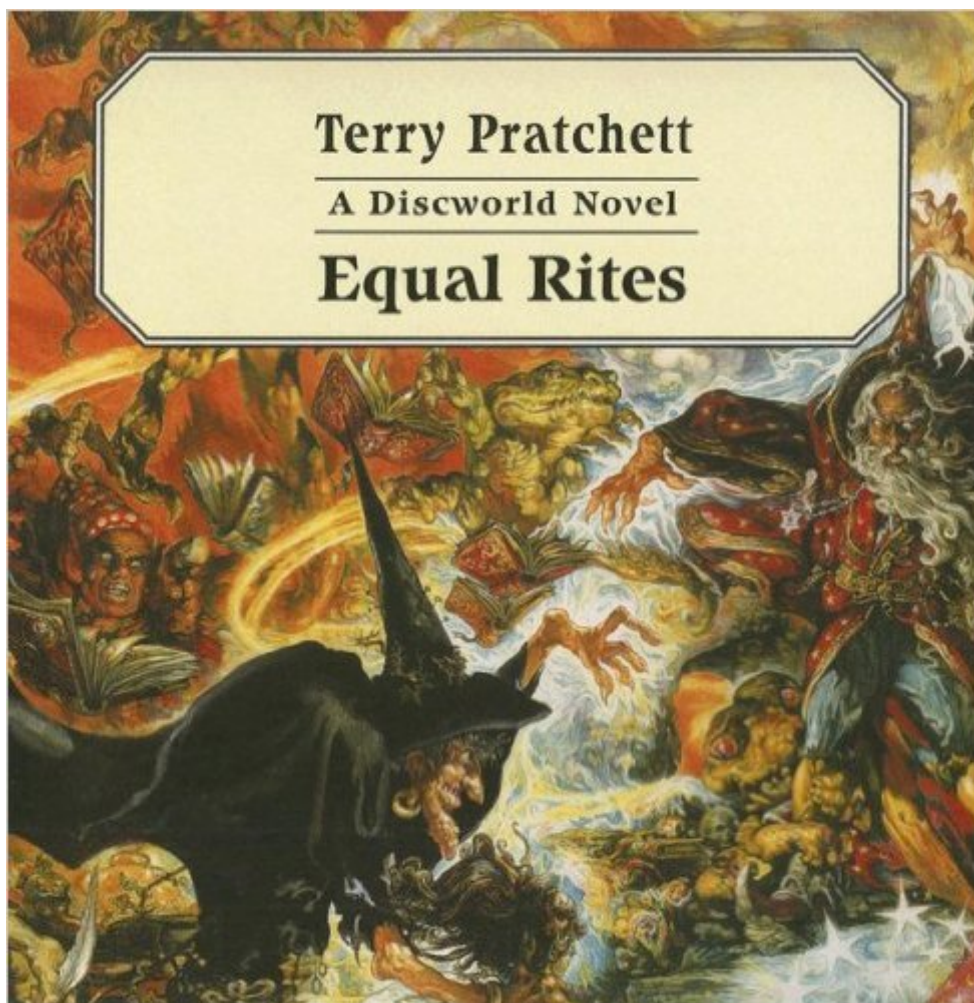


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Equal Rites (Discworld Novels (Audio))



Synopsis

Equal Rites is the third in Terry Pratchett's phenomenally successful Discworld series. The last thing the wizard Drum Billet did, before Death laid a bony hand on his shoulder, was to pass on his staff of power to the eighth son of an eighth son. Unfortunately for his colleagues the eighth son turns out to be a daughter, and women aren't supposed to be wizards. Eskarina inherits the wizard's staff and with the reluctant help of Granny Weatherwax sets out to learn her new calling.

Book Information

Series: Discworld Novels (Audio)

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Customer Reviews

When Eskarina was born she was bestowed with a dying wizard's magic staff and his powers because the wizard mistakenly thought she was the eighth son of an eighth son. Granny Weatherwax, the town witch who delivered young Esk, knows that the girl must now learn to control the extraordinary powers she has been bequeathed before they start to control her. She takes Esk under her wing and begins to teach her about witchcraft and magic. After Esk has had several years of apprenticeship, Granny decides to enroll Esk in Unseen University, the training ground for wizards. The two of them set off for Ankh-Morpork, the home of the famous wizard school. But everyone in Discworld knows that wizardry is the bastion of men and that a woman can never become a wizard... or can she? In "Equal Rites," Terry Pratchett parodies gender stereotyping and discrimination as Esk is confronted with society's view of the differences between witchcraft, a traditionally feminine profession, and wizardry, an exclusively male domain. As Granny sees it,

wizardry is high magic composed of science, "geommetry" and power, while witchcraft is a magic grounded in nature, herbs and "headology." Esk feels she can handle either type of magic and she turns wizardry on its ear as she proceeds to demonstrate what she can accomplish. Before reading this book, I thought that Rincewind was the most bumbling of wizards. I now realize that Unseen University is full of them! This book is not as wickedly funny as the two books that precede it, but it does contain several humorous scenes such as the magic conjuring duel between Granny and the Archchancellor of the university. Although Pratchettisms are sprinkled here and there throughout the book, the story line takes precedence over the satire.

Pratchett seems to love the character dynamic between the Curmudgeon and the Innocent, when both are working together towards the same goals. He used this to great effect with Rincewind and Twoflower in the first two books of his Discworld series, and it pops up again here. Granny Weatherwax (the curmudgeon) is a witch. She is charged with steering 8-year old Esk towards wizardry. Only Esk is a girl, and as we all know, girls can't be wizards. She was supposed to be the eighth son of an eighth son, but somebody messed up the paperwork. It is this conflict that is central to the book. Pratchett does a nice job lampooning the (perceived) differences between men and women (i.e., practical vs. intuitive knowledge; book study vs. study of nature, etc.) that exist in our world, transporting them to his own imagined landscape. That's to be expected from a book punnishly titled "Equal Rites". On top of that, we get a cunning parody of institutes of higher learning. Unseen University (where boys go to become wizards) and its hierarchy of learned scholars knocks the stuffing out of scholastic life. All the Pratchett devices are back for another run through the ringer. Along with the above mentioned character types, we also have some silly humour (a group of marzipan ducks magically anthropomorphize, only to melt when they take to the river; "that's natural selection for you," comments the cheeky narrator). And another inanimate object without a face inexplicably manages to make facial expressions. Twoflower's Luggage has an heir apparent in Esk's magic staff. Some comments I've read state that Pratchett relies too heavily on these devices in later books. Well, it's only three books into the series, and I still find them fresh and interesting. Time will tell, though.

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