



Terry Pratchett

Nation
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A Note from the Author

I don't think I've ever worked so hard on a book...*Nation* was born several years ago. I wanted to write a book about a boy left orphaned of family, clan, and culture by a huge tsunami that hits his island. I had the Krakatoa explosion in mind, and I knew that the heart of the book, the very center of it, was the image of my young hero, barely into his teens, lost and alone, standing on the scoured beach and screaming defiance at the universe. About four months later, when I hadn't even scheduled the book, Indonesia was struck by the most recent tsunami, and I thought: There will be a time for *Nation*, but it's not now. The story still cooked itself through, at the back of my mind, while I waited a few years. After that disaster, I saw footage of people celebrating because the wave, which had

flattened their whole village, had miraculously left their new mosque standing. But that seemed to me to be not much of a miracle—one that flattens flimsy huts and fails to disturb a solid-looking house of worship. Surely the miracle of a caring god would have razed his holy temple but left every little house intact? What had in reality taken place was the opposite of a miracle, wasn't it? The trouble is, we call these things acts of God. And I realized that my boy on the beach was, from the depths of his soul, asking his gods for answers—and was on fire with rage because he was getting none. He had a name now: Mau, and there was the soul of the book, right there. Is this the right kind of topic for a young adult book? Probably none better, I thought. And the rest of the book fell into place like a clicking Rubik's cube: the last voyage of the Sweet Judy, the new verse to "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," the tree-climbing octopi, the ethics of guns and empires, and First Mate Cox—the sum of all evils distilled into one man. Finally, there is Daphne, the shipwrecked Victorian girl, all ringlets and hang-ups, fresh from a world where wearing fewer than four undergarments is considered risqué and now on an island where a loincloth is optional. She and Mau are a world apart, but together they turn the world upside down. Terry Pratchett