Rumpelstiltskin

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For other uses, see Rumpelstiltskin (disambiguation).

Rumpelstiltskin

Illustration from Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book* (1889)

Folk tale	
Name	Rumpelstiltskin
Also known as	- Tom Tit Tot - Päronskaft - Repelsteeltje - Cvilidreta - Rampelník - Tűzmanócska - Eiman
Country	- Germany - United Kingdom - Netherlands - Czech Republic - Hungary

Published in	
	• *Grimm's Fairy Tales* • *English Fairy Tales*

"**Rumpelstiltskin**" (/ˌrʌmpəlˈstɪltskɪn/ *RUMP-əl-STILT-skin*;[1] German: *Rumpelstilzchen*) is a German fairy tale.[2] It was collected by the Brothers Grimm in the 1812 edition of *Children's and Household Tales*.[2] The story is about an imp who spins straw into gold in exchange for a woman's firstborn child.[2]

Plot

In order to appear superior, a miller brags to the king and people of the kingdom he lives in by claiming his daughter can spin straw into gold.[note 1] The king calls for the girl, locks her up in a tower room filled with straw and a spinning wheel, and demands she spin the straw into gold by morning or he will have her killed.[note 2] When she has given up all hope, a little imp-like man appears in the room and spins the straw into gold in return for her necklace of glass beads. The next morning the king takes the girl to a larger room filled with straw to repeat the feat, the imp once again spins, in return for the girl's glass ring. On the third day the girl is taken to an even larger room filled with straw, and told by the king that if she can spin all this straw into gold he will marry her, but if she cannot she will be executed. While she is sobbing alone in the room, the little imp appears again and promises that he can spin the straw into gold for her, but the girl tells him she has nothing left with which to pay. The strange creature suggests she pay him with her first child. She reluctantly agrees, and he sets about spinning the straw into gold.[note 3]

Illustration by Anne Anderson from *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (London and Glasgow 1922)

The king keeps his promise to marry the miller's daughter. But when their first child is born, the imp returns to claim his payment. She offers him all the wealth she has to keep the child, but the imp has no interest in her riches. He finally agrees to give up his claim to the child if she can guess his name within three days.[note 4]

The queen's many guesses fail. But before the final night, she wanders into the woods[note 5] searching for him and comes across his remote mountain cottage and watches, unseen, as he hops about his fire and sings. He reveals his name in his song's lyrics: "tonight tonight, my plans I make, tomorrow tomorrow, the baby I take. The queen will never win the game, for Rumpelstiltskin is my name".

When the imp comes to the queen on the third day, after first feigning ignorance, she reveals his name, Rumpelstiltskin, and he loses his temper at the loss of their bargain. Versions vary about whether he accuses the devil or witches of having revealed his name to the queen. In the 1812 edition of the Brothers Grimm tales, Rumpelstiltskin then "ran away angrily, and never came back". The ending was revised in an 1857 edition to a more gruesome ending wherein Rumpelstiltskin "in his rage drove his right foot so far into the ground that it sank in up to his waist; then in a passion he seized the left foot with both hands and tore himself in two". Other versions have Rumpelstiltskin driving his right foot so far into the ground that he creates a chasm and falls into it, never to be seen again. In the oral version originally collected by the Brothers Grimm, Rumpelstiltskin flies out of the window on a cooking ladle.

History

According to researchers at Durham University and the NOVA University Lisbon, the origins of the story can be traced back to around 4,000 years ago.[3][4] A possible early literary reference to the tale appears in Dionysius of Halicarnassus's *Roman Antiquities*, in the 1st century CE.[5]

Variants

Stamp series on *Rumpelstilzchen* from the Deutsche Post of the GDR, 1976

The same story pattern appears in numerous other cultures: *Tom Tit Tot*[6] in the United Kingdom (from *English Fairy Tales*, 1890, by Joseph Jacobs); *The Lazy Beauty and her Aunts* in Ireland (from *The Fireside Stories of Ireland*, 1870 by Patrick Kennedy); *Whuppity Stoorie* in Scotland (from Robert Chambers's *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, 1826); *Gilitrutt* in Iceland;[7][8] جعيدان (*Joaidane* "He who talks too much") in Arabic; Хламушка (*Khlamushka* "Junker") in Russia; *Rumplcimprcampr*, *Rampelník* or *Martin Zvonek* in the Czech Republic; *Martinko Klingáč* in Slovakia; "Cvilidreta" in Croatia; *Ruidoquedito* ("Little noise") in South America; *Pancimanci* in Hungary (from 1862 folktale collection by László Arany[9]); *Daiku to Oniroku* (大工と鬼六 "The carpenter and the ogre") in Japan and *Myrmidon* in France.

An earlier literary variant in French was penned by Mme. L'Héritier, titled *Ricdin-Ricdon*.[10] A version of it exists in the compilation *Le Cabinet des Fées*, Vol. XII. pp. 125-131.

The Cornish tale of Duffy and the Devil plays out an essentially similar plot featuring a "devil" named *Terry-top*.[11]

All these tales are classified in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index as tale type ATU 500, "The Name of the Supernatural Helper".[12][13] According to scholarship, it is popular in "Denmark, Finland, Germany and Ireland".[14]

Name

Illustration by Walter Crane from *Household Stories by the Brothers Grimm* (1886)

The name *Rumpelstilzchen* in German (IPA: /ʀʊmplʃtiːltsçn/) means literally "little rattle stilt", a *stilt* being a post or pole that provides support for a structure. A *rumpelstilt* or *rumpelstilz* was consequently the name of a type of goblin, also called a *pophart* or *poppart*, that makes noises by rattling posts and rapping on planks.

The meaning is similar to *rumpelgeist* ("rattle-ghost") or *poltergeist* ("rumble-ghost"), a mischievous spirit that clatters and moves household objects. (Other related concepts are *mummarts* or *boggarts* and *hobs*, which are mischievous household spirits that disguise themselves.) The ending *-chen* is a German diminutive cognate to English *-kin*.

The name is believed to be derived from Johann Fischart's *Geschichtklitterung, or Gargantua* of 1577 (a loose adaptation of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*), which refers to an "amusement" for children, a children's game named "Rumpele stilt oder der Poppart".[15]
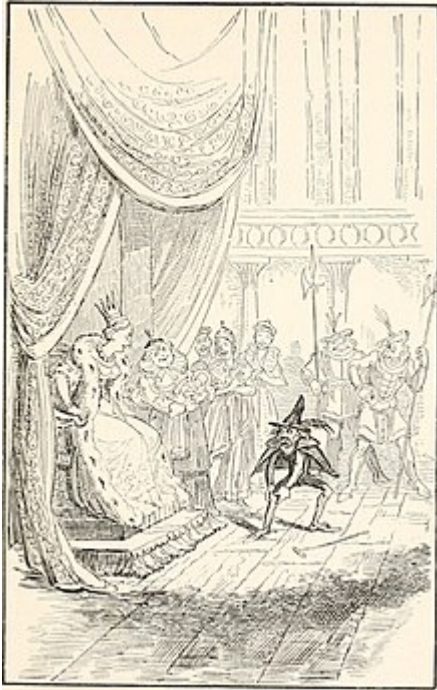
Translations

Illustration for the tale of "Rumpel-stilt-skin" from *The heart of oak books* (Boston 1910).

Translations of the original Grimm fairy tale (KHM 55) into various languages have generally substituted different names for the dwarf whose name is *Rumpelstilzchen*. For some languages, a name was chosen that comes close in sound to the German name: *Rumpelstiltskin* or *Rumplestiltskin* in English, *Repelsteeltje* in Dutch, *Rumpelstichen* in Brazilian Portuguese, *Rumpelstinski*, *Rumpelestíjeles*, *Trasgolisto*, *Jasil el Trasgu*, *Barabay*, *Rompelimbrá*, *Barrabás*, *Ruidoquedito*, *Rompeltisquillo*, *Tiribilitín*, *Tremolín*, *El enano saltarín* y *el duende saltarín* in Spanish, *Rumplcimprcampr* or *Rampelník* in Czech.

In Japanese, it is called ルンペルシュティルツキン (*Runperushutirutsukin*).

Russian might have the most accomplished imitation of the German name with Румпельшти́льцхен (*Rumpel′shtíl′tskhen*).

In other languages, the name was translated in a poetic and approximate way. Thus *Rumpelstilzchen* is known as *Päronskaft* (literally "Pear-stalk") or *Bullerskaft* (literally "Rumble-stalk") in Swedish,[16] where the sense of *stilt* or *stalk* of the second part is retained.

Slovak translations use *Martinko Klingáč*. Polish translations use *Titelitury* (or *Rumpelsztyk*) and Finnish ones *Tittelintuure*, *Rompanruoja* or *Hopskukkeli*. The Hungarian name is Tűzmanócska and in Serbo-Croatian *Cvilidreta* ("Whine-screamer"). The Slovenian translation uses *Špicparkeljc* ("Pointy-Hoof").

In Italian, the creature is usually called *Tremotino*, which is probably formed from the world *tremoto*, which means "earthquake" in Tuscan dialect, and the suffix "-ino", which generally indicates a small and/or sly character. The first Italian edition of the fables was published in 1897, and the books in those years were all written in Tuscan Italian.

For Hebrew, the poet Avraham Shlonsky composed the name עוץ־לִי גוץ־לִי (*Uts-li Guts-li* (*Ootz-li Gootz-li*), a compact and rhymy touch to the original sentence and meaning of the story, "My-Adviser My-Midget", from יוֹעֵץ, *yo'éts* (*yo'étz*), "adviser", and גוּץ, *guts* (*gootz*), "squat, dumpy, pudgy (about a person)"), when using the fairy-tale as the basis of a children's musical, now a classic among Hebrew children's plays.

Greek translations have used Ρουμπελστίλτσκιν (from the English) or Κουτσοκαλιγέρης (*Koutsokaliyéris*), which could figure as a Greek surname, formed with the particle κούτσο- (*koútso-* "limping"), and is perhaps derived from the Hebrew name.

Urdu versions of the tale used the name *Tees Mar Khan* for the imp.

Rumpelstiltskin principle

The value and power of using personal names and titles is well established in psychology, management, teaching and trial law. It is often referred to as the "Rumpelstiltskin principle". It derives from a very ancient belief that to give or know the true name of a being is to have power over it, for which compare Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19-20.

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Media and popular culture

Literature adaptations

- *Gilded*, a 2021 first novel of a duology by Marissa Meyer[17]
- *Spinning Silver*, a 2018 fantasy novel by Naomi Novik[18]

Film

- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1915 film), an American silent film, directed by Raymond B. West
- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1940 film), a German fantasy film, directed by Alf Zengerling
- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1955 film), a German fantasy film, directed by Herbert B. Fredersdorf
- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1985 film), a twenty-four-minute animated feature
- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1987 film), an American-Israeli film
- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1995 film), an American horror film, loosely based on the Grimm fairy tale
- *Rumpelstilzchen* (2009 film), a German TV adaptation starring Gottfried John and Julie Engelbrecht

Ensemble media

- The 1994 direct-to-video *Muppet Classic Theater* adapted the story, starring The Great Gonzo as the title character, Miss Piggy as the miller's daughter, and Kermit the Frog as the king. In this version of the story, Rumpelstiltskin reveals that his mother sent him to camp every summer until he was 18. The miller's daughter, who has her father, the king and the king's loyal royal advisor help her guess the name of the "weird, little man", recalls that "a good mother always sews her kid's name inside their clothes before sending them off to camp." Thus, the girl decides to check his clothing, and finds Rumpelstiltskin's name inside.

- "Rumpelstiltskin", a 1995 episode from *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child*.

- Rumpelstiltskin appears as a figment of Chief O'Brien's imagination in the 16th episode "If Wishes Were Horses" of season 1 in the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

- Rumpelstiltskin appears as a villainous character in the *Shrek* franchise, first voiced by Conrad Vernon in a minor role in *Shrek the Third*. In *Shrek Forever After*, the character's appearance and persona are significantly altered to become the main villain of the film, now voiced by Walt Dohrn. A diminutive, evil con man who deals in magical contracts, this version of the character has a personal vendetta against the ogre Shrek, as his plot to take over Far Far Away was foiled by Shrek's rescue of Princess Fiona in the first film. Rumpel manipulates Shrek into signing a deal that creates an alternate reality where Fiona was never rescued and Rumpel ascended to power with the help of an army of witches, a giant goose named Fifi, and the Pied Piper. Dohrn's version of the character also appears in various spin-offs.

- In *Once Upon a Time*, Rumplestiltskin is one of the integral characters, portrayed by Robert Carlyle. In the Enchanted Forest, Rumplestiltskin was a cowardly peasant who ascended to power by killing the "Dark One" and gaining his dark magic to protect his son Baelfire. However, the darkness causes him to grow increasingly twisted and violent. While attempting to eliminate his father's curse, Baelfire is lost to a land without magic. Ultimately aiming to save his son, Rumplestiltskin orchestrates a complex series of events, establishing himself as a dark sorcerer who strikes magical deals with various individuals in the fairy tale world, and manipulating the Evil Queen into cursing the land by transporting everyone to the Land Without Magic, while implementing failsafes to break the Dark Curse and maintain his powers. Throughout the series, he wrestles with the conflict between his dark nature and the call to use his power for good.

- Rumpelstiltskin appears in *Ever After High* as an infamous professor known for making students spin straw into gold as a form of extra credit and

detention. He deliberately gives his students bad grades in such a way they are forced to ask for extra credit.

- The cast of the children's tv series *Rainbow* acted out the story in a 1987 episode. Zippy played the title character, Geoffrey played the king, Rod played the miller, Bungle played the miller's daughter, George played the baby, Jane played the maid and Freddy played a peasent.

Theater

- *Utz-li-Gutz-li*, a 1965 Israeli stage musical written by Avraham Shlonsky
- *Rumpelstiltskin*, a 2011 American stage musical

Notes

1. ^ Some versions make the miller's daughter blonde and describe the "straw-into-gold" claim as a careless boast the miller makes about the way his daughter's straw-like blond hair takes on a gold-like lustre when sunshine strikes it.
2. ^ Other versions have the king threatening to lock her up in a dungeon forever, or to punish her father for lying.
3. ^ In some versions, the imp appears and begins to turn the straw into gold, paying no heed to the girl's protests that she has nothing to pay him with; when he finishes the task, he states that the price is her first child, and the horrified girl objects because she never agreed to this arrangement.
4. ^ Some versions have the imp limiting the number of daily guesses to three and hence the total number of guesses allowed to a maximum of nine.
5. ^ In some versions, she sends a servant into the woods instead of going herself, in order to keep the king's suspicions at bay.

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Rumpelstiltskin by the Brothers Grimm

Film	- *Rumpelstiltskin* (1940) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (1955) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (1985) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (1987) - *Muppet Classic Theater* (1994) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (1995) - *7 Dwarves: The Forest Is Not Enough* (2006) - *Happily N'Ever After* (2006) - *Shrek Forever After* (2010)
Music	- *Utz-li-gutz-li* (musical) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (musical) - *Rumpelstiltskin* (album)
Story within a story	- "If Wishes Were Horses" - *Sleeping in Flame*

Related	- *Märchenbilder*
	- *Once Upon a Time*
	  - Mr. Gold
	  - "The Miller's Daughter"

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