

TERRY PRATCHETT -A (DISC) WORLD OF COLLECTING

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Background

Terrence David John Pratchett - Terry Pratchett - is the author of the phenomenally successful Discworld series and is one of contemporary fiction's most popular writers. Since Nielsen's records began in 1998, Pratchett has sold around 10 million books in the UK, generating more than £70 million in revenue. His agent and original publisher, Colin Smythe says Pratchett has either written, co-written or been creatively associated with 100-plus books, notably Discworld titles,

Despite this prodigious output, Pratchett is one of the UK's most collectable authors, particularly for his early books and special editions. Pratchett's first book, *The Carpet People*, was published in 1971, while his first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, appeared in 1983. 36 more Discworld books have followed, many of which have topped the UK hardback and paperback lists. Pratchett's novels have sold more than 60 million copies and have been translated into 33 languages

Until Pratchett's recent diagnosis of an early stage of a rare form of Alzheimer's disease, he usually wrote two books a year, which reputedly earned him £1 million each. When asked "What do you love most about your job?" Pratchett replied "Well, I get paid shitloads of cash...which is good". Pratchett donated £500,000 towards Alzheimer's research in March 2008.

Pratchett anticipates dictating novels from 2009 onwards due to his illness. He recently told the BBC, that compared to his once rapid typing, that he now types "badly - if it wasn't for my loss of typing ability, I might doubt the fact that I have Alzheimer's. It's now hunt and peck". Pratchett reflects, "Merely catching a variant of Alzheimer's has propelled me onto more prestigious chat show sofas than I have ever seen in 25 years of quietly writing the Discworld series".

Well before J. K. Rowling became popular, Pratchett straddled the best selling divide between young and adult literature. In 1989 *Truckers* became the first children's book to appear in British adult fiction best-seller lists, while *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* won the UK Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in 2001. *The Wee Free Men* (2003) began the highly successful Tiffany Aching series.

Pratchett was awarded an OBE in 1998 for services to British literature. His interpretation: "At best, it's kind of a knighthood light". He sometimes gives the impression that he feels neglected by the literati. Alison Flood, in an interview earlier this year with Pratchett for the UK *Bookseller*, identified "a chippiness there, an irritation at the way he can be viewed by the literary establishment".

Pratchett in a way occupies a sort of literary blind spot, because his books sell; has a high productivity rate (and thus faces the quality versus quantity fallacy); his books are humorous, and they are set in a world which on first sight may appear ridiculous. Discworld itself is a flat world which rests on the back of four elephants, which in turn are on top of a giant turtle sailing through space.

Pratchett responds “There are mainstream novels that have more fantasy than some of mine . . . The point is that any fantasy in a book will turn it into a fantasy, whereas a murder in a book will not turn it into a murder mystery. I’ve written police procedurals, romances and murder mysteries; but because the person murdered is a dwarf, it becomes a fantasy.”

Like Jonathan Swift, Pratchett uses his (Disc)world to hold up a distorting mirror to our world, providing a satirical perspective in novels which have ranged over xenophobia, militarism, rock ‘n’ roll, quantum physics, religion and opera! Pratchett has given readers versions of Homer and Dante (*Eric* 1989), Shakespeare (*Wyrd Sisters* 1988 and *Lords and Ladies* 1992), *The Phantom of the Opera* (*Maskerade* 1995), and pop music (*Soul Music* 1994). In *Moving Pictures* (1990) Pratchett parodies celebrity culture and Hollywood films, while *Small Gods* (1992) tackles religious fundamentalism.

Bibliographical background

Colin Smythe’s (Pratchett’s first publisher and now agent) website is indispensable for the details of Pratchett’s publications <http://www.colinsmythe.co.uk/terrypages/tpindex.htm>. It is particularly important for the complex details of the early editions. Smythe provides bibliographical details of all of Pratchett’s publications including foreign translations, cover illustrations, collaborations etc.

Three articles on Pratchett in the UK *Book and Magazine Collector* are extremely useful, providing overlapping information, and constitute Pratchett collecting time capsules in terms of public appreciation and prices. The initial top price for *The Carpet People* (1971) was gradually eroded as the early Discworld novels gained in popularity.

The first article was by M.J. Simpson in the *BMC* issue for May 1995; the second by David Howard in the May 2003 issue, while the latest comprehensive survey was by renowned critic and bibliographer, Mike Ashley in the December 2005 issue. Ashley made some subsequent additions and corrections in the *BMC* letter column, as a result of contact with Colin Smythe. The complex printings of *The Tourist Guide To Lancre* (1998), the third book in the Discworld Mapp series, are highlighted.

Early biography

Much of Terry Pratchett’s early biography can be found on Colin Smythe’s web page (<http://www.au.lspace.org/about-terry/biography.html>)

Pratchett was born on 28 April 1948 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. A recent American appreciation of Pratchett termed him a “baby boomer”, although Pratchett never seems to fit the popular conception of a baby boomer. Pratchett passed his 11-plus examination in 1959, but instead attended High Wycombe Technical High School rather than the local grammar because he felt “woodwork would be more fun than Latin”. At this time he had no real idea of what he wanted to do, and remembers himself as a “nondescript student”.

He writes ironically in retrospect, “I had a deprived childhood, you see. I had lots of other kids to play with and my parents bought me outdoor toys and refused to ill-treat me, so it never occurred to me to seek solitary consolation with a good book”. Then Tolkien changed all that. I went mad for fantasy. Comics, boring Norse sagas, even more boring Victorian fantasy...I even bought and read all the Narnia books in one go, which was bit like a surfeit of Communion wafers. I didn't care any more”.

Terry's first non fiction appearance in a science fiction magazine was in the British Science Fiction Association's magazine, *Vector* with a letter entitled 'Science Fiction in Schools' in the September 1963 issue. Issues of *Vector* occasionally turn up as fans throw out their magazines. Mainstream collectors would often not be aware of Pratchett's presence in this issue and therefore a chance to obtain a rare item is always possible.

My interest in Terry Pratchett began early. I subscribed to the magazines *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* in the 1960's, Pratchett's first published story was the short story 'The Hades Business', which appeared in his school magazine when he was 13, and was subsequently reprinted in *Science Fantasy* magazine in 1963, for which he was paid £14. Pratchett bought a typewriter with the proceeds.

His second published story 'Night Dweller' appeared in *New Worlds* magazine, (issue 156, November 1965). It is one of the few items that Pratchett has never allowed to be republished, allegedly because of the immaturity of the writing and plot. Consequently, the price of this piece of Pratchettiana will be higher than "The Hades Business". On the positive side, copies of both these magazines turn up reasonably regularly within sets of *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*. Usually these are to be found in general secondhand bookshops as SF bookshops usually know what they are doing in this area.

I also subscribed to the excellent critical 1960's fanzine *Zenith*, which had regular contributions from authors such as Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock and JG Ballard. I still have a Pratchett signed copy of issue 6 (September 1964) in which Pratchett was a co-author of a feature on Colin Kapp, entitled 'The Unconventional Cavalier'. This is a rare item, which even unsigned is probably worth about £100, as it was selling at around £50 several years ago in one of Andy Richards' Cold Tonnage SF catalogues.

Having obtained five O-levels and started A-level courses in Art, History and English, Pratchett decided to become a journalist, and left school in 1965. In October 1965, Terry, under the pseudonym of Marcus, began writing stories for the Children's Circle column in *The Bucks Free Press*, the first of which, spread over 13 weeks, featured characters from what would become *The Carpet People* (1971). The chances of finding issues of these articles are perhaps very remote, but would certainly bring high prices if found. Another rare item to look out for from that period is a Colin Smythe magazine *The Psychic Researcher* in which Terry had a comic strip entitled "Warlock Hall" about a fictional governmental paranormal research facility.

The Carpet People, Pratchett's first book, was published by Colin Smythe in 1971, with a launch party in the carpet department of Heal's in Tottenham Court Road. *The Carpet People* describes the adventures of little people living in a carpet. This

foreshadows Pratchett's *Bromeliad* trilogy, comprising *Truckers*, *Diggers* and *Wings* (1989-90), which also features little people who live within a department store.

The Carpet People, despite being the first Pratchett book, is not the Pratchett book that brings the highest prices, partly because of its larger print run, although if one were to find the several copies in which Pratchett hand-coloured the illustrations, they would certainly give the prices of his Discworld first editions a run for their money. A facsimile reprint of this first edition specially bound in carpet was presented in a special case to Pratchett by Transworld Publishers on his fiftieth birthday. The 2005 boxed signed limited edition comprised 1000 copies.

I bought a signed copy of the 1971 first edition of *The Carpet People* in 1997 from a Blue Mountains bookshop in Australia. This was advertised as a signed copy, but the signature bore no resemblance to the Pratchett signatures in my other signed books. I therefore contacted Pratchett and faxed him a copy of his signature in that book.

His response of September 9 1997 is as follows: "looks pretty much the way my signature used to look...this was probably signed more than ten years ago when I had time to shape every vowel! Andromeda Books in Birmingham have a visitors book signed by me twice a year since the mid 80s and its chilling and instructive to see how my sig has simplified over the years." Pratchett then sent another e-mail saying "I've looked through some old stuff and this may be one of the ones signed back in the 70s".

Pratchett's signature, as can be seen from the title page illustration from my copy of *The Carpet People*, has morphed into even more of a quick signature in the twenty-first century. Pratchett is a prodigious signer, with his book signing queues lasting between two and six hours. In 2001, when he received an honorary Doctorate of Literature at Portsmouth University, he said he thought he had signed over 300,000 books!

In his early *Discworld* signings, Pratchett signed in full and often embellished his signature with a caption, a drawing, and often for younger readers, a Pratchett stamp on the title page. Pratchett had his own "library" stamp which he carried around in a pouch. These were perhaps more enjoyable signing times for him in that he had more time to chat. In more recent years it's often been head down and fast signings, although to give Pratchett his due, he often rarely balked at the vision of unkempt youths approaching him with large collections of paperbacks.

Pratchett e-mailed me on 6 November 2007, "I think the key drawback of signing tours is that they put you, via jetlag, missed meals, suitcase living and randomised stress in a situation where you fall prey to any bug going. And then you sit in front of a line up of 300 fans, who breathe foreign germs all over you".

Pratchett's illness has prevented him coming to Australia in 2008, as part of the 25th Annual Discworld Tour. This has prevented him signing my collection of Pratchettiana which has accumulated since his last visit. He responded to my query about signing bookplates: "I appreciate your dogged determination to have every printed item of mine, but I really hate signing bookplates and bits of sticky paper. These seem to me to negate the very basis of book signing. I like to sign for people where I can see the whites of their eyes."

Pratchett had signed his books for me from in Australia 1990 onwards, ie from his first Australian tour. At this time, I was reviewing his books on a regular basis for *The Canberra Times* and organised his first literary events outside of book signings.

We arranged a literary lunch, but the majority of the audience were somewhat bemused as his then publisher publicity was billing Pratchett as a mixture of Evelyn Waugh and P.G. Wodehouse! Pratchett is a wonderful speaker, but he was not the suave English gentlemen that the ladies who lunch quite expected! On future occasions, Pratchett and I, whenever possible, talked on stage at the Australian National University. These regularly attracted audiences of over 600 people, the capacity of the lecture theatre.

We even managed to persuade the British High Commission to hold two receptions, one under the banner of Pratchett being a major British export earner, which indeed he is. This latter reception was hosted by a rather bemused Sir Alastair Goodlad, the then British High Commissioner, who clearly had not heard of Pratchett before his briefing.

Pratchett gave a condensed version of his 2004 World Science Fiction Convention speech about a recent operation and his waking on the operating table shouting for sandwiches – what Pratchett called “a near sandwich experience”. Pratchett’s English humour seemed to leave a number of foreign ambassadors, especially the French Ambassador, somewhat bemused, but it did not prevent many of the guests forming an impromptu book signing queue afterwards.

The publications of the 1970’s and 1980’s

The Carpet People was followed by two SF novels *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981). *Strata* parodies Larry Niven’s *Ringworld* and foreshadowed the idea of the Discworld. *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) first edition, unsigned, can reach between £550 and £650, while *Strata* is in the £450 to £550 bracket.

Neither book, however, at the time, made enough money for Pratchett to give up his full time job. He continued to work as a journalist, eventually moving to the *Western Daily Press* and the *Bath Chronicle*. In 1980 he left journalism entirely to become a press officer for three nuclear plants under the direction of the Central Electricity Generating Board, a job he was able to give up after the success of the early *Discworld* novels.

The Colour of Magic (1983), which launched the Discworld series, is usually considered his weakest novel, yet due to its small print run of 506 copies in the UK, it is the most collectable Pratchett item. Smythe notes “the book was typeset in the UK, but printed in the US for us through St Martin’s Press, as at that time printing costs were cheaper there than here and there were only about 500 copies with our imprint.” As most of the copies went to public libraries, pristine copies of the first edition are very rare.

The exact bibliographical details of the publication of *The Colour of Magic* are complex between the UK and US editions (and between the St Martin’s Press and US

SF Book Club editions) and reference needs to be made to both Smythe and Ashley for details.

M. J. Simpson in his *BMC* article for May 1995 quotes Barry Phelps writing in the May 1993 issue of *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* (*Rare Book Review*'s previous title) that "the only copy I have ever seen is the one in the British Library. Many advertisements in the Book Dealer failed to provide me with a copy and I judge that the first one to reach the Bloomsbury Book Auctions will fetch over £500. The first edition of *The Colour of Magic* in good condition can now realise over £5000.

Stephen Briggs has "converted" almost half of Terry Pratchett's novels into plays. The early mimeographed editions of the plays are scarce and very collectable. Thus, *The Colour of Magic* play adaption, originally performed by the Cambridge Amateur Dramatics Company, comprised originally only eight copies of the scripts, by Richard Artley and Mark Syddal, collated in ring bindings with soft covers. A copy can bring, according to Ashley, between £750 and £800 in this scarce "publication". Similarly the 1996 play script of *Mort*, by Artley and Syddal can bring up to £500.

The Light Fantastic (1986) is the only direct sequel in the Discworld series. Reference also needs to be made to Smythe and Ashley for the exact publication details of editions of *The Light Fantastic* which had a first UK printing of 1043 copies. Copies of the British edition can now reach up to £2500. At the time of writing, Cold Tonnage Books lists a copy for £1650, while SuzyQ books in America has one for £1607.

Other early Discworld books such as *Equal Rites* (1987), *Mort* (1987), and *Sourcery* (1988) are also very collectable with prices ranging from £800 maximum for the former to £250 for the latter. Later Discworld novels had much larger print runs, so that by the time of *Jingo* (1997) the print runs exceeded 100,000 copies.

Signed copies of these early books may well fetch more, although it should be noted that a Pratchett signature is far from rare. Having said that, most Pratchett fans tend to keep their signed books rather than dispose of them. The value of *Discworld* novels, which retain their associated promotional items, are also much enhanced. Thus *Pyramids* came with a black mug with the slogan "Mummies don't do it in Pyramids". The paperback version of *Sourcery* was packaged with the mug in a cardboard box labelled "The Terry Pratchett cup and Sourcery". Other promotional material came with *Good Omens* (1990) and *Mort* (1987).

Recent years have seen *Discworld* novels issued in signed, limited editions, in addition to the normal trade copy. Although limited can be defined as 2,500 copies! *Making Money* (2007) is on sale at the moment in the limited edition, signed by Pratchett and the illustrator Paul Kidby at £500.00

As always, unusual copies may bring higher prices. Thus a copy of *Pyramids* (1989) has been listed at £150 as it was signed by both Pratchett and Boy George! Allegedly the previous owner was travelling on the London Underground with the book in 1989 and Boy George was sitting opposite him. *Pyramids* was the only piece of paper available for signing, so possibly a unique signing occurred. "Samplers" were also issued for several of the Discworld books and are very collectable like proofs.

The selling of proof copies is a contentious issue and with authors like Pratchett, proof copies of each new work induce a collecting frenzy. In recent years, proof copies have either been used for auction purposes to support Pratchett charities or have surfaced on E-bay at extremely high prices, prior to publication, as was the case with Pratchett's latest novel *Nation*. At the time of writing, a signed proof of *Mort* was listed at £595 by Fine Edition Books in Kent.

Some Pratchett non Discworld items

There are too many Pratchett collectables outside of Discworld books to document in this article. The following therefore is only a Pratchett pot-pourri. *Good Omens* (1990), co-written with Neil Gaiman, is more valuable in the first edition if signed by both authors. Gaiman, himself a collectable author, has written "Terry and I wrote a book together. It began as a parody of Richmal Crompton's *William* books ... but rapidly outgrew that conceit and became about a number of other things instead ... It was a funny novel about the end of the world".

An unusual publishing experiment was Gollancz's 1995 four hardcover compact editions of *Discworld* books, each with a page height of 8.7cm. They were printed in China and Colin Smythe comments "the complications involved in producing these were the reason that no more volumes have been produced to date". These volumes are not that easy to find, even though produced in significant numbers.

An unusual limited edition is *Sharpe's Trafalgar*, (Scorpion Press, 1999), which was a limited edition of Bernard Cornwell's book with 99 numbered copies signed by Cornwell, and included an appreciation by Pratchett. There were, however, a further 15 lettered de-luxe copies, signed by the author and Terry Pratchett, produced for private distribution.

You Can Save Mankind (1992) began the *Johnny Maxwell* trilogy, and won the 1993 Writers' Guild of Great Britain Best Children's Book Award. *Johnny and the Dead* was shortlisted for the 1994 Carnegie Medal. After this book's publication, ten copies were bound in quarter dark blue artificial leather and cloth boards and signed by Terry Pratchett for a competition run by Books Etc.

The collection of Pratchett short stories, speeches and travel notes brought together in 2004, *Once More With Footnotes*, is now out of print and very collectable. A copy on ABE, which is publicised as signed by Pratchett and one of the illustrators, Omar Rayyan, is priced at £1250. This collection contains an essay on his Australian tours, entitled *No Worries*, in which this author features anonymously at the Australian National University function. Pratchett gave me a "Librarians Rule Ook" badge.

There are many other Pratchett collectables, such as diaries, almanacs, quiz books, film tie-ins and companions which need to be covered in a comprehensive collecting portfolio, a "Terry-go-Round". The depth and breadth of the Smythe web bibliography is staggering in this regard.

The Pratchett phenomenon shows little signs of abating, and prices will no doubt continue to rise, as issues of *BMC* on Pratchett have clearly shown over the last decade.

Postscript

The best accessible collection for Pratchett scholars is probably that generously donated by Colin Smythe to the University of London Library (Senate House).

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/specialcollections/pratchett.shtml>

It brings together all editions of the published writings of Pratchett, and includes book proofs, typescripts, associated publications and merchandising, with a selection of writings about Pratchett. Not only does it hold the standard printed material - novels, short stories, and journal articles - but also expands to include audio books, graphic novels, play texts, screenplays, maps, diaries, calendars, videos, DVDs, games, computer games, jigsaws, posters, prints, cards, bookmarks, bookplates, wine and alcoholic beverages, newsletters and fanzines, models, tee-shirts, key-rings, and publicity material.