



Photo of Terry Pratchett: Rob Wilkins

The King of The Discworld

Sir Terry Pratchett OBE has been writing for over 40 years now and even a rare form of early-onset Alzheimer's disease has not been able to slow him down. The 39th book in his Discworld series has recently been released and sales have been phenomenal.

If you have never heard of Sir Terence David John "Terry" Pratchett, born 1948, then you mustn't have teenage children, a yen for fantasy, or a slapdash sense of humour. This British author of fantasy novels was the best-selling author of the 90's, selling over 70 million books worldwide in 37 languages. While he has been overtaken by J.K. Rowling, he retains the distinction of being the most

shop-lifted author in Britain, through no fault of his own.

Pratchett is best known for the Discworld series. The release of the 39th book in the series, *Snuff*, in October 2012 saw it quickly become the third-fastest-selling novel since records began in the United Kingdom, selling 55,000 copies in the first three days. That is a lot. Only Dan Brown's *The Lost*

Symbol (2009) and Thomas Harris' *Hannibal* (1999) have sold more copies in the UK during the first week of sales.

Pratchett started writing at a young age. At age 13, he published his first short story *The Hades Business* in the school magazine. It was published commercially when he was 15 years old. His first real breakthrough, however, was at 20,



while working as a journalist. He interviewed the Director of a small publishing company. Several years later, in 1971, *The Carpet People* was published. Two science fiction novels followed *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981). Many would argue that the Pratchett universe didn't really kick into gear until 1983. This was when the first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, was published and since then Pratchett has written on average

two books a year, albeit less so in the early years. He has moved from strength to strength and gained a strong and devoted following in both teen and adult circles.

So what is the Discworld? The Discworld is a flat disc balanced on the backs of four elephants which, in turn, stand on the back of a giant turtle, Great A'Tuin, who is slowly swimming through space. The gender of the turtle

is unknown which is unfortunate as this may offer some clarification as to A'Tuin's destination. Attempts by telepaths to learn more about the turtle's intents have not met with much success. All they've been able to discern is that the Great A'Tuin is looking forward to something.

It is this imaginative universe that has captured readers, with its combined laws of physics and



Awards:

Pratchett was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1998 and was knighted for services to literature in the 2009 New Year Honours. In 2001 he won the annual Carnegie Medal for *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents*.



Discworld, rest assured that each of the books stand alone as independent stories set in the same fantasy universe. The Discworld does, however, have a chronology. Advancements can be seen in the development of the Discworld civilisations, such as the creation of paper money and a banking system. The books take place roughly in real time and the characters' ages change to reflect the passing of years. Some books refer to earlier events and characters disappear and reappear so if faced with the option, reading in order is preferable.

Pratchett has said that the Discworld series will probably never end as such, however, in December 2007 he announced that he was suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease, which in inimitable style he typically refers to as an 'embuggerance'. He has hit back at the disease since this time by donating a million dollars to the Alzheimer's Research Trust. He has also become an ambassador for assisted dying. While he is no longer able to touch type, Pratchett's imagination, and thus his Discworld, continue to exist. Long live the King of the Discworld say we.

magic and an awful lot of detail. Pratchett's trademark is his sense of humour which relies heavily on wordplay, spoofing mythology and popular culture largely through the extensive use of metaphor. Common themes and motifs run through the series, which often parodies fantasy sub-genres as well as creating analogies of real world issues such as religion, business and politics, and the arts. Pratchett tends to avoid current affairs though, allowing the series an indeterminate shelf life ensuring the contents do not date.

Should a novice be ready to launch themselves into the

Quotable quotes by Sir Terry Pratchett OBE include:

'I'll be more enthusiastic about encouraging thinking outside the box when there's evidence of any thinking going on inside it.'

'The trouble with having an open mind, of course, is that people will insist on coming along and trying to put things in it.'

'God does not play dice with the universe; He plays an ineffable game of his own devising, which might be compared, from the perspective of any of the other players, to being involved in an obscure and complex version of poker in a pitch dark room, with blank cards, for infinite stakes, with a dealer who won't tell you the rules, and who smiles all the time.'

'Sham Harga had run a successful eatery for many years by always smiling, never extending credit, and realising that most of his customers wanted meals properly balanced between the four food groups: sugar, starch, grease, and burnt crunchy bits.'

'In ancient times cats were worshipped as gods; they have not forgotten this.'