

I have seen or heard other people talk about Terry Pratchett's new book, *A Hat Full of Sky*, in terms of it being the "sequel" to *The Wee Free Men*. And while it is true that it does feature the same characters, if the development of those characters is any indication, this book will be the second in the series, not just the sequel.

Tiffany Aching has gone to learn to be a witch. She has left the Chalk, the sheep, her little brother, and Roland, the Baron's son. Not that she cares about that, mind you. She is escorted by Miss Tick to meet her instructor, Miss Level. And they are followed by a creature that the Nac Mac Feegle call a hiver.

This book is slightly a departure for Pratchett on many levels. For one thing, it relies heavily on events that took place in *The Wee Free Men*. Most Discworld books stand by themselves fairly well, with only occasional references to previous events. The characters change and develop, of course, but events from previous books seldom have direct consequences in the story that is being told at the time. Not so here. Repeated references are made to the virtual pointy hat that Tiffany receives at the end of the last book, as well as her brief time as kelda of the Nac Mac Feegle clan, her defeat of the Fairy Queen, and the powerful presence of the departed Granny Aching. It also deviates slightly from some of Pratchett's previous attitudes towards witchcraft. Those readers who are familiar with Granny Weatherwax will remember that she is quite adamant that witchcraft finds the witch, not the other way around. Therefore it is slightly odd to find Tiffany going off to study with Miss Level, and even more odd to find that she isn't the only "apprentice witch" studying in the mountains.

In my review of *The Wee Free Men*, I stated that whether you had read previous Discworld novels would influence your perception of the events and characters. This is also true in this sequel, but towards the end of the book the story takes a turn. This book is ultimately about Tiffany learning about herself. Of course the witching lessons are just a pretext to that happening; the real learning takes place out in the world. And it is that notion that brings this book back to the Discworld. The appearance of a familiar Discworld character, Granny Weatherwax, moves the book onto comfortable ground, but at the moment Tiffany calls her "Granny" instead of "Mistress" you can almost feel the book growing up along with Tiffany herself.

As for the Nac Mac Feegle, while they were an integral part of *The Wee Free Men*, here they seem almost like an afterthought. They play an important role in the book, but getting them there to perform it takes some doing.

There is no doubt that there will be more books featuring Tiffany and the Nac Mac Feegle. The question at this point is to what extent Pratchett will go to keep his "children's" books separate from his "adult" books. The stage has been set, with the direct and significant involvement of Granny Weatherwax, for these characters to bridge that rather slim gap and further blur the line between the two series, which really only exists in the marketing world. Just because your protagonist is 11 years old doesn't mean only children can read and enjoy your story.

This book is an extremely strong offering from Pratchett. The humor is pretty standard for his style and there are a few very funny bits, but overall this is another serious work about childhood issues, growing up, and identity.

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