
Slant's Progress - A Discworld™ Story

Daniel Goldsmith < daniel[at]bongley[dot]net >

2004-12-02

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Slant's Progress | 1 |
| 2. Copyright and Licence | 5 |

1. Slant's Progress

Finding that his vision was clouding over yet again, Mr. Slant moved the papers to the far end of the desk. As always, Sneem, his earnest assistant, was there to remove them back to the filing area. Slant watched as Sneem picked his way across the room slowly, his back arched with the weight of just a few files.

Another one going - he thought to himself - the help just can't last these years! He didn't look forward to locating a replacement, everything had become so complicated. Interview boards. Gender mainstreaming. Discrimination - Ach! - he spat! Damn busybodies up in the Palace! No sense of history. No sense of tradition!

Noting that the clock was straightening itself, he decided to call it a day. Not that he needed rest, or food (or even air) but because there would be precious little point on continuing. The new laws meant that workers - ha! - had rights, such as the right to leave for home on weekdays. Shortly the offices of the city would empty as people surged off homeward, the streets would be thronged, filled with new modern people, who didn't point and stare but whose distaste was evident in every twitch of their muscles.

As he left his buildings, on a whim, he decided to call in at the Fresh Start Club for an evening. He strode along the road to the cross-walk, where a watchman stood on his little box directing the traffic of the city. Of course, no vehicles were permitted here in the old quarter, but such was the sheer mass of people that rules governing their movement had been introduced by the Palace.

Crossing Lower Broadway, Slant immediately walked turnwise, toward the looming bulk of the Opera House. As the autumnal sun dipped, the bronzed roof of the dome shone brightly, illuminating the streets all about. He turned about and in the distance, he could see the statue against the wall of the Palace, Vimes looked resplendent, as always. Frozen in time - thought Slant bitterly - as I am.

Arriving at the Club, Slant was met by Pinkings, the doorman.

"Evening Mr. Slant, and isn't it a fine evening indeed" he gushed, as he opened the door wide and rang the little bell set into the wall in one fluid practiced movement. "A fine evening indeed!"

Young idiot - Slant thought to himself, wishing fondly that old Roberts still had the job, or perhaps Benzote the Troll from the bad old days.

"Ahh, Mithter Thlant, good evening." This came from Igor, the club's own, who never seemed to leave the building. Slant was certain that Igor had a nightmarish laboratory on the premises, filled with the remnants of bodies of former doormen. He was sure that Igor's left hand had once been on Robert's arm,

but no matter.

"Will Thur be thtaying with uth tonight?"

"Ah, no Igor, I'll not stay, I have much to do later, just calling by for a visit." A lie, of course. All he really had to do was stand at the window of his apartments looking out over the City, seeing blessed darkness where now lights burned, looking skywards at the glow, where once there had been stars. Slant couldn't remember the stars. He hadn't bothered to look for them for so long, and then they were gone.

"Perhaps Thur would care to go through to the lounge, I believe Mr. Thoe hath returned", purred Igor.

Shoe! "Perhaps I might stay after all, Igor. My usual room overlooking the River, please."

Slant almost had to restrain himself as he climbed the stair. Some other members nodded their greetings on the stair - Winkins, Margolitta - the usual crowd he had come to despise. Shoe was in the bar, hidden in the gloom near the bar. No new-fangled lights in here, thankfully.

"Slant, old friend, how are you?" came the greeting from the corner. Reg stood up and waved enthusiastically. Slant saw that he had obviously taken the treatment again, his skin glowed with what could almost be described as rude health. Slant himself hadn't taken a treatment in many years, and now he looked at his greenish hands with contempt as he clasped them around Reg's and greeted him with a hearty "Shoe, you bastard, where have you been?"

"Ah, that would be telling, now sit down and tell me how fares the city."

"Offler's teeth - you can see that by the sights, hear it by the noise and smell it from Quirm - where were you?"

Reg began to speak, then stopped as a group of were-wolves bayed greetings to each other. Slant knew that Reg regretted allowing them into the club in the first place, but that had been so very long ago, and times had changed over the years.

Casting a last glare at the other occupants of the Bar, Reg leaned forward and whispered "Four-Ecks."

For the first time in centuries, Slant felt a thrill of fear and excitement. Could it be? "Well? Have they??" he breathed.

Shoe smiled enigmatically, the tracery of repair about his mouth doing its usual job of simulating muscle movement. "Come with me to the maps room, and we'll talk, so much more *civilized* in there."

Slant followed Reg urgently, as he made his way to the very top of the building.

There, under a cupola of glass, the Discworld lay in magnificent splendor. Each continent was carefully marked out, every island and eyot had its place. Deserts were marked with gold finely graded into dust, the cities marked out with precious stones. The extravagance had been a project for the club members. They had calculated the likely cost and the length of time it could take to acquire the funds, then set out to beat the estimate. It had been a lark at the time, a game to play after they discovered the secret of fire-proofing - the key to eternal un-life.

Slant often came here, trying to reclaim some of the excitement of those days. Standing here was meant to reflect the glory of Dunroamin', pleasure palace of the Gods. He always left disappointed, filled instead with regret that they had ever bothered to make the discovery.

"Well then, here is Four-Ecks, and here" Reg pointed with a platinum rod, "is Bugarup, largest city on the Continent."

"Yes Reg, I know." Slant sighed, not caring for another of Reg's lectures.

Reg moved the rod, off the coast of Four-Ecks, to a small island, denoted on the map by a fragment of

yellow diamond. "This is Dusty Island, as per usual for Four-Ecks, and this is where they have built the facility. It has been kept very secret, but I was contacted some months ago when they sent word that they may actually have done it. I obtained the passes and went over directly with Banner..."

"Banner? Why him? This was my idea!" interrupted Slant, with some anger.

"Precisely! You would have attracted notice. You may not realize it Slant, but you are one of the most watched men in Ankh-Morpork. Your every movement noted, every purchase examined. I heard that half the chamber fainted the last time you sought a travel pass. Think of the effect on the City of you traveling to Four-Ecks!" Reg put a hand out and placed it on Slant's own, clearly trying to resolve a fraught situation with such a flagrant breach of the unDeaths' own rules of decorum.

"Yes, I see. Damn them."

"Precisely - this is what we are trying to do. Now Banner and I arrived at the Island and met with the Project Team."

"Wizards?"

"Yes, but the modern type, full of thaumaturgical this and unfriendly bozo that... Erm...Yes, the Buildings are small, non-descript, nothing which would create any suspicion. The Council's agents are everywhere." Reg pulled a pen and some paper from his bag, and began to sketch.

"The main chamber is housed in the central portion, the vaults in these smaller buildings, linked to the main chamber by these strengthened corridors."

"Why are they irregular - four here and three here?"

"Something to do with the field pattern weave, or something. The point is, the vaults create a standing wave, and this then creates the required vortex in the chamber."

"Has it been tried?"

"Yes." Reg said, again with that enigmatic smile.

"Who? I thought they didn't have any over there?"

"Banner. He demanded that they try it there and then."

"And? - For pity's sake Reg, tell me!"

"It worked."

Slant felt the world about him spin. At last! Uncounted years of planning, all coming together for these moments. Finally.

"Dead?" he finally managed to breathe the word.

"Completely. Freedom Slant, freedom for all of us who want it."

"Freedom for them also, the ones who need it. At last." Slant knew that, if he still could, he would now be crying tears of joy. He held onto that feeling, one of the few he had felt in so long, he needed to remember this moment.

"We shall have to move quickly. Banner was a compulsive collector, and I have his instructions to sell his gallery immediately. Obviously we will need to present the papers in the Courts, but once we do, they will know and will try to stop us."

"Of course they will, their world is about to end, they won't give it up so easily. Banner's art will just be

the start, I imagine the market will begin to crash as soon as the papers are filed - information moves so quickly these days."

"You are certain it will work?" Reg asked, for the thousandth time.

"Yes. The Aggregations Act is quite specific. It lists the things we can and cannot do with our wealth and it states that the list is definitive. Gods' sake Reg, I've manipulated them long enough to know the meaning of the laws. There is no provision for us dying in the Act, nothing at all!" Slant found himself going cold again, years of preparation kicking in as the reality began to settle.

"We can do with our property as we choose then?"

"Yes. Freedom Reg. Revenge too. Finality, finally."

Shoe seemed equally shaken, despite that he had known it was coming. The enormity of what they were doing was settling on him like a shroud.

"I'll arrange for the flights immediately, we'll all be out of here by sunrise. The passes are arranged, the officials already bought." Reg paused, as if unsure of himself. "Well, I'll be off then, so much to prepare" he blurted, and made for the door.

"Reg," called Slant, "Please leave the Wick of State of the Uberwald Union behind you. It is worth, today, about five hundred million dollars, not to mention that its disappearance featured as a *causus belli* in the war between the Union and the City."

Reg carefully placed the platinum rod against a crude stone throne - itself purloined from the jungles of Hersheba. He stood, straightened, then nodded once and left the room.

Slant stayed a while longer, head bowed over the map, unmoving, unseeing. The plans had all been worked out for years. Once he had noted the loophole he had set about persuading the others. Most were enthusiastic, some anxious, a very few hostile indeed. It had cost billions to ensure the latter couldn't upset his plans. Over the decades they had stopped trying. Un-Life was good, why change it? They had forgotten all about Slant and his plans.

Slant had not.

When the Aggregation Act was proposed he had fought it bitterly. To protect their own privilege the Great and the Good of the City had constrained the freedom of the unDead, the wealthiest people in the entire world. The City had grown fat on their enslaved citizens' unparalleled wealth. Reg's slogan of the dispossessed from so long ago "Undead yes, un-citizen, No!" had become his driving force.

As he descended the stair he reviewed in his mind the process which would now come into action, the delicate legal framework he had spent so long designing. For the last time he went over the procedures. He was certain, there were no mistakes.

He came to realize that he had somehow returned to his apartments on the Downs. From the eighty-fifth floor Slant looked out at the slumbering city of Ankh-Morpork. The Old Quarter was visible even from here, the Palace and the Statue floodlit by beams of electrically generated lights.

He looked across to the gleaming mountainous skyscrapers on the turnwise side, outside the line of the Old Wall, the one he remembered from his youth. Filled with micro-managers of the New Industries, industries which only existed because of the sheer value of unDead assets.

He looked hubward, noting the mass of gleaming lights, which spread nowadays as far as Sto Lat and Sto Helit. Even as he watched, a flight launched into the air from Sto Lat aerodrome. This certainly was the Century of the Small Pointy Sticks, no doubt about that!

He looked rimward, saw the lights of the city surrounding the Circle Sea. The lights in all constituted The Republic of Ankh-Morpork, greatest city in all the Discworld. The Capital of Commerce, politics

and more. Holding the peoples of the entire Disc in stagnated semi-slavery for nigh on five hundred years now. All because of a stupid decision made centuries earlier by him and those like him. The un-Dead. Those who, for reasons best known to themselves, stepped outside the life normally granted.

He remembered the stories about Death, wondered if he still came to visit. He recalled the curse from the Counterweight Continent, *May you live in interesting times*. He would create those times, but he would not, could not be there to see them.

He turned away from the New World he had helped create, prepared, finally, to die.

2. Copyright and Licence

Discworld, Ankh-Morpork and all other specific usages are © *Terry and Lynn Pratchett*

This document © *Daniel Goldsmith, 2004* This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/> [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/] or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.