

## **The Magician's Apprentice**

Imagine a magician who takes on a young man as an apprentice. To start with the youth is very dull and unaware and doesn't even register the unusual happenings around the magician. But the wise magician feels that, despite appearances, this young man has hidden potential, so in order to bring it out he gives him a task. He sits his apprentice on a wall by a path and tells him that he owns a large number of horses. The magician will drive them down the path and the apprentice's task will be to count them, one by one.

The young man sits dozily on his wall in the sunshine. After a while he hears the sound of the magician chanting a spell, and some animals come by, their manes, flanks, and tails bright in the sunlight.

He isn't very interested in horses and his mind keeps drifting off. But he has a job to do, so he pays enough attention to keep count, though often only just in time, counting as the animals have gone by and are disappearing into the distance.

The apprentice soon realizes that by counting like that he might miss a fast-moving horse, as it could disappear out of sight before he has registered it. So he shakes himself more awake and begins watching the horses as they come towards him, counting them as they come into view.

As he pays a bit more attention to them in this way, he becomes dimly aware, still in a rather dozy state, that there is something very odd about these horses. Forgetting all about the counting, he starts to scan each animal from head to tail, looking at each one intently in order to work out what is unusual about it.

When he does this it dawns on him at once. If he had not been half asleep, functioning on automatic and taking his experience for granted, he would have seen it straight away. These aren't horses at all. They're unicorns! Each one has a spiral horn on its forehead. Now he forgets all about the manes, bodies, hooves, and tails. With each creature that passes his whole attention is focused on that wondrous horn. As time goes on, and he becomes more and more engrossed in the horns, he finds himself following their spiral shape until his attention is poised on the very point of the horn itself. In this way, the apprentice moves from a dull state to an aware one, and finally into a magical realm in which his attention is riveted on what he is experiencing.

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