



Terry Pratchett

Night Watch
ISBN13: 9780060013127

Q: *Night Watch* is a dark novel. Would you agree?

A: For a given value of dark, perhaps. Fairy-tale dark, maybe. In a fairy-tale our hero has to walk through the dark forest, kill the monsters, evade the giant spiders — but the important thing, without which the story could never be written, is that he emerges from the other side, into the light.

Q: Our hero being in this case Commander Sam Vimes of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch — except that he's demoted to sergeant.**A:** Yes, and the monsters are on two legs. But let's not give too much away, eh? There's a revolution, except that the people behind the barricades aren't revolutionaries, and there're murders and assassinations and a breakdown of law and order. And some

laughs, I must admit. It's amazing how they turn up.

Q: And through it all walks Sergeant Vimes, having the time of his life as a street cop again.**A:** Yep. Well put. He stands to lose everything, but there's a part of him that's gloriously happy. He's fighting dirty and double-crossing and using all his old skills to survive. There's no damn paperwork and people are trying to kill him all the time. In an odd way, a way he's ashamed of when he thinks about it, he's loving it. Look, I think when people mean that Discworld books have become darker they really mean the series is growing up. In *The Colour of Magic* most of the city is set alight. It's a joke, in much the same way that the Earth is destroyed almost at the start of Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I could not do that quite so easily now — and this time, we know that people are dying. But I think the books are richer for that. You need tragic relief. You need darkness for the light to show up. You need a way out of the forest.

Q: You need redemption.**A:** Right. And that means you need to let in more than laughter.

Q: In *Night Watch* people get hurt or killed, sometimes quite nastily. Where does that fit into comedy?**A:** Right slap bang in the middle, I think. There's humor in the book, but you can't build a plot out of jokes. You need tragic relief. And you need to let people know that when a lot of frightened people are running around with edged weaponry, there are deaths. Stupid deaths, usually. I'm not writing "The A-Team" — if there's a fight going on, people will get hurt. Not letting this happen would be a betrayal. There was a famous incident during the Falklands War when a shell landed amongst some squaddies and one yelled "I've lost my leg!" and another one shouted back "No you haven't, it's over here!" And they were so high on adrenaline they all laughed. Humor turns up in strange places. It can unite people, and blunt the edge of terror.

Q: Is this trend going to continue?**A:** Well, yes. It's been noticeable, I'd say, ever since my novel, *Men at Arms*, possibly earlier. And all it is, is me saying: supposing these people were real? Suppose that when they were cut, they bled? What's that Mel Brooks line...tragedy is me cutting my finger, comedy is you falling down a manhole? I still do the comedy, I just look down the manhole sometimes.

Q: So does that mean no more Rincewind?

A: No. He's useful if I need a viewpoint character. But the next adult DW book will, like *The Truth*, contain no major characters from earlier in the series, at least in big roles. It's good discipline for me, and you never know what'll show up. We're heading for 30 DW books now, and to keep it fresh I'm franchising it, only I'm franchising it to myself. So that's led to *The Last Hero*, big and illustrated, and *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents*, which is a YA Discworld novel. There'll be another YA book, *The Wee Free Men*, out in May. And I'm trying new things with the adult books. I don't know if DW is the longest series ever written by one author, but it must be in contention. And the only way to keep it fresh is to let it evolve.

Q: This means you're writing books back to back, doesn't it? Don't you sometimes think you've made enough money? Don't you want to put your feet up sometimes?**A:** I like writing. I get cranky when I can't. Yes, I write books back to back, and I work very hard on them. But the late Douglas Adams said that the best time to start a new book is in the lovely warm glow you get from finishing the last one. It was good advice, although as far as I can tell he didn't follow it himself. But I do, and starting a new book somehow restores what the manic editing of the last book took away. Money is an unavoidable consequence, but it isn't the reason I write; if it was, I wouldn't have written any of the YA books, because advances in that field are small compared to what I'd got now for an 'adult' DW.

Q: Out of genuine interest, then, why do you write them?**A:** Because I want to, I enjoy it, I sometimes have ideas that are too serious for an adult book, and it's a way of paying back or, perhaps, paying forward. If I thought there were kids out there who'll remember the Truckers trilogy, or the Johnny Maxwell books, or even Maurice as warmly as I remember books I read more than 40 years ago, I'd be very happy.

Q: *The Amazing Maurice* won the Carnegie Medal. Were you really surprised?**A:** That's putting it mildly. I didn't think it'd be ruled out because it's a fantasy, but because there's a fair amount of humor in it. And humor is not something traditionally beloved of judges inside or outside the genre, believe me. God bless the librarians!

Q: With fantasy now perceived as being big box office, what is it that keeps Discworld off the screen?**A:** Er...me, mostly. And the movie industry is helping, I have to say. The Dreamworks movie of my Truckers trilogy does seem to be moving now, but there's no

Discworld movie currently in sight. Most recently FilmFour in the UK said Discworld was too "cerebral and genteel." Yes, that surprised me, too. And then their company collapsed anyway. Shame. And someone else said that Equal Rites as a movie would "look like a parody of Harry Potter." I tried to come up with an answer to that, but the top of my head kept unscrewing. Anyway, after you've been around for a while, you learn that most movie deals mean...what's that lovely term...oh, yes: diddly-squat. Lots of people offer deals, but few of them seem to have the capability to get a movie made. They just want to own the rights — lots of rights. Well, to hell with that. Sorry, I meant heck. Something may or may not happen. It's taken half a century to make a decent movie of *The Lord of the Rings*, and heaven knows what's happened to the *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* movie now. Frankly, I don't think a Discworld movie is ever going to happen and, unless it does happen within the next few years, I'd rather it didn't at all.

Q: Why?**A:** Well, what exactly would be in it for me? Money? I've got money. Fame? I doubt it. Rincewind or Vimes or Granny Weatherwax in bendable plastic? Does the world need this?

Q: *The Fellowship of the Ring* is widely regarded as a great movie, though.**A:** I'd agree. Tolkien is eminently filmable, I think. The Lord of the Rings is intensely...landscaped. But Discworld is about dialogue, which is one reason why it might be hard to film. We'll have to see. I'm far more interested in the various theatrical productions, I have to say. They always seem more real to me.

Q: Are you working on another book?**A:** Always.