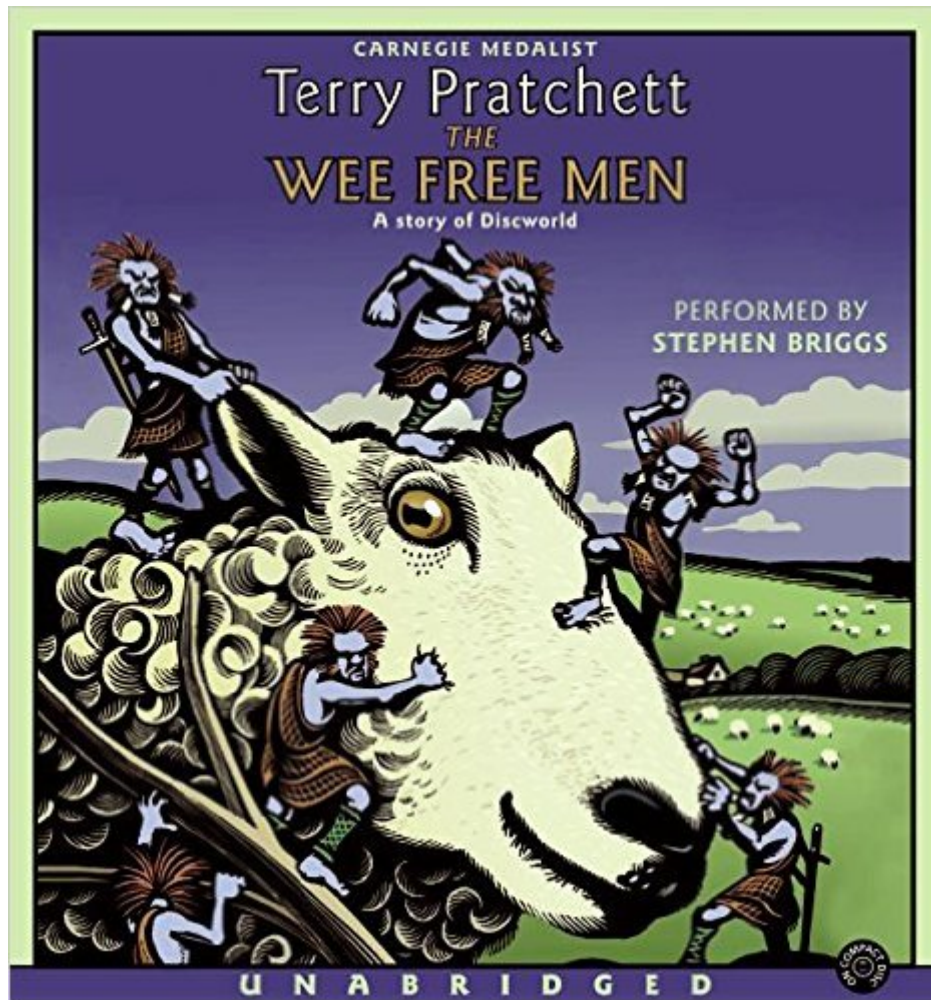


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The Wee Free Men



Synopsis

Armed only with a frying pan and her common sense, Tiffany Aching, a young witch-to-be, is all that stands between the monsters of Fairyland and the warm, green Chalk country that is her home. Forced into Fairyland to seek her kidnapped brother, Tiffany allies herself with the Chalk's local Nac Mac Feegle -- aka the Wee Free Men -- a clan of sheep-stealing, sword-wielding, six-inch-high blue men who are as fierce as they are funny. Together, they battle through an eerie and ever-shifting landscape, fighting brutal flying fairies, dream-spinning dromes, and grimhounds -- black dogs with eyes of fire and teeth of razors -- before ultimately confronting the Queen of the Elves, absolute ruler of a world in which reality intertwines with nightmare. And in the final showdown, Tiffany must face her cruel power alone ...

Book Information

Audio CD: 7 pages

Publisher: HarperChildren's Audio; Unabridged edition (June 14, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060785985

ISBN-13: 978-0060785987

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1 x 5.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Terry Pratchett won a Carnegie Medal for his first children's book set in his Discworld, "The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents." He has a good shot at a second award for "Wee Free Men." It's that good. Nine year old Tiffany Aching was born on The Chalk. The Achings have lived on The Chalk and tended their sheep for centuries. Tiffany's grandmother was the matriarch of the Aching clan, and while she never called herself a witch, she never denied it, either. Tiffany is still trying to adjust to the death of her grandmother, and to the birth of her sticky little brother, Wentworth, when she is attacked by a monster out of Faerie. One thing leads to another, and before long she must rescue her brother from Faerie, be the kelda of the Nac Mac Feegle, the Wee Free Men of the title, and save the world from the terrors of Faerie. Because there is no one else. One of

Pratchett's many skills is inversion. In "Amazing Maurice," he inverted the Pied Piper of Hamelin. In "Wee Free Men," he inverts children's fairy tales in general. Instead of a magic sword, Tiffany has a plain old iron frying pan. Instead of a wise mentor, she has a toad who used to be a lawyer. Instead of an army, she has the Nac Mac Feegle. The Queen of Faerie, Tiffany's antagonist, is about as far from a noble Tolkien elf as you can get. Because the Queen of Faery has the power to steal your dreams, your worst nightmares, and trap you inside them. And Tiffany must confront the Queen on her own ground, in the land of nightmares, where the monsters are terrifying and real. You don't have to reflect very long to understand Pratchett is working at several levels. The themes are meaningful and accessible to children without the slightest condescension.

"The Wee Free Men" is Terry Pratchett's second foray into Discworld-for-Young-Adults coming a year and a half after "The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents" and six months after his last 'regular' Discworld book, "Night Watch". It revisits ground from "Lords and Ladies" and "Carpe Jugulum", which is fine, because with usual Pratchett flair, he tosses in enough wry satire, strange humor and generally good storytelling that you don't always notice when he goes back to some of his older material. While the Nac Mac Feegle (the Wee Free Men last seen in "Carpe Jugulum"), little woad-tattooed Pictsies, do feature in a large chunk of the book, the heroine is Tiffany, a nine-year-old witch's granddaughter and budding witch herself who must be the singularly most sensible (but still likeable) character I've ever read in a book directed at an audience less than 18 years old. She struggles to cope with the death of a grandmother who, even though she died more than a year ago, has still had a huge impact on her life. She also struggles with making sense of the world - both as a young girl and as a human being, and she struggles with the Queen of the Elves/Fairies (last seen in "Lords and Ladies") in what becomes a metaphor for maturity and clarity in a large, scary world. Pratchett's moral is that just because you're not yet officially an adult, it doesn't mean that you can't understand the world any less well. This is a theme he's played with before, but it's always appropriate no matter how many times he brings it out. As a huge Discworld fan, I really enjoyed this book - possibly even more than "The Amazing Maurice...", although it's probably not at quite the same level of literary excellence as his previous work.

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