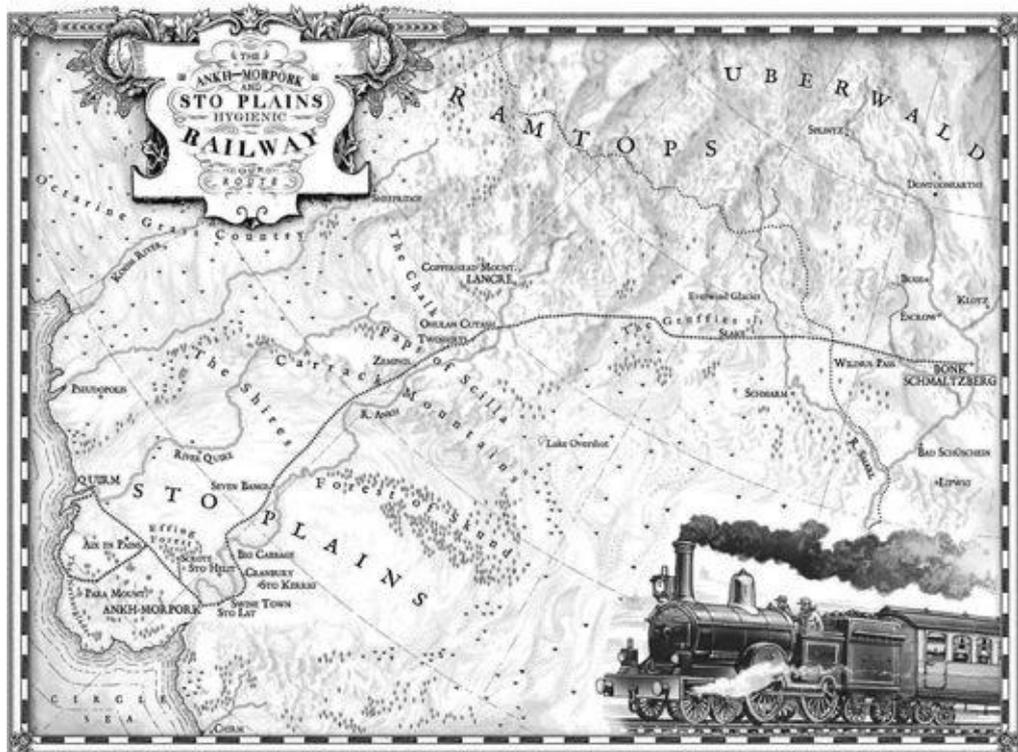
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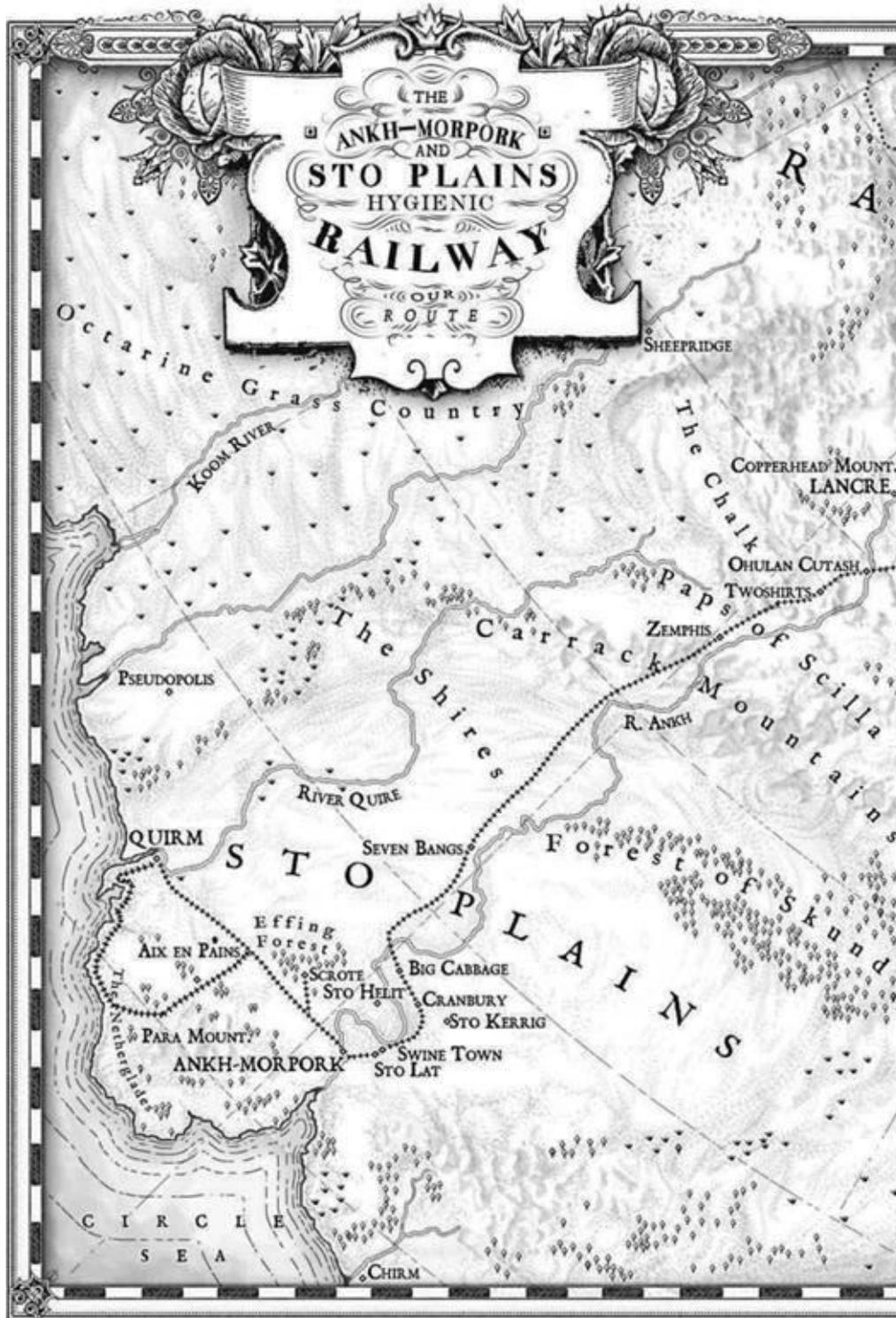
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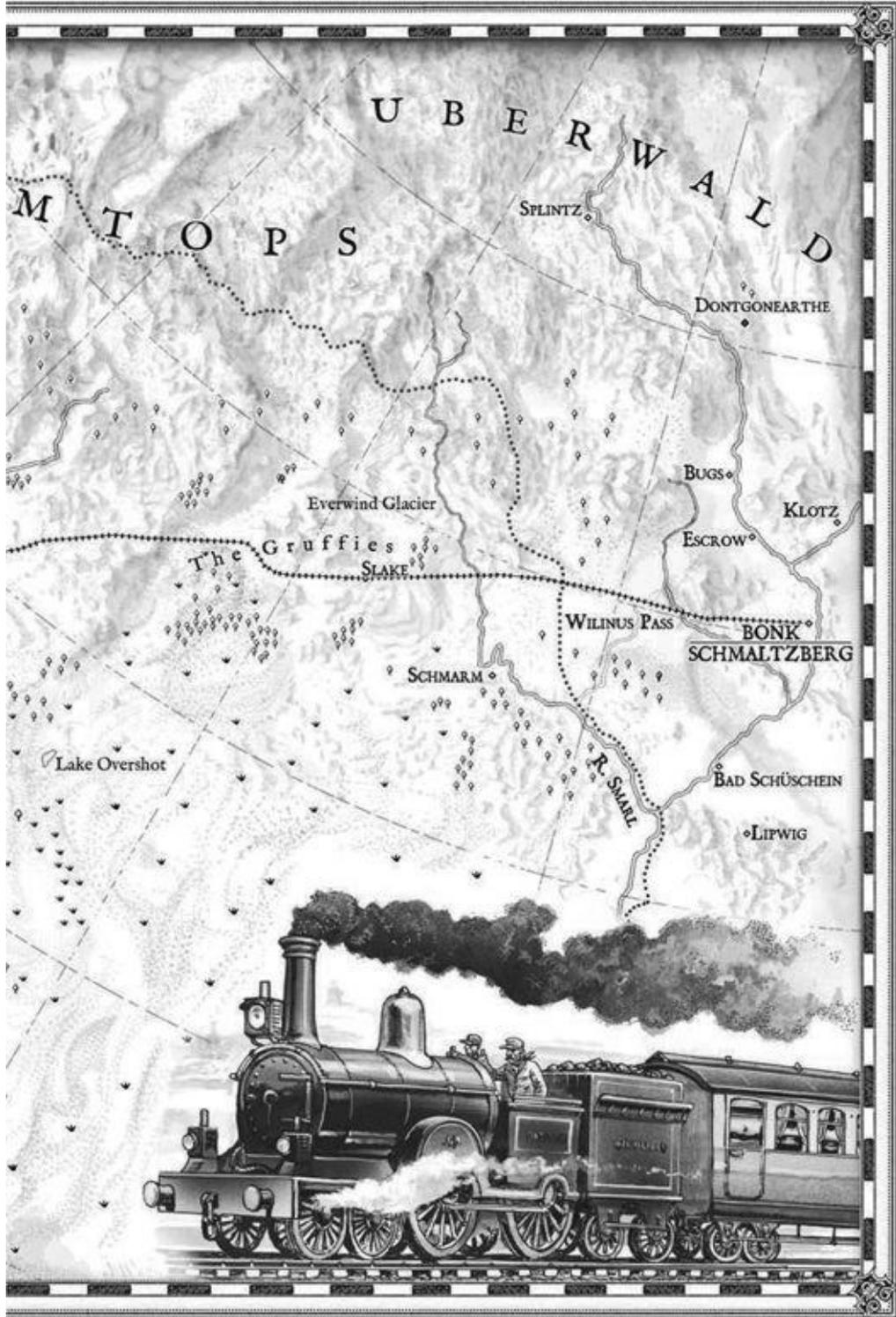
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It is hard to understand nothing, but the multiverse is full of it. Nothing travels everywhere, always ahead of something, and in the great cloud of unknowing nothing yearns to become something, to break out, to move, to feel, to change, to dance and to experience—in short, to *be* something.

And now it found its chance as it drifted in the ether. Nothing, of course, knew about something, but this something was different, oh yes, and so nothing slid silently into something and floated down with everything in mind and, fortunately, landed on the back of a turtle, a very large one, and hurried to become something even faster. It was elemental and nothing was better than that and suddenly the elemental was captured! The bait had worked.

*

Anyone who has ever seen the River Ankh sliding along its bed of miscellaneous nastiness would understand why so much of the piscine food for the people of Ankh-Morpork has to be supplied by the fishing fleets of Quirm. In order to prevent terrible gastric trouble for the citizenry, Ankh-Morpork fishmongers have to ensure that their suppliers make their catches a long, long way from the city.

For Bowden Jeffries, purveyor of the very best in seafood, the two hundred miles or more which lay between the fish docks at Quirm and the customers in Ankh-Morpork was a regrettably long distance throughout the winter, autumn, and spring and a sheer penance in the summertime, because the highway, such as it was, became a linear furnace all the way to the Big City. Once you had had to deal with a ton of overheated octopus, you never forgot it; the smell lasted for days, and followed you around and almost into your bedroom. You could never get it out of your clothes.

People were so demanding, but the elite of Ankh-Morpork and, indeed, everyone else wanted their fish, even in the hottest part of the season. Even with an icehouse built by his own two hands and, by arrangement, a second icehouse halfway along the journey, it made you want to cry, it really did.

And he said as much to his cousin, Relief Jeffries, a market gardener, who looked at his beer and said, “It’s always the same. Nobody wants to help the small entrepreneur. Can you imagine how quickly strawberries turn into little balls of mush in the heat? Well, I’ll tell you: no time at all. Blink and you miss ’em, just when everybody wants their strawberries. And you ask the watercress people how difficult it is to get the damn stuff to the city before it’s as limp as a second-day sermon. We should petition the government!”

“No,” said his cousin. “I’ve had enough of this. Let’s write to the newspapers! That’s the way to get things done. Everyone’s complaining about the fruit and vegetables and the seafood. Vetinari should be made to understand the plight of

the small-time entrepreneur. After all, what do we occasionally pay our taxes for?”

Dick Simnel was ten years old when, back at the family smithy in Sheepridge, his father simply disappeared in a cloud of furnace parts and flying metal, all enveloped in a pink steam. He was never found in the terrible haze of scorching dampness, but on that very day young Dick Simnel vowed to whatever was left of his father in that boiling steam that he would make steam his servant.

His mother had other ideas. She was a midwife, and as she said to her neighbors, “Babbies are born everywhere. I’ll never be without a customer.” So, against her son’s wishes, Elsie Simnel decided to take him away from what she now considered to be a haunted place. She packed up their belongings and together they returned to her family home near Sto Lat, where people didn’t inexplicably disappear in a hot pink cloud.

Soon after they arrived something important happened to her boy. One day while waiting for his mother to return from a difficult delivery, Dick walked into a building that looked interesting, and which turned out to be a library. At first he thought it was full of poncy stuff, all kings and poets and lovers and battles, but in one crucial book he found something called mathematics and the world of numbers.

And that was why, one day some ten years later, he pulled together every fiber of his being and said, “Mother, you know last year when I said I were going ’iking in the mountains of Uberwald with me mates, well, it were kind of ... sort of ... a kind of lie, only very small, mind you.” Dick blushed. “You see, I found t’keys to Dad’s old shed and, well, I went back to Sheepridge and did some experimenting and”—he looked at his mother anxiously—“I think I know what ’e were doing wrong.”

Dick was braced for stiff objections, but he hadn’t reckoned on tears—so many tears—and as he tried to console her he added, “You, Mother, and Uncle Flavius got me an education, you got me the knowing of the numbers, including the arithmetic and weird stuff dreamed up by the philosophers in Ephebe where even camels can do logarithms on their toes. Dad didn’t know this stuff. He had the right ideas but he didn’t have the ... *tech-nol-ogy* right.”

At this point, Dick allowed his mother to talk, and she said, “I know there’s no stopping you, our Dick, you’re just like your stubborn father were, pigheaded. Is that what you’ve been doin’ in the barn? Teck-ology?” She looked at him accusingly, then sighed. “I can see I can’t tell you what to do, but you tell me: how can your ‘logger-reasons’ stop you goin’ the way of your poor old dad?” She started sobbing again.

Dick pulled out of his jacket something that looked like a small wand, which might have been made for a miniature wizard, and said, “This’ll keep me safe, Mother! I’ve the knowing of the sliding rule! I can tell the sine what to do, and the cosine likewise and work out the tangent of t’quaderatics! Come on, Mother, stop fretting and come wi’ me now to t’barn. You must see ’er!”

Mrs. Simnel, reluctant, was dragged by her son to the great open barn he had

kitted out like the workshop back at Sheepridge, hoping against hope that her son had accidentally found himself a girl. Inside the barn she looked helplessly at a large circle of metal which covered most of the floor. Something metallic whizzed round and round on the metal, sounding like a squirrel in a cage, giving off a smell much like camphor.

“Here she is, Mother. Ain’t she champion?” Dick said happily. “I call her Iron Girder!”

“But what is it, son?”

He grinned hugely and said, “It’s what they call a pro-to-type, Mother. You’ve got to ’ave a pro-to-type if you’re going to be an engineer.”

His mother smiled wanly but there was no stopping Dick. The words just tumbled out.

“The thing is, Mother, before you attempt owt you’ve got to ’ave some idea of what it is you want to do. One of the books I found in the library was about being an architect. And in that book, the man who wrote it said before he built his next big ’ouse he always made quite tiny models to get an idea of how it would all work out. He said it sounds fiddly and stuff, but going slowly and being thorough is the only way forward. And so I’m testing ’er out slowly, seeing what works and what doesn’t. And actually, I’m quite proud of me’sen. In the beginning I made t’track wooden, but I reckoned that the engine I wanted would be very ’eavy, so I chopped up t’wooden circle for firewood and went back to t’forge.”

Mrs. Simnel looked at the little mechanism running round and round on the barn floor and said, in the voice of someone really trying to understand, “Eee, lad, but what does it *do*?”

“Well, I remembered what Dad said about t’time he were watching t’kettle boiling and noticed t’lid going up and down with the pressure, and he told me that one day someone would build a bigger kettle that would lift more than a kettle lid. And I believe I have the knowing of the way to build a proper kettle, Mother.”

“And what good would that do, my boy?” said his mother sternly. And she watched the glow in her son’s eyes as he said, “Everything, Mother. *Everything*.”

Still in a haze of slight misunderstanding, Mrs. Simnel watched him unroll a large and rather grubby piece of paper.

“It’s called a blueprint, Mother. You’ve got to have a blueprint. It shows you how everything fits together.”

“Is this part of the pro-to-type?”

The boy looked at his doting mother’s face and realized that a little more exposition should be forthcoming. He took her by the hand and said, “Mother, I know they’re all lines and circles to you, but once you have the knowing of the circles and the lines and all, you know that this is a picture of an engine.”

Mrs. Simnel gripped his hand and said, “What do you think you’re going to do with it, our Dick?”

And young Simnel grinned and said happily, “Change things as needs changing, Mother.”

Mrs. Simnel gave her son a curious look for a moment or two, then appeared to reach a grudging conclusion and said, “Just you come with me, my lad.”

She led him back into the house, where they climbed up the ladder into the attic. She pointed out to her son a sturdy seaman's chest covered in dust.

"Your granddad gave me this to give to you, when I thought you needed it. Here's the key."

She was gratified that he didn't grab it and indeed looked carefully at the trunk before opening it. As he pushed up the lid, suddenly the air was filled with the glimmer of gold.

"Your granddad were slightly a bit of a pirate and then he got religion and were a bit afear'd, and the last words he said to me on his deathbed were, 'That young lad'll do something one day, you mark my words, our Elsie, but I'm damned if I know what it's going to be.' "

The people of the town were quite accustomed to the clangings and bangings emanating every day from the various blacksmith forges for which the area was famous. It seemed that, even though he had set up a forge of his own, young Simnel had decided not to enter the blacksmithing trade, possibly due to the dreadful business of Mr. Simnel Senior's leaving the world so abruptly. The local blacksmiths soon got used to making mysterious items that young Mr. Simnel had sketched out meticulously. He never told them what he was constructing, but since they were earning a lot of money they didn't mind.

The news of his legacy got around, of course—gold always finds its way out somehow—and there was a scratching of heads among the population exemplified by the oldest inhabitant, who, sitting on the bench outside the tavern, said, "Well, bugger me! Lad were blessed wi' an inherited fortune in gold and turned it into a load of old iron!"

He laughed, and so did everybody else, but nevertheless they continued to watch young Dick Simnel slip in and out of the wicket gate of his old and almost derelict barn, double-padlocked at all times.

Simnel had found a couple of local likely lads who helped him make things and move things around. Over time, the barn was augmented by a host of other sheds. More lads were taken on and the hammers were heard all day every day and, a bit at a time, information trickled into what might be called the local consciousness.

Apparently the lad had made a pump, an interesting pump that pumped water very high. And then he'd thrown everything away and said things like, "We need more steel than iron."

There were tales of great reams of paper laid out on desks as young Simnel worked out a wonderful "undertaking," as he called it. Admittedly there had been the occasional explosion, and then people heard about what the lads called "the Bunker," which had been useful to jump into on several occasions when there had been a little ... incident. And then there was the unfamiliar but somehow homely and rhythmic "chuffing" noise. Really quite a pleasant noise, almost hypnotic, which was strange because the mechanical creature that was making the noise sounded more alive than you would have expected.

It was noticed in the locality that the two main coworkers of Mr. Simnel, or

“Mad Iron” Simnel as some were now calling him, seemed somewhat changed, more grown-up and aware of themselves; young men, acolytes of the mysterious thing behind the doors. And no amount of bribery by beer or by women in the pub would make them give up the precious secrets of the barn.*1 They conducted themselves now as befitted the masters of the fiery furnace.

And then, of course, there were the sunny days when young Simnel and his cohorts dug long lines in the field next to the barn and filled them with metal while the furnace glowed day and night and everyone shook their heads and said, “Madness.” And this went on, it seemed forever, until ever was finished and the banging and clanging and smelting had stopped. Then Mr. Simnel’s lieutenants pulled aside the double doors of the big barn and filled the world with smoke.

Very little happened in this part of Sto Lat and this was enough to bring people running. Most of them arrived in time to see *something* heading out toward them, panting and steaming, with fast-spinning wheels and oscillating rods eerily appearing and disappearing in the smoke and the haze, and on top of it all, like a sort of king of smoke and fire, Dick Simnel, his face contorted with the effort of concentration. It was faintly reassuring that this *something* was apparently under the control of somebody human—although the more thoughtful of the onlookers might have added “So what? So’s a spoon,” and got ready to run away as the steaming, dancing, spinning, reciprocating engine cleared the barn and plunged on down the tracks laid in the field. And the bystanders, most of whom were now byrunners, and in certain instances bystampers, fled and complained, except, of course, for every little boy of any age who followed it with eyes open wide, vowing there and then that one day *he* would be the captain of the terrible noxious engine, oh yes indeed. A prince of the steam! A master of the sparks! A coachman of the Thunderbolts!

And outside, freed at last, the smoke drifted purposefully away from the shed in the direction of the largest city in the world. It drifted slowly at first, but gathered speed.

Later that day, and after several triumphant turns around the short track in the field, Simnel sat down with his helpers.

“Wally, Dave, I’m running out of brass, lads,” he said. “Get your mothers to get your stuff together, make us some butties, bring out the ’orses. We’re taking Iron Girder to Ankh-Morpork. I ’ear it’s the place where things ’appen.”

Of course Lord Vetinari, Patrician of Ankh-Morpork, would occasionally meet Lady Margolotta, Governess of Uberwald. Why shouldn’t he? After all, he also occasionally had meetings with Diamond King of Trolls up near Koom Valley, and indeed with the Low King of the Dwarfs, Rhys Rhysson, in his caverns *under* Uberwald. This, as everybody knew, was politics.

Yes, politics. The secret glue that stopped the world falling into warfare. In the past there had been so much war, far too much, but as every schoolboy knew, or at least knew in those days when schoolboys actually read anything more demanding than a crisp packet, not so long ago a truly terrible war, the last war of Koom Valley, had *almost* happened, out of which the dwarfs and trolls had

managed to achieve not exactly peace, but an understanding from which, hopefully, peace might evolve. There had been the shaking of hands, *important* hands, shaken fervently, and so there was hope, hope as fragile as a thought.

Indeed, thought Lord Vetinari as his coach rattled along toward Uberwald, in the rosy afterglow that had followed the famous Koom Valley Accord even goblins had finally been recognized as sapient creatures, to be metaphorically treated as brothers, although not necessarily as brothers-in-law. He reflected that, from a distance, the world might conceivably look to be at peace, a state of affairs that always ends in war, eventually.

He winced as his coach hit another most egregious bump on the road. He'd had the seats supplemented with extra mattress padding but simply nothing could turn the journey to Uberwald into anything other than a penance at every pothole, leading to fundamental discomfort. Progress had been very slow, although stops at clacks towers along the route had allowed his secretary, Drumknott, to collect the daily crossword puzzle without which Lord Vetinari considered the day incomplete.

There was a bang from outside.

"Good grief! Must we hit every pothole on the road, Drumknott?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but it appears that her ladyship cannot even now control the bandits around the Wilinus Pass. She has a culling every so often, but I'm afraid this is the least dangerous route."

There was a shout outside, followed by more banging. Vetinari blew out his reading lamp moments before a ferocious-looking individual pushed the point of a crossbow bolt to the glass of the carriage, which was now in darkness, and said, "Just you come out here with all your valuables or it'll be the worse for you, okay! No tricks now! We're assassins!"

Lord Vetinari calmly put down the book he had been reading, sighed and said to Drumknott, "It appears, Drumknott, that we have been hijacked by *assassins*. Isn't that ... nice."

And now Drumknott had a little smile. "Oh, yes, how nice, sir. You always like meeting assassins. I won't get in your way, sir."

Vetinari pulled his cloak around him as he stepped out of the coach and said, "There is no reason for violence, gentlemen. I will give you everything I have ..."

And it was no more than two minutes later that his lordship climbed back up into the coach and signaled for the driver to carry on as if nothing had happened.

After a while, and out of sheer curiosity, Drumknott said, "What happened this time, my lord? I didn't hear anything."

Beside him, Lord Vetinari said, "Neither did they, Drumknott. Dear me, it's such a waste. One wonders why they don't learn to read. Then they'd recognize the crest on my coach, which would have enlightened them!"

As the coach got up to what might be considered an *erratic* kind of speed, and after some thought, Drumknott said, "But your crest, sir, is black on a black background and it's a very dark night."

"Ah, yes, Drumknott," Lord Vetinari replied, with what passed as a smile. "Do you know, I hadn't thought of that."

There was something inevitable about Lady Margolotta's castle. As the great wooden doors slowly opened, every door hinge creaked. After all, there was such a thing as socially acceptable ambience. Indeed, what kind of vampire would live in a castle that didn't creak and groan on cue? The Igors wouldn't have it any other way, and now the resident Igor welcomed Lord Vetinari and his secretary into a cavernous hall with spiderwebs hanging pendulously from the ceiling. And there was a sense, only a sense, that down in the basement somewhere, something was screaming.

But of course, Vetinari reflected, here was a wonderful lady, who had made vampires understand that returning from the grave so often that you got dizzy was rather stupid and who somehow had persuaded them to at least tone down their nocturnal activities. Besides which, she had introduced coffee to Uberwald, apparently exchanging one terrifying craving for another.

Lady Margolotta was always short and to the point, as was the nature of the conversation that followed a splendid dinner a few days later. "It is the grags. The grags again, yes, Havelock? After all this time! My vord, even vorse, just as you, my dear, prophesied. How could you have foreseen it?"

"Well, madam, Diamond King of Trolls asked me the very same thing, but all I can say is that it lies in the indefatigable nature of sapient creatures. In short, they can't all be satisfied at the same time. You thought the bunting and fireworks and handshakes and pledges after Koom Valley was signed and sealed was the end of it, yes? Personally, I have always considered this a mere interlude. In short, Margolotta, peace is what you have while incubating the next war. It is impossible to accommodate *everyone* and twice as impossible to please all the dwarfs. You see, when I'm talking to Diamond King of Trolls he is the mouthpiece of the trolls, he speaks for *all* the trolls. Sensible as they are, they leave it all to him when it comes to the politics.

"And then, on the other hand, we have yourself, dear lady: you speak for all your ... folk in Bonk^{*2} and most agreements made with you are, well, quite agreeable ... But the dwarfs, what a calamity. Just when you think you're talking to the leader of the dwarfs, some wild-eyed grag will pop out on the landscape and suddenly all bets are off, all treaties instantly become null and void, and there is no possibility of trust! As you know, there is a 'king'—a *dezkaknik*,^{*3} as they call him—in every mine on the Disc. How does one do business with people like this? Every dwarf his own inner tyrant."

"Vell," said Lady Margolotta, "Rhys Rhysson is managing quite vell in the circumstances and ve in higher Uberwald"—now her ladyship almost whispered—"are very much on the side of progress. But, yes, how can vun vin vunce and for all, that is what I would like to know."

His lordship set down his glass carefully and said, "That, alas, is never totally possible. The stars change, people change, and all we can do is assist the future with care and thoughtful determination to see the world at peace, even if it means ushering some of its worst threats to an early grave.

"Although I'm bound to say that subtlety and careful interrogation of the things the world puts in front of us suggest to me that the Low King—whom, as

protocol dictates, I called upon before coming here to meet you—is forming a plan right now; and when he makes his play we will throw everything in to support him. He is taking a very big gamble on the future. He believes that the time is right, especially since Ankh-Morpork is now well known to have the largest dwarf community in the world.”

“But I believe his people don’t like too much modernity. I must admit, I can see why. Progress is such a vorrisome thing when one is trying to maintain peace in the world. So ... unpredictable. Can I remind you, Havelock, that many, many years ago, an Ephebian philosopher built an engine that was very powerful, scarily so. If those people had persevered with the engine powered by steam the nature of life now might have been very much different. Don’t you find that vorryink? How can we guide the future when von idiot can make a mechanism that might change *everything*?”

Lord Vetinari dribbled a last drop of brandy into his glass and said cheerfully, “Madam, only a fool would try to stop the progress of the multitude. *Vox populi, vox deorum*, carefully shepherded by a thoughtful prince, of course. And so I take the view that when it’s steam engine time, steam engines will come.”

“And what do you think you’re doing, dwarf?”

Young Magnus Magnusson didn’t pay much attention at first to the senior dwarf whose face, insofar as it could be seen, was definitely grumpy, the kind of dwarf that had apparently never himself been young, and so he shrugged and said, “No offense, O venerable one, but what I think I’m doing is walking along minding my own business in the hope that others would be minding their own. I hope you have no rat with that?”^{*4}

It is said that a soft answer turneth away wrath, but this assertion has a lot to do with hope and was now turning out to be patently inaccurate, since even a well-spoken and thoughtful soft answer could actually drive the wrong kind of person into a state of fury if wrath was what they had in mind, and that was the state the elderly dwarf was now enjoying.

“Why are you wearing your helmet backward, young dwarf?”

Magnus was an easygoing dwarf and did the wrong thing, which was to be logical.

“Well, O venerable one, it’s got my Scouting badge on it, you know. Scouting? Out in the fresh air? Not getting up to mischief and serving my community well?”

This litany of good intentions didn’t seem to get Magnus any friends and his sense of peril began belatedly to function much faster. The old dwarf was really, really unhappy about him, and during this short exchange a few other dwarfs had sauntered over to them, looking at Magnus as if weighing him up for the fight.

It was Magnus’s first time alone in the twin cities of Bonk and Schmaltzberg and he hadn’t expected to be greeted like this. These dwarfs didn’t look like the ones he had grown up with in Treacle Mine Road and he began to back away, saying hurriedly, “I’m here to see my granny, right, if you don’t mind, she’s not very well and I’ve come all the way from Ankh-Morpork, hitching rides on carts and sleeping out every night in haystacks and barns. It’s a long, long way—”

And then it all happened.

Magnus was a speedy runner, as befitted the Ankh-Morpork Rat Pack,^{*5} and as he ran he tried to figure out what it was that he had done wrong. After all, it had taken him forever by various means to get to Uberwald, and he was a dwarf, and they were dwarfs and ...

It dawned on him that there had been something in the newspapers back home saying that there were still a few dwarf societies that would have nothing to do with any organization that included trolls, the traditional and visceral enemy. Well, there were certainly trolls in the pack back home and they were good sports, all of them, a bit slow, mind you, but he had occasionally gone to tea with some of them and vice versa. Only now he remembered how occasionally old trolls and older dwarfs were upset for no other reason than that after hundreds of years of trying to kill one another they, by means of one handshake, were supposed to have become friends.

Magnus had always understood that the Low City of the Low King was a dark place, and that was okay for dwarfs, as dwarfs and darkness always got on well together, but here he sensed a deeper darkness. In this trying moment it seemed that here he had no friends apart from his grandmother, and it looked as though there was going to be a lot of trouble between him and the other side of town where she lived.

He was panting now but he could still hear the sounds of pursuit, even though he was leaving the deeper corridors and tunnels behind him and heading out of the underground city of Schmaltzberg, realizing he would have to come back another day ... or another way.

As he stopped briefly to get his breath back, a guard on the city gate stepped into his path with a certain greedy expression.

“And where do you think you’re going in a hurry, Mister Ankh-Morpork? Back to the light with your troll friends, eh?”

The guard’s spontoon knocked Magnus’s feet from under him and then the kicking started in earnest. Magnus rolled to get out of the way and as a kind of reflex shouted, “Tak does not want us to think of him, but he does want us to think!”

He groaned and spat out a tooth as he saw another dwarf coming toward him. To his dismay the newcomer looked middle-aged and well-to-do, which certainly meant that there would be no friendship here. But instead of administering a kicking, the older dwarf shouted in a voice like hammers, “Listen to me, young dwarf, you must never let your guard down like this ...”

The newcomer smacked his original assailant to the ground with commendable ferocity and a gloriously unnecessary display of violence and as the guard lay groaning he pulled Magnus upright.

“Well, you can run, kid, much better than most dwarfs I know, but a boy like you should know that Ankh-Morpork dwarfs are not in favor at the moment, at least not around these parts. To tell you the truth, I’m not that happy about them myself, but if there’s a fight it must be a fair one.”

At that he kicked the stricken guard very hard and said, “My name is Bashfull Bashfullsson. You, lad, better get yourself some micromail if you’re going to

come calling on your granny looking all Ankh-Morpork. And it is ashamed I am that my fellow dwarfs treat a young dwarf so badly just because of what he wears.” And the full stop to that rant was yet another blow to the recumbent guard.

“I’ll hand it to you, lad, I really have never seen a dwarf that can run as fast as you were doing! My word, you can run, but it might now be time to learn how to hide.”

Magnus brushed himself down and stared at his savior, saying, “Bashfull Bashfullsson! But you’re a legend!” And he took a step backward, saying, “I’ve read all about you! You became a grag because you don’t like Ankh-Morpork!”

“I may not, young dwarf, but I don’t hold with killing in the darkness like those bastard deep-downers and delvers. I like a stand-up fight, me.”

Saying this, Bashfull Bashfullsson kicked the fallen guard heavily yet one more time with his enormous iron-clad boot.

And one of the most well-known and well-respected dwarfs in the world held out his hand to young Magnus, and said, “Now let your talent take you to safety. As you said, Tak does not require us to think of him, but remember that he does require us to think and you might want a thought or two about adjusting your attire when you come back to visit your granny again. Besides, she might not appreciate Ankh-Morpork fashions. Nice to have met you, Mister Speedy, and now get your sorry arse out of here—I might not be around next time.”

Far away and turnwise of Uberwald, Sir Harry King was pondering on the business of the day. He was widely known as the King of the Golden River because of the fortune he had made minding other people’s business.

Harry was normally a cheerful man with a good digestion, but not today. He was also a loving husband, doting on Euphemia, his wife of many years, but alas, not today. And Harry was a good employer, but also not today, because today his stomach was giving him gyp by means of the halibut to which the phrase *long time no see* could not happily be applied. He hadn’t liked the look of it when it was on his plate, halibut being a fish which tends to look back at you reproachfully, and for the last few hours he had envisaged the damn thing looking at the insides of his stomach.

The problem was, he thought, that Euphemia still remembered the good old days when they were poor as church mice and therefore necessarily frugal with their money, and such habits bite to the bone, very much like the inadvisably digested fish which had been swimming somewhere in the vicinity of Harry’s bowels and threatening to swim a lot further.

Regrettably, Harry was a man brought up to eat everything that was put in front of him and that meant *everything* eaten up. When he had finally exited from the privy, where he fancied the damn fish had been watching him from the bowl, he had pulled the chain with such vehemence that it broke, causing the woman whom he sometimes called the Duchess to have words with him. And since words tend to lead to more words, nasty, spiteful little words flew on both sides, words that if Harry could help it would be flung back to the wretched fish which