

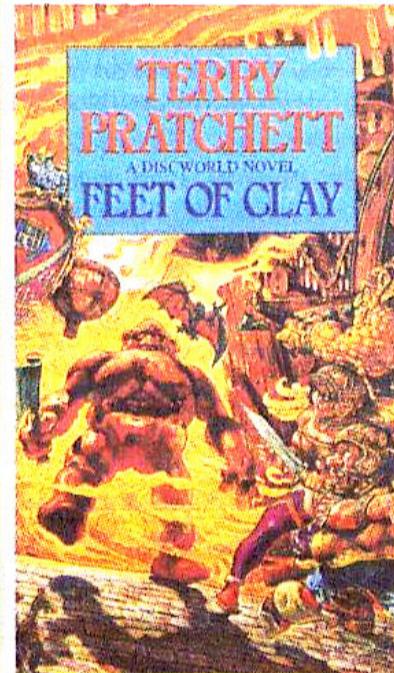
Feet of Clay

WHAT was going on in the minds of the tsars when they lost their serfs? How did the authorities feel when the people of Phulbari took a stand against strip mining? What does it sound like when a muted people find a tongue? You wouldn't expect to find some answers from Terry Pratchett, would you? Neither did I, until I read *Feet of Clay*.

This is the 19th book in the Discworld series, and the 4th City Watch story. It begins with a murder, and the City Watch is hot on the case. The dwarf alchemist Cheery Littlebottom makes a debut here as the forensic expert for the watch, and she is the one who realises that a golem has committed the murder.

Before we proceed further, a note on golems: these are living clay statues, built and designed for non-stop labour. Waterproof, fire-proof, and requiring no wages, food, rest, or just about any benefits other than one day off at certain times, they're the ultimate slave. Like Asimov's robots, they come with built-in instructions not to kill or harm humans. Hence one can understand the uproar that ensued when the murder was believed to be the work of a golem.

Meanwhile, Commander Vimes, having narrowly escaped an assassination attempt, keeps his appointment with the Royal College of Heralds, only to be told by the chief Herald, a vampire named Dragon (no kidding!), that he does not get a coat of arms because one



of his ancestors had killed a king. Before Vimes has much of an opportunity to lament this fact, someone tries to poison the Patrician, and he must find the would-be assassin. Despite his best efforts, the attempts on the ailing tyrant's life continue.

Back on the golem case, the proprietor of the Dwarf Bread museum is found dead, and a golem named Dorfl tries to turn himself in for murder, but Captain Carrot suspects that the golem is really trying to protect himself (although it's hard to tell, since golems can't speak). This sets the young Watchman on a trail that reveals how people exploit the golems.

The two mysteries roll along, gathering suspense and intrigue the way a snowball gathers more snow, until they collide in an explosive finish, about which you'll have to read the book to find out. This is one of Pratchett's darker works, and there are parts that might leave a lump in your throat. He tackles issues like class snobbery, exploitation of the marginal people, gender discrimination, and more, and since this is Pratchett we're talking about, you can be sure to find yourself laughing throughout the entire story. So if you find yourself waiting for iftar, trying to ignore the complaints of your empty stomach, this book will make the perfect diversion.

By Sabrina F Ahmad
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The (Ir)Relevance of Learning Mathematics

HAVE you ever turned into a gibbering monkey in the throes of a heart attack? For the unfortunate student of mathematics, the experience alas is all too common, particularly during the last few minutes of a difficult exam. Having had one near death experience too many, I have finally decided that enough is enough, and that we, the oppressed student body, have been silent for far too long. Not having the energy to organize a protest rally, I have settled for venting my feelings on paper. If you disagree with anything I say, please, feel free to throw eggs at me on the street.

"If you look at the full moon on a beautiful night, what you are really seeing is a shape called (pi) (r2)." And so begins a Discovery Channel special on the relevance of mathematics. Everything around us is apparently some regular shape or another, following clear-cut rules of geometry. (Begin sarcasm.) Now I understand the purpose of endless hours of mensuration we suffer so that one day we can look at a table and say in an awe-filled voice, "What a noble rectangular shape it is!" (End sarcasm.) Whatever happened to looking at the moon and just enjoying its beauty? Which brings me to another hated topic: coordinate geometry and circle theorems. Every student can feel my pain when I talk about the many theorems we have to memorize and use. What is their practical application anyway? Are we supposed to look at the moon and deduce which line is a diameter and which line is a chord?

Probability and tree diagrams our teachers give us endless lectures about their relevance in daily life. Yet all the problems we ever face in school deal with picking socks of a particular colour or the chances of being late for work if you oversleep. (Practical advice: Buy an alarm clock, and you will NEVER be late.) Why can't we be taught the theory of probability that is at work at casinos, and how we can beat the odds and win money? Now, that would put a whole new spin on the concept of practical mathematics.

My heart goes out to all those poor geometry students who have had to rotate, reflect and translate endless triangles and squares as they study transformations. After much thought, I have decided that transformations is actually a metaphor for classic human behavior—that people hate something about themselves and want to change it. If only this life lesson could be taught in a more direct and less painstaking manner...

Statistics, how I hate thee, let me count the ways. I hate your endless formulas, which can never be remembered. I despise all the big numbers you insist I process within seconds. May I remind you that I am not a computer? I

loathe how you complicate already hard-to-remember formulas with meaningless Greek symbols, which I can never draw properly. I abhor the way you insist on presenting one set of data in ten different manners. Why, oh why, must you suffer from such indecision?

Moving on, have you noticed how in Mechanics a lot of problems have to do with colliding ships and planes? Apart from giving future terrorists ideas, how on earth are we

meant or minimum points of curves, and in integration we find out exactly what area the curves cover. What exactly is the point of such blatant curve-worshipping, unless you are artistically inclined? (See the next paragraph to get more details on how to use curves for the greater good.) And when differentiation gets bored with curves and dares to try something new, it usually asks some inane question about the rate of evaporation of oil that has been exposed to open air. Now if some person actually develops enough intelligence to seal the oil barrels, the whole question loses any meaning it pretended to have in the first place.

Before I get labeled as a whiner, let me say I have learned some useful maths curve sketching. We have learnt to sketch and manipulate curves in so many different ways that great works of art can be created with such knowl-



DON'T BE EMBARRASSED TO ASK FOR HELP DAD.

notations of vectors supposed to help us? When we are walking down the road, are we supposed to think to ourselves, "Now I am walking in the direction 4i. If I keep it up, I will soon reach my destination. Whoopie!" And what's with all the kinematics problems dealing with falling bodies? Are we supposed to drop tennis balls on the heads of people we don't like with such calculated precision that their skulls crack open? "Mechanics and Rise in Youth Violence" I foresee his being a future topic of intensive study.

No article on mathematics would be complete without throwing mud on the face of calculus. The two twin evils of differentiation and integration have been the bane of every mathematics student in existence. In differentiation, all we really seem to do is find the maxi-

edge. And this is what I plan to do... sit by the roadside and draw curves on the pavements and walls of Dhaka. Apart from (hopefully) getting Tk 2 coins which I can use to buy coke at my school canteen, I will be contributing to the beautification efforts of my glorious city. Earning money and serving my community in the process what could possibly be nobler? So my heartfelt thanks go out to the teachers who taught me how to sketch curves.

Now that we are nearing the end of this extremely meaningless essay, let us reflect on all the life lessons mathematics has taught us. Practice curve sketching diligently. Stare at tables in admiration of their symmetrical beauty. And if you wish to combat violence, burn every mechanics book in existence. By Jahanara

Ramadan for us

RAMADAN is the single month in the whole year when even those who are not that religious, look up to God. It's the month when all Muslims unite to perform the duties our religion asks us to do. We fast together, pray together and finally, we celebrate the end of it together. But of course, different people have different perspectives of Ramadan.

For many of us, Ramadan is a month when we get really tired and weak. Having to go through all the day to day activities without any food can surely get exhausting. But the most wonderful thing is that hardly any of us complain about it!

Then again there are people who actually do love this month. For a lot of us,

Ramadan is the month when your mother doesn't keep on asking you to have your meals right on time. Not having food saves a lot of time and makes life a little hassle free. Would people have been happy if this had continued throughout the year? I don't think so! But yes, since it is only for a month, we actually happen to enjoy it.

Speaking about enjoying Ramadan, I forgot to mention the thing that all of us look forward to the most (other than Eid) - iftaar. We wait till the clock ticks to exactly the iftaar time and the 'moazin' at the masjid says out the azaan. Those of us who have iftaar with our family rush to our houses at the nick of time- its kind of fun. And for those of us who choose to check

Though Baba tried his best to make it up to me, I always craved for a little bit of attention from ma. When I was 5, she quit her job, and was unemployed for few days. This was the happiest period of my childhood. But three years later, she resumed her M. Phil degree followed by PhD. But I didn't complain even then, because I considered this as a treat compared to my childhood days, when I used to wait for hours after class ended, each day, waiting for my ma, who never came! Though I rarely saw her at daytime or at meals, she was always there with my report card to tell me how I neglected my studies and what a bad boy I was!! As I stood there, head hung with shame and guilt and sorrow

out all the offers at the restaurants go out with our friends and have it with them. For many of us, it turns out to be a blast! The adda, the food and the excitement that seems to fill the atmosphere is absolutely awesome.

All in all, Ramadan is with no doubt a month full of action and a lot of fun things to do. It's like a way of testing yourself. Testing if you can pass the hours, ignoring the rumbling in your tummy, walking down the road under the blazing sun (for those who don't have luxurious cars). No matter which part of the city you are in, there is always a common thing between you and the people around you. It almost feels like we are no longer rich or poor, bad or good. We are just Muslims for a change. Does that feel good or what?!

By Nayeema Reza

at breaking my ma's heart, not even once I felt myself being rude to her or answering her back! I couldn't raise my voice even then or today. Nothing has changed. Not me, nor ma!

My joy knew no bounds when my O'Levels results came out!! While my friends' parents hugged and congratulated them, I was debating over the fact whether to call ma or not. Then again, she was too busy to receive my call! Even as I walked home, sad, leaving my friends to celebrate, I couldn't stop thinking about my ma, whose shadow still plays hide and seek with me!

By The Dark Lord