The Soul Music Collection -

Intro, Soul Music
Pratchett's Wizards

On Susan -
The Inheritance Part 1 Tragic Relief
Susan S.E.R.
The Inheritance Part 2 Under the Radar
The Inheritance Part 3 Alien Child
To be Susan

Part 3 The Alien Child

> *"... The poet's vision was taken apart with inexpert tools."*

Prologue

Some years ago our printer broke down. Irreparable. Before taking it to the council tip, armed with 3 screwdrivers and newspaper on the kitchen table, my 2 daughters and I had hours of simple pleasure stripping it back to its component parts. We ended up with piles of deliciously chunky screws, nuts, cogs, wheels, bars and all sorts of things we didn't know the names of but were works of art in their own right. Things of shiny beauty never exposed to the light but gleaming at us now or solidly heavy in the palm of a hand, fitting together like poetry.

That's what I've been doing with this book. Whether it 'works' as a whole, its parts are a delight to handle and collect. I like to imagine Terry Pratchett sitting at his computer engrossed, piecing together the elements. Reaching out to a pile of gleaming ironmongery of imagery, selecting carefully, thoughtfully, gleefully, setting them in place, only seemingly chaotic, not random at all.

He wrote Susan a superficially fairly straightforward journey of discovery, (although it wouldn't be his work if there weren't humorous elements too). A thoughtful progression. A bildungsroman of sorts. Paralleling it with her Grandfather's quest for inner peace. Along the way he carefully manipulates our view of her so that after the hints of horror, an alien creature we then see emerges as a very human girl. She will have to choose what part of her she wants to live.

1) Susan is initially portrayed by Terry Pratchett as other, as oddity

Her first appearance is distant, indirect, a pan in through the eyes of her headmistress, Miss Butts. Co-founder of the school and experienced teacher

> *"She was not an unkind woman, despite a lifetime of being gently dried out on the stove of education,"*

but who, rather surprisingly, is feeling worried about having to scold Susan for what could be interpreted as truancy.

> *-"Miss Butts shuffled the paperwork **nervously**."*
> *-"Miss Butts shuffled paper again. She was feeling distracted and **nervous**, a feeling common to anyone who had much to do with the gel. Paper usually made her feel better. It was more dependable."*
> *-"Ah, Susan," said Miss Butts, a tight smile scuttling across her face like a **nervous** tick over a worried sheep. "Please sit down."*[1]

We discover that although Susan is physically present in classes, she makes herself invisible and reads a book that she prefers to what is being studied in class. By this means Susan also backs away from this encounter. This ability to become invisible is later shown to be a characteristic of DEATH, her grandfather.

Susan's other weird inherited DEATH features spook people too. She has :

The ability to be seen or unseen at will

Teachers -

> *-"... uncanny, they said. She was always in front of you when you least expected it.*
> *-"I'm sorry to say that it appears you have been missed in lessons again."*
> *"I don't understand, Miss Butts. … "You've been making yourself invisible again, haven't you?"*
> *Susan blushed. So, rather less pinkly, did Miss Butts. I mean, she thought, it's ridiculous. It's against all reason."*

Albert -

> *"Albert looked around, and totally failed to see Susan. If you could be invisible to Miss Butts, everyone else was easy."*
> *"The Master could do that," he said at last. "It's part of the job. I 'spect you found you could do it a long time ago, eh? Not be noticed when you didn't want to be?"*

The Memory, past and future :

Albert -

> *"And she knows about things she couldn't have seen. She couldn't have been tole. She's got his memory. She inherited."*

Miss Butts -

> *"It was as if she'd already known, and had dealt with it in some way"*

> *"Yes, Miss Butts?" said Susan, just before Miss Butts said, "Susan?"*
> *Miss Butts shuddered. This was something else the teachers had mentioned. Sometimes Susan answered questions just before you asked them…*

The Voice

Albert -

> *"You did the voice," said Albert.*
> *"The voice had made her jaw ache. It worried her even more than it worried Albert. After all, it was her mouth."*

Walking through walls

Albert -

> *"How did you manage to walk through the wall?"*

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[1] Note 3 uses of the word 'nervous'. Very Prachettian.

“I’m sorry?” said Susan, backing away. “I didn’t know there was one.”
“What d’you call this then, Klatchian mist?” The man slapped the air.

Unshockability about death :

Miss Butts -

“I wonder if, perhaps, you fully understood what I have told you?”
The child had stared at the ceiling as though trying to work out a difficult problem in algebra and then said, “I expect I will.”

“But the child had just sat there. It was the politeness that scared the daylights out of Miss Butts.”

Her own parents -

“Your mum and dad didn’t want to, but they gave in and brought you all here for tea one day just to keep him quiet. They didn’t like to do it because they thought you’d be scared and scream the place down. But you…you didn’t scream. You laughed. Frightened the life out of your dad, that did.

“And when I was born mum and dad were so afraid that I felt at home here they brought me up to be…well…a Susan.”

Insensitivity to what people think :

“Susan mooched along the disinfectant-smelling corridors. She wasn’t particularly worried about what Miss Butts was going to think. She didn’t usually worry about what anyone thought”.

Scythe swinging :

fellow pupils -

Susan surprised people by being good at Sport. Any game that involved putting a stick of some sort in her hands and asking her to swing it, definitely. The sight of Susan advancing toward goal with a calculating look made any goalie lose all faith in her protective padding and throw herself flat as the ball flashed past at waist height, making a humming noise.

Autonomous hair (although DEATH himself is bald, his bones can reassemble at will.)

“School regulations required that it be in two plaits, but it had an uncanny tendency to unravel itself and spring back into its preferred shape, like Medusa’s snakes.”*

“A small fingerbone rolled across the stones until it came up against another, slightly larger, bone. A third bone tumbled off a rock and joined them…”

Birthmark

“It only showed up if she blushed, when three faint pale lines appeared up across her cheek and made it look exactly as though she’d been slapped.”

She’s recognised as death by The horse, Binky, The Death of Rats, and the Lifetimers

She walked through the hall of lifetimers. Even those on the highest shelves rattled gently as she passed.

Possibly not even really human

“People had ways of dealing with it. There was a sort of script built into the human mind. Life went on. But the child had just sat there.”

“The headmistress leaned forward. She felt vaguely annoyed with herself, but…there was something frankly unlovable about the child. Academically brilliant at the things she liked doing, of course, but that was just it; she was brilliant in the same way that a diamond is brilliant, all edges and chilliness.”

“She’d always known she was different. Much more aware of the world, when it was obvious that most people went through it with their eyes shut and their brains set to “simmer.” It was comforting in a way to know that she was different. The feeling wrapped around her like an overcoat.”

2) Then as child

He cleverly muddles the weird picture he’d painted as the story progresses by changing the point of view to Susan’s own. She has **real, normal child reactions and puzzlement** - dreams, blushing, genuine confusion why a stranger was in the dorm (tooth fairy), and annoyance and fear at being thrown in the deep end by DEATH’s disappearance

“Not being seen wasn’t a big problem. It was the things that she kept seeing that were more of a worry. There were the dreams… flying white horses, huge dark rooms, and lots of skulls… She’d seen other things ... the strange woman in the dormitory the night Rebecca Snell put a tooth under the pillow.”

Susan was almost bewildered with unfamiliar fright, but the petty-mindedness in the tones slapped her back to something approaching sanity.

“He says to tell you,” said Albert wearily, “that a chit of a girl means a small girl. He thinks you may have misheard me.” Susan hunched up in the chair.

Your mum and dad,” said Albert, when she had a chocolate moustache that was far too young for her, “did they ever…explain anything to you?”

“I mean I can’t help it! That’s not my fault! It’s not fair!”
“Really? Oh, why didn’t you say?” said Albert sourly.

Susan strode through the rooms of Death, seething gently with anger and just a touch of fear, which only made the anger worse.

3) Next as adolescent

Susan has had normal human developmental hormones, but other than that her emotional development had largely been arrested at a state of underlying anger and feeling distanced from life. From the appearance of the horse onwards she goes on to show a number of caricatural adolescent behaviours (in parallel with the wizards who experience more comic and cultural signs) including :

swinging from childish attitudes

-“On the occasions when she was angry—and she was quite often angry, at the sheer stupidity of the world—they glowed.”
-“pointed out just how stupid they were in not picking her. For some exasperating reason it didn’t seem to have any effect.”

-"If someone had told Susan that Death had a house, she would have called them mad or, even worse, stupid."

and looking down on people

Huh, she thought…if only they knew I was up here! And, despite everything, she couldn't help feeling superior.

(although she denies it when DEATH says it !)

"BUT MOST PEOPLE ARE RATHER STUPID AND WASTE THEIR LIVES. HAVE YOU NOT SEEN THAT? HAVE YOU NOT LOOKED DOWN FROM THE HORSE AT A CITY AND THOUGHT HOW MUCH IT RESEMBLED AN ANT HEAP, FULL OF BLIND CREATURES WHO THINK THEIR MUNDANE LITTLE WORLD IS REAL? YOU SEE THE LIGHTED WINDOWS AND WHAT YOU WANT TO THINK IS THAT THERE MUST BE MANY INTERESTING STORIES BEHIND THEM, BUT WHAT YOU KNOW IS THAT REALLY THERE ARE JUST DULL, DULL SOULS, MERE CONSUMERS OF FOOD, WHO THINK THEIR INSTINCTS ARE EMOTIONS AND THEIR TINY LIVES OF MORE ACCOUNT THAN A WHISPER OF WIND.
The blue glow was bottomless. It seemed to be sucking her own thoughts out of her mind.
"No," whispered Susan. "No, I've never thought like that."

- to mature ones - learning a new job, taking instruction,

-"The rat shrugged and pushed a lifetimer into her hand."
-"The Death of Rats jumped up and down on the pillow, making urgent slashing movements with its scythe.
"Oh, sorry," said Susan, and sliced."

and waiting at the scene of the crash for DEATH

"Sometimes the only thing you could do for people was to be there.
She rode Binky into the shadows by the cliff road, and waited."

She has a growing self awareness - clothes, name

-"Well, maybe a bit of lace," she said. "And…perhaps a bit more…bodice."
She nodded at her reflection in the mirror.
-"And when I was born mum and dad were so afraid that I felt at home here they brought me up to be…well…a Susan. What kind of name is that for Death's granddaughter? A girl like that should have better cheekbones, straight hair, and a name with Vs and Xs in it."

having her first crush

"He was really rather attractive, in a dark, curly-headed sort of way."

"To Susan's horror and amazement she found that she was blushing. "Just some boy,"

ARE YOU ROMANTICALLY INVOLVED WITH THE YOUNG MAN?
"What? No! I've only ever seen him once!"
YOUR EYES DIDN'T MEET ACROSS A CROWDED ROOM OR ANYTHING OF THAT NATURE?
"No! Of course not."

She is rebellious, showing challenging behaviour to authority - Albert, Miss Butts, DEATH and criticises her parents, death, Mrs butts, Albert, questioning their adult attitudes and choices :

She got on with her education. In her opinion, school kept on trying to interfere with it.

She was supposed to apologise, and then it'd turn out that crusty old Albert had a heart of gold,

How could anyone even think like that? How could anyone be content to just be the personification of a blind force? Well, there were going to be changes…

"So…my grandfather was Death, and he just let nature take its course? When he could have done some good? That's stupid."

"Susan had nothing against pink in moderation, but this wasn't it" (mother's wardrobe)

"Her father had tried to change things, she knew. But only because he was, well, quite frankly, a bit soppy. … He just spent all his time travelling from one wretched city-state to another, talking to people and trying to get them to talk to other people. … That didn't seem to be much of a job for a war leader. Admittedly there didn't seem to be all the little wars there used to be, but it was…well…not a proud kind of life."

4) Finishing with resolution of the conflict of ideas

- Both the Raven, then Albert see that she's both a manifestation of death and human, and going to have to choose :

"Poor kid," he said.
"That's destiny for you," said the skull.
"I don't blame her for trying to be normal. Considering."

"She'll crack soon enough," said Albert. "Oh, yes. You can't be an immortal and a mortal at the same time, it'll tear you in half. I almost feels sorry for her."
SQUEAK, agreed the Death of Rats.
"And that ain't the worst bit," said Albert. "You wait till her memory really starts working…"

Terry Pratchett finishes by positing, through a speech by DEATH, that the degree to which either of them are fully either human or immortal is actually variable.

YOU REMEMBER EVERYTHING. SO DO I. ***BUT YOU ARE HUMAN AND YOUR MIND REBELS FOR YOUR OWN SAKE.*** *SOMETHING GETS ACROSS, THOUGH. DREAMS, PERHAPS. PREMONITIONS. FEELINGS. SOME SHADOWS ARE SO LONG THEY ARRIVE BEFORE THE LIGHT.*

And optional, she has to choose (as incidentally so does he).

"But my parents still died."
I COULDN'T HAVE GIVEN THEM MORE LIFE. I COULD ONLY HAVE GIVEN THEM IMMORTALITY. THEY DIDN'T THINK IT WAS WORTH THE PRICE.
*"****I…think I know what they mean."***

Far above the world, Death nodded. ***You could choose immortality, or you could choose humanity. You had to do it for yourself.***

5) And a return to regular life

Susan and her grandfather will make opposite choices. DEATH returns to The Duty.

> *“You’re back?”*
> *IT SEEMS SO. BUSY, BUSY, BUSY.*

As signs of the choice of humanity that Susan has made she will :,

accept her grandfather’s gestures to make a relationship, call him for help, ask him questions, accept his authority, doesn’t cheek him when he corrects her, gives the requested gesture of affection, finally accept her grandfather’s and parents’ judgement on the literal life choices they faced once it’s explained to her.

> *YOU KNOW I SHALL KEEP YOUR ROOM EXACTLY AS YOU LEFT IT. “Thank you.” A MESS. “Sorry.” I CAN HARDLY SEE THE FLOOR. YOU COULD HAVE TIDIED IT UP A BIT. “Sorry.”*

As a sign of her new maturity she starts to understand her Grandfather

> *I mean…it was pretty good. A good swing.” REALLY? “I was just too young to appreciate it.”*

> *I SUPPOSE…YOU HAVEN’T GOT A KISS FOR YOUR OLD GRANDDAD?*
> *Susan stared at him.*
> *The blue glow in Death’s eyes gradually faded, and as the light died it sucked at her gaze so that it was dragged into the eye sockets and the darkness beyond…*
> *…which went on and on, forever. There was no word for it. Even eternity was a human idea. Giving it a name gave it a length; admittedly, a very long one. But this darkness was what was left when eternity had given up. It was where Death lived. Alone.*

And reachout despite her embarrassment -

> *She reached up and pulled his head down and kissed the top of his skull. It was smooth and ivory white, like a billiard ball.*
> *She turned and stared at the shadowy buildings in an attempt to hide her embarrassment.*

She will be able to stay visible in the presence of Miss Butts,

> *Susan felt herself fading protectively, out of habit. She stopped it. There was no need for that. There had never been a need for that.*
> *Susan got through the next morning without having to go nonexistent.*

seeing her with new eyes, (although using the christian name might be going just a little too far!)

> *Susan patted her on the arm. “I think they’re probably more like guidelines, don’t you? Eulalie?”*
> *Miss Butts’s mouth opened and shut. And Susan realised that the woman was actually quite short. She had a tall bearing and a tall voice and a tall manner, and was tall in every respect except height. Amazingly, she’d apparently been able to keep this a secret from people.*
> *“But I’d better be off to bed,” said Susan, her mind dancing on adrenaline. “And you, too. It’s far too late to be wandering around draughty corridors at your age, don’t you think? Last day tomorrow, too. You don’t want to look tired when the parents arrive.”*
> *“Er…yes. Yes. Thank you, Susan.”*
> *Susan gave the forlorn teacher another warm smile and headed for the dormitory,*

become able to grieve

> *“And, after a while, the sound of someone sobbing and trying not to be heard. It went on for a long time. There was a lot of catching up to do.”*

and have a crush on Imp

> *“Oh, quite a few girls have gone down there today,” said the dwarf. She leaned closer. “It’s the new boy working down there,” she said. “I’d swear he’s elvish.”*
> *Something inside Susan was plucked and went twang.”*

Susan becomes less arrogant and looks for stability

> *“Susan stared down at the dark landscape. Here and there were the lights of homesteads and small villages, where people were getting on with their lives without thought of what was passing by, high over their heads. She envied them.”*

admits her failings

> *“So I can stop? I don’t think I was very good at it.”*
> *YES.*

and reviews and respects the life choice of her parents not to choose immortality

> *“But my parents still died.”*
> *I COULDN’T HAVE GIVEN THEM MORE LIFE. I COULD ONLY HAVE GIVEN THEM IMMORTALITY. THEY DIDN’T THINK IT WAS WORTH THE PRICE.*
> *“I…think I know what they mean.”*

6) After all that, she’s still her!

> *“But…all this doesn’t alter anything, you know. The world is still full of stupid people. They don’t use their brains. They don’t seem to want to think straight.”*

But DEATH gets the last word

> *UNLIKE YOU?*

7) Instead of embracing her difference she’s now rejecting it.

> *“There was a blur of movement among the debris in the gutter.*
> *Something hidden by a fish wrapper went:*
> *SNH, SNH, SNH.*
> *“Oh yes, very funny,” said Susan.*
> *She walked on.*
> *And then broke into a run.”*

Thus setting us up nicely for her annoyance at the reappearance of the Death of Rats at the beginning of Hogfather.

If you think about it, this experience was not an easy one for her.

- She's had to face up to what she'd been avoiding for years, the early bereavement of her parents and the separation from her grandfather.
- She's discovered her grandfather's real identity and seen him as he really is both his inhumanity as the Ultimate Reality, as fallible in his nearly humanity, and the vast haunting loneliness in his eyes.
- She's understood about her 'gifts' and what they represent, but her new heritage is so socially unacceptable she's never going to be able to openly talk about it with anyone.
- She's witnessed an elderly death but with a hidden distasteful underbelly of mourners behaviour after, a battlefield with waste of young life, a bar riot and attempted assassinations,
- She's been patronised by the students, the Arch Chancellor of the Unseen University and Buddy.
- She did not take to DEATH's line of work and the injustice of the realities of life. She wasn't even very good at it. She'd so far more or less avoided the things she didn't like.

I hope she remembers (OK I know, she's fictional)

- that she did actually do it, she did learn the duty and took it on;
- Although she did nearly make a huge mistake it was The Music that got in first and her later saving the singer meant that The Music didn no finally get to create the legend and it's survival on discworld
- that her presence at the scene of the fight between her father and DEATH meant that he turned over their life timers instead of ending things;
- that she was there for DEATH even if it meant witnesing the scene of the death of her parents;
- that in that incident he couldn't even face her because of the choice her parents had made not to become immortals therefore permanently leaving her and him;
- that she can carry off black lace and a bodice;
- Ponder Stibbons accepted her opinion and was reassured by it.
- and that there are some good sides to being a Sensible Susan.

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