
Terry Pratchett

The Wee Free Men
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Q: When you're writing a new novel, do you "listen with your eyes" at the world about you, or does a character, or a voice come into your head? What happens to get you to sit down your desk and write the opening words of a new novel?

A: "I'm not sure. I start with a handful of semi-formed ideas and play around with them until they seem to make some sense. Actually typing is important to me—it kind of tricks my brain into gear. I've got a packrat mind, like most writers, and once I starting thinking hard about a new project all kinds of odd facts and recollections shuffle forward to get a place on the bus."

Q: When you were writing *The Amazing Maurice*, you did a good deal of research into rats and admitted that "I think I have read, in the past few months, more about rats than is good for me." Now, can you tell us a little about researching those *Wee Free Men* ... and did you have to get "a wee bittie sloshed" to do it?

A: "Well, 'no' to that last question—I actually put some thought into giving the Feegles a language that *sounded* right, and you need to be sober for that! This time around I didn't need to do a lot of primary research. It'd be more accurate to say I spent some time checking up to be absolutely certain about things that I remembered from my general reading over many years, like the Yan Tan Tethera (the shepherd's counting system) and one or two old customs of the Chalk country. The Feegles were easy. They practically created themselves! I can't stress this enough—the best research is probably the research you're doing when you don't think you're doing research."

Q: "[Tiffany] could put up with monsters. But she didn't want to face mad boots." Do you have any particular—or peculiar—fears?

A: "When I was a kid I was scared rigid of skeletons. So maybe you don't have to have taken Psychology 101 to see why, in the adult Discworld series, I've made the skeletal Death almost a gentle figure."

Q: In *The Wee Free Men*, Tiffany comments that where she lives there are "a lot of people with a lot to do. There wasn't enough time for silence." Would this be as fair a comment from you about life for us all today as it is for Tiffany in the Chalk?

A: "More so, I think. We've banished silence from our lives. We seem to fear it. We fill the world with noise. I'm sure it makes us ill."

"The silence up on the Chalk that I mention in the book—well, we get that where I live. It doesn't mean no sound at all, though. You hear the buzzards and the wind in the hedgerows and tractor sounds a long way off, and all of this gives the silence a kind of texture, makes it richer somehow."

Q: When you won the Carnegie Medal last year, you commented that "It's nice to see humor taken seriously." (Actually, you probably commented that "It's nice to see humour taken seriously" but ...) Is writing YA novels something we can look forward to you continuing, and might we meet Tiffany, or any other characters again in future books?

A: "I'm playing with ideas for a sequel to *TWFM*, that's certain. And that means the Feegles will be in it along with Tiffany. I'd like to follow her life for a while. But there are so many other things I want to do, too."

Q: We note with admiration that in a UK national poll conducted by the BBC you have five titles in the list of 100 all-time 'best loved' books, the same number as Charles Dickens. Does that make you feel proud?

A: "A bit. And puzzled, too. It's only 4.5 titles, though, since one is *Good Omens* and as far as I know Charles Dickens has never worked with Neil Gaiman. But P.G. Wodehouse isn't in there, which is strange. Still it was a poll of people's personal favorites, not the books they objectively considered 'the best', so if you don't like the answer, maybe it's because you've asked the wrong question."

"It's interesting to try to work out what was going through the voters' minds, though."