

Terry Pratchett

going by the book

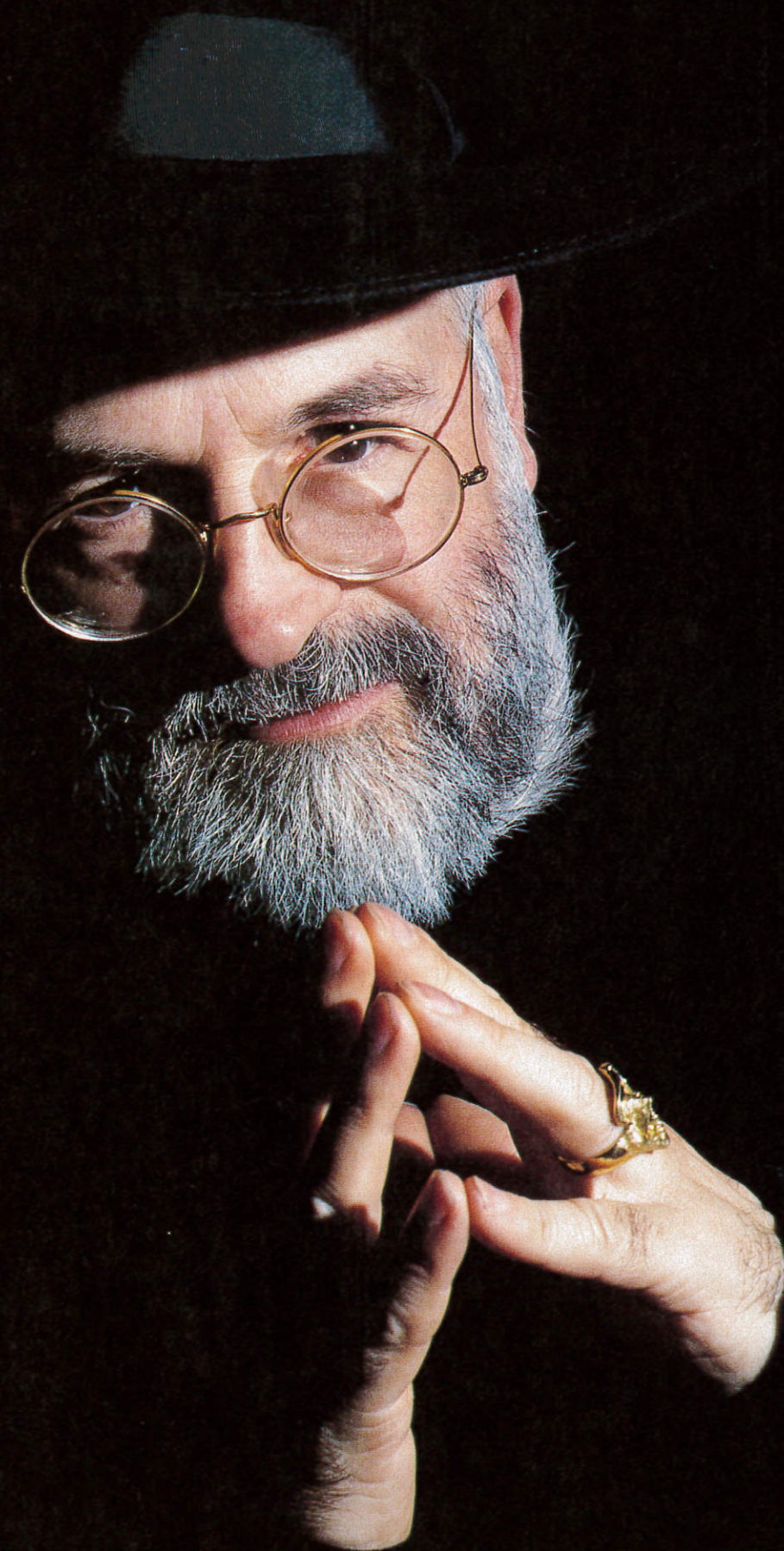
His Discworld novels have had readers in stitches for a decade by poking fun at the Dungeons & Dragons genre. But now that the best-selling books are set to become a graphic adventure for the PC, the author's making sure their humour survives the transition intact.

BY GARY WHITTA

"I'm a right bastard to work with."

Terry Pratchett

Terry Pratchett photographed by Richard Robinson



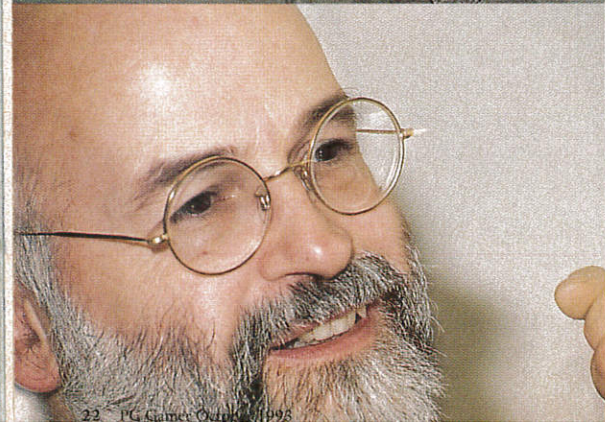
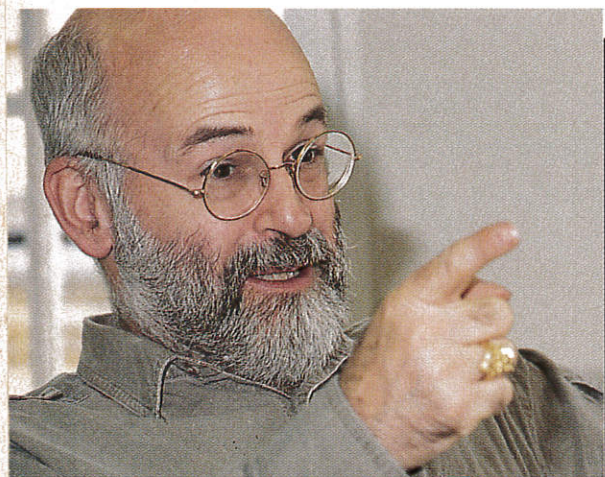
A BASS NOTE SOUNDS. IT IS A deep, vibrating chord that hints that the brass section may break in at any moment with a fanfare for the cosmos, because the scene is the blackness of deep space with a few stars glittering like dandruff on the shoulders of God.

Then it comes into view overhead, bigger than the biggest, most unpleasantly-armed starcruiser in the imagination of a three-ring film-maker: a turtle, ten thousand miles long. It is a Great A'Tuin, one of the rare astrocheloniens from a universe where things are less as they are and more like people imagine them to be, and it carries on its meteor-pocked shell four giant elephants who bear on their enormous shoulders the great round wheel of the Discworld.

As the viewpoint swings around, the whole of the world can be seen by the light of its tiny orbiting sun. There are continents, archipelagos, seas, deserts, mountain ranges and even a tiny central ice cap. The inhabitants of this place, it is obvious, won't have any truck with global theories. Their world, bounded by an encircling ocean that falls forever into space in one long waterfall, is as round and flat as a geological pizza, although without the anchovies.

A world like that, which exists only because the gods enjoy a joke, must be a place where magic can survive. And sex too, of course.

Extract from *Equal Rites*, © Terry Pratchett 1986



TERRY PRATCHETT is 45, sports a ferocious white beard, has little hair (which is maybe why he wears a black, broad-brimmed hat in public) and, since returning from a recent science fiction convention in San Francisco, carries a heavily-loaded suede saddlebag over his shoulder wherever he goes. He doesn't look like someone who's written around 20 best-selling books over the last 15 years and is universally regarded as the funniest, most inventive fantasy writer in the world today. In fact, he looks (as our Art Editor commented when she first saw one of his press photographs) like a little wizard.

Maybe that's all for the best. Although he occasionally dips into the world of more conventional fantasy, he's still best known for his ever-growing series of novels (15 to date, with one on its way) based on Discworld, Pratchett's very own mythological milieu, which celebrates its tenth birthday this month.

Discworld is a place where anything, no matter how bizarre, isn't just possible, but highly probable. The world itself (if you can get your head round this) is a pizza-shaped planet which rests on the backs of four giant elephants, who in turn stand on the shell of a ten thousand mile long turtle that plods inexorably through space. And that's just the beginning. It quickly gets even stranger...

Pratchett's books stick two fingers up at conventional fantasy fiction by committing the cardinal sin of not taking themselves seriously. As a result, they are very funny indeed. It's a unique approach that Terry Pratchett has made his own - primarily because, although many have tried, nobody can do it quite like him. This is a world where the Grim Reaper, after a hectic day ushering souls into the next world, pops out for a curry. A world where the librarian of the magical Unseen University is an arm-wrestling orangutan. A world in which the most frightening creature is not a dragon or an orc warlord, but a psychotic piece of travelling luggage on hundreds of little

legs and capable of flattening anything that gets in its way... Move over, JRR Tolkien. Comedy has arrived.

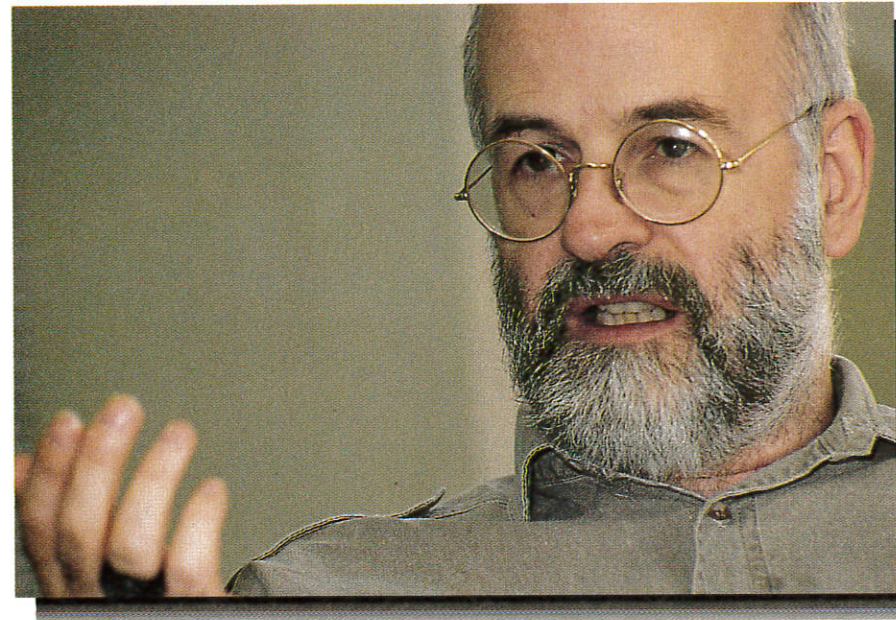
Despite the books' phenomenal success (they've been translated into 18 languages and back catalogue titles still sell over 100,000 copies a month), Pratchett has always shied away from the traditional merchandising deals. His Truckers books for kids were recently adapted for television, a small craft company produces jolly little clay figurines of Discworld's main characters, and there's been the odd spin-off comic book, but little else.

Until now, that is. Plans are already in motion for all kinds of Discworld maps, a concept album and, most interestingly of all, a PC adventure game. It'll be the first official title since *The Colour Of Magic*, Delta 4's Spectrum adventure of the mid-'80s, and Pratchett, ever protective of his vision, is keeping a close eye on its development. Today, however, the man is not at home writing his latest, as-yet-untitled Discworld book. He's not in Croydon, where the Discworld game is being developed, either. No, he's in Bath, home of *PC Gamer* and his former employer The Bath Evening Chronicle, to talk about life, the universe and everything. (*I think you've got the wrong author there, Gary - Ed.*) Oh, and to buy himself a new leather jacket, one that looks like, as he describes, "something that pigs have been shitting on for ten years."

But seeing as it's late-night closing, there's still plenty of time beforehand for photos and a friendly chat over a cup of tea and biccies...



"All this silliness about elves and fluffy unicorns... I can't be having with that - that definitely needs sending up."



"I hope that Discworld will be a good playable game. I think it would be a mistake just to go for gags all the time."



The question you are probably asked most often (and the one I'm going to get out of the way first!) is: "Where did the idea for Discworld come from?" Do you have an answer?

No, I make up a new answer for every interview. I suppose the look of Discworld is pinched from ancient mythology. Something that looks very similar to Discworld turns up in a number of old myths. And that's about it, so far as the surface and what happens on it is concerned. It's just a place where I can write funny fantasy stories.

Around 1970-71, the kid who lived next door came round with his parents on Boxing Day and showed me this Dungeons & Dragons game. I'm not even certain they were 'games' then. There was certainly White Dwarf magazine and the dice, but the whole thing was a bit more informal than it is now. And I thought, hey, if I'd been 13 when this came out, I'd have been lost. I'd have become a sad person painting the eyeballs on little figures and what have you. I could see there was an incredible attraction in it. But I did some game scenarios for him and some of those things actually got incorporated into *The Colour Of Magic*. One or two others even turned up later in the series. I

quite enjoyed it. I was a pretty good Dungeon Master - providing people worked out what the plot was...

The thing you can't help but notice about the Discworld books is how they poke fun at more conventional fantasy fiction. Do you think the genre takes itself too seriously?

Poking fun is probably going too far. You'll find all sorts of references in there to films, crime movies and all kinds of stuff - whatever I think is a good idea at the time. Fantasy in the terms of classic post-Tolkien fantasy takes itself horribly seriously, and there's a lot of very bad fantasy, usually written by Americans. Many of these writers suffer from the American belief that Europe is full of quaint old buildings and people saying things like, "Ho, a pint of your finest ale." And all this silliness about elves and fluffy unicorns... I can't be having with that. That definitely needs sending up. But the reason the Discworld books are successful is, I'm sure, that there's a bit more to them than just the gags. You've got to have a plot that you can quite enjoy and characters you're going to be interested in. It's not enough just to string a load of gags together.

Did you honestly expect the series to run for as long as it has?

I didn't have the faintest idea. No-one did. The publishers, Corgi, were in two minds whether to publish *The Colour Of Magic*. Everyone liked it, but they didn't quite know where it fitted in.

But it started to sell very, very well - there were two main specialist bookshops that had it at the top of their best-seller list for two years.

Has the series developed according to a plan or did it spiral away under its own momentum?

Not entirely under its own momentum. One of the strengths of the series is I bounce around between various types of book. Small Gods is quite heavy in places. It's probably got the fewest 'yuk, yuk' laughs of any of the books, but I get some very interesting mail for it. It's ten years of my life, so they're actually written by different people. I'm a different person now to who I was when I wrote *The Colour Of Magic*.

What kind of people read your books?
It's 50/50 male and female, which I think

is surprising. I get letters from mothers like: "We wondered what our Kevin was laughing about, so I read one of your books and now I'm your greatest fan." It sounds kind of crap to say it, but when I go on signing tours, whole families come in to have all their entire collections of Discworld books signed. It's almost Victorian, but it's nice.

Do you have a personal favourite Discworld book?

It's always the one I'm working on now. I've got a soft spot for Guards! Guards! and Reaper Man, but it's like asking someone, "Which one's your favourite kid?" It doesn't work.

You had quite a comprehensive knowledge of computers and games before the Discworld project came along, didn't you?

I feel so old. I remember the 1K ZX80, I really do. Luxury when I was a lad - *Space Invaders* played on the printer and all that. I started off in real life with a ZX81, soldering on extra memory and building speech boards. I used to enjoy playing a game called *Mazogs*, and another called *Merchant Of Venus*. In those innocent days I didn't realise what it was a reference to...

Then Alan Sugar, God bless him, came up with the Amstrad CPC464 and that stayed with me for a long time. I went from that to a PC in 1985, because it was the only thing that could offer me the kind of space I wanted, and I've stayed with them ever since. These days, with Super VGA and a good soundcard, you get good games. But I spent many years watching all those bastards with Amigas and Ataris having all the good stuff, while what we had was like *Pong*. We're getting the good stuff now though.

What system do you have at home?

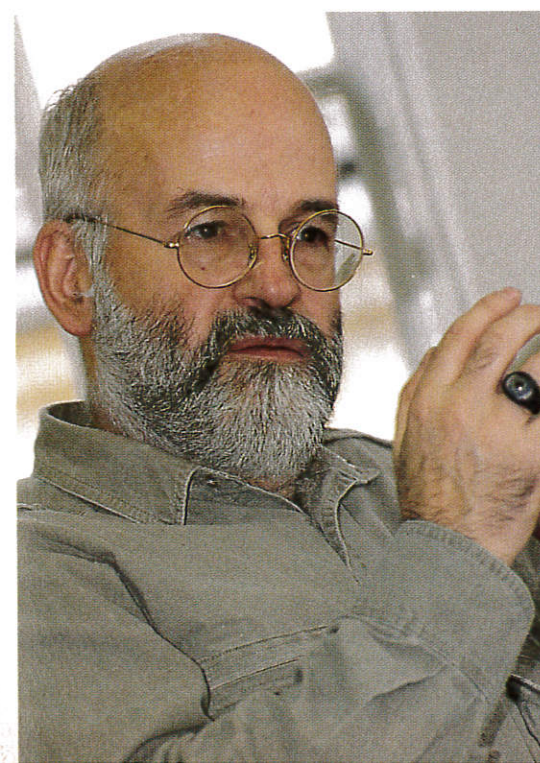
I've got two 33 MHz 486s. My old 386 is still lurking in the corner. I like to have two machines. What the hell, I make quite a lot of money. I don't want a little puff of smoke came out of my machine one day so I have to stop work - I make my living on that machine - so I back up from one PC to another. It's a luxury, but not that much of a luxury.

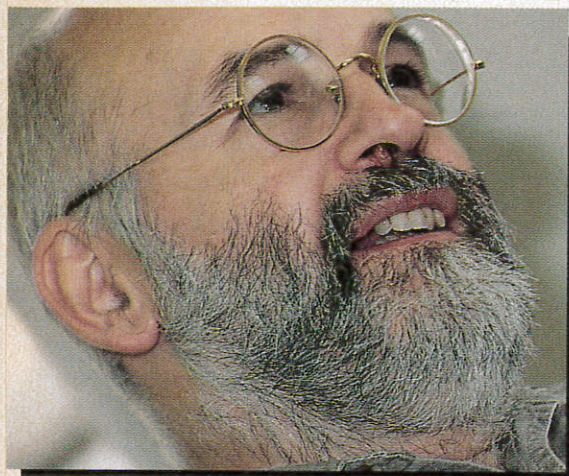
Do you keep many games on your hard drive?

I don't actually keep many games permanently on hard disk. But I have got a fair number of games. I bring a couple with me whenever I come back from the States. I've flown my way through *Wing Commander*, *X-Wing* and, well, most stuff, I suppose.

Do you have any particular favourites?

I like *Spear Of Destiny*. There's something very nice, >





"I suppose now on the PC I've got into bad ways. In the words of the film Dark Star: 'Screw the intelligent life stuff. Just find me something I can bomb.'"

> if you are basically a pacifist kind of guy, about kicking down a door and spraying a room with bullets in the privacy of your own home. My daughter goes for things like *Monkey Island* and the Sierra games, which I bring back for her.

Curiously enough, on the old Amstrad, I was quite into text-only adventures. There's one called *Snowball* from Level 9. That was superb because it had been written by guys who'd read science fiction. It was very cleverly done, and I spent weeks playing it. But I suppose now on the PC I've got into bad ways. In the words of the film *Dark Star*: "Screw the intelligent life stuff. Just find me something I can bomb."

Is there a Terry Pratchett top five?

Let me think, because I've played a lot of games of one sort or another over the years. The point is, is a game good because it grips you for a week or two? I can, if a game's really got me by the throat, sit there for an afternoon until my eyes are like furry hard boiled eggs. It's only when I've got to the end that I can stop playing the bloody thing and get on with some work.

What kind of game grips you like that?

Wing Commander. All the way – because there's always something new. And *Tetris*. Not only did I eventually wipe it off my hard disk, I threw it away and used Norton's Utilities to make sure I could never ever use it again. It's a computer virus which human beings can catch. But *Wing Commander* would definitely be in my top five, along with *Prince Of Persia*. The way the kid runs and jumps is so smooth.

Did you finish *Prince Of Persia*?

Yep. I get to the end of everything. I sit there, banging my head against the screen until I finish.

What did you think when you were first approached with the idea of the *Discworld* game? Were you apprehensive?

Oh, I was a bit suspicious. There was *The Colour Of Magic* on the Spectrum, which was actually pretty good, but this was back in the days when you would buy a tape cassette with pictures of blazing robots and exploding planets, and when you played the game it was something where the graphics where just ASCII characters stuck together. *The Colour Of Magic* came out just at the tail-end of that period, when publishers thought all you had to do was have software and it would sell. They had the marketing skills of a wire coathanger. So when this came along I thought, "Yes, I'm keen, I'm sure the game will be good, but I want a company with some kind of track record."

So what made you agree to do this particular project with this particular company?

They kept pestering me really. They've actually been very patient, because I'm a right bastard to work with. I get very jealous over what happens to *Discworld*. But having spoken to them and been there and seen the stuff they've done...

You've got to understand that *Discworld* is not internally funny. It's not funny if you live there. It's funny to us because we're looking at it from the outside. It's the same humour as the bloke slipping on a banana skin. It's not funny to him, but it's funny to the people watching. So I wanted the feeling of it to be right. There will be a lot of involvement from me. I've seen enough to feel confident about going ahead.

If only if they hadn't called themselves Teeny Weeny Games. I liked it when it was Perfect 10, Level 9 and Delta 4. Now I've got Teeny Weeny Games! Do me a favour...

How much of an involvement have you had so far?

Basically, I shout at them and threaten them quite a lot.

"I can, if a game's really got me by the throat, sit there for an afternoon until my eyes are like furry hard boiled eggs."



They send me a lot of graphic material and I've seen lots of backgrounds and stuff like that. I've also seen the first draft of the plot. If there have been things I haven't liked, I've said, "No, you can't do that in the *Discworld*, but I can think of something else you can do that's appeared in the books, that would enable you to achieve the same effect."

They really won me over by sending me a little animation sequence of Rincewind getting the luggage off the top of a wardrobe with a broom. The way the luggage walked and everything was nice, so I thought, "Okay, they can do it well."

Have you had any specific problems or major disagreements so far?

Well, I said it should be called simply *Discworld*, which is what it's going to be rather than *The Trouble With Dragons* or something like that. Apart from that, no. I think the art of negotiating is that no-one ever has to get to a point where they simply put their foot down and say "no". It's clear that TWG are familiar with the *Discworld* idea of things, so that even if they're inventing stuff – although I'm not letting them invent too much – it's a very logical extension of what does exist. What I wouldn't allow is a completely new *Discworld* narrative. Because it's mine.

Are you concerned about how the humour of your novels will be represented in the game?

I think it's got to be a game, more importantly. That's one of the drawbacks of, say, *Wing Commander*. The first time you play it, it's fantastic because these amazing things happen, but by about the fourth or fifth time... A lot of the funny stuff is only funny first time round. That's the nature of humour. I hope that *Discworld* will be a good playable game. I think it would be a mistake just to go for gags all the time.

From what you've seen so far, are you happy >

"Teeny Weeny Games? Do me a favour..."



The Teeny Weeny Games team responsible for the *Discworld* title at their Croydon offices. Front and centre is head honcho Angela Sutherland. The long-haired one with the glasses at the back is Gregg. The rest of 'em are currently engaged on other TWG projects which are just a bit hush-hush at the moment. But we can tell you that one of them is... (That's enough! – Ed)

TO SOME, Croydon is the Ankh-Morpork of the so-called real world. True, it's not quite so decrepit and reeking as the fictional twin city from Pratchett's famed *Discworld*, but it can still put on a convincing imitation. It's grey, it's dull, it's cold and it's always drizzly... Hardly a hotbed for creative inspiration, you might think.

But you'd be wrong. This is the home of Probe Software, Europe's biggest games developer, and Teeny Weeny Games – not exactly the biggest of anything, but a team that's poised to enter the big leagues with *Discworld*.

Since Angela Sutherland set up the company in 1990, TWG has been earning a living from a mixture of original and licensed console projects. But since the announcement of the *Discworld* project, every major publisher on the block has been banging on TWG's door, with the game finally being signed to Psygnosis only last month. The words 'block' and 'buster' are coming together at an alarming rate.

Discworld is being designed by Teeny Weeny's co-founder Gregg Barnett, formerly of Australian developer Beam Software, where he worked on such well-worn 8-bit classics as *The Hobbit* and *Way Of The Exploding Fist*. He's also an avid *Discworld* fan, which accounts for how the game came about in the first place. >

"He's a great, fun guy and he comes up with really interesting ideas." Angela Sutherland, Teeny Weeny Games' founder, on Terry Pratchett



(Above) The Alchemist's Alley from *Ankh-Morpork* is just one of dozens of locations that make up the teeming medieval city of *Discworld*. (Inset) The original artwork, which was then digitised, touched-up on computer and incorporated into the game...

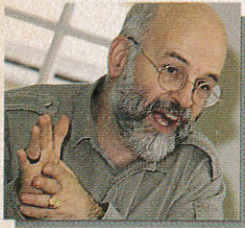


(Below) Welcome to The Mended Drum, the roughest pub you'll ever have the misfortune to stumble into. If you can get past the decidedly unfriendly troll bouncer on the door, that is.



> the game will capture the spirit of the books?

Certainly the overall spirit of some of the books. Small Gods is a very different book to The Colour Of Magic, and Wyrd Sisters is a different kind of book to Reaper Man. I think it captures the spirit of the Ankh-Morpork books, the ones that tend to be set around the city.



I've said no to an awful lot of people, because I didn't think

they were going to do it right, but I'm feeling quite happy about this Teeny Weeny Games deal. Teeny Weeny! I wish they hadn't called themselves that!

What are the most important things for the game to convey in your opinion?

I'd like to see it require some intelligence on the part of the gamer. I want it so if they sit and think logically about a situation in a Discworld context, they'll think of the right things to do.

Have you had a good time being involved with the Discworld game?

I think the good times are just beginning. A lot of the stuff at the start was the making certain that I was going to get involved and that we were dealing with a game that was going to get out there and sell. Now we're beginning to get down to the brass tacks of trying things out.

Adventure games are very often described as 'interactive fiction', the idea being that the player is shaping the narrative in his role as the central character. Is that description justified?

I've always thought that idea was a bit suspect, because there's a limit to what you can really do. You only have

a certain number of limited choices, and a number of those choices are going to bring you back into one particular thread. You can't really branch out into some huge decision tree. I'm not sure that the truly interactive game has yet been invented.

How do you see the computer gaming medium evolving in the future?

Well, first of all, let's take Virtual Reality. I don't believe in it. The trouble with VR is that while you're clonking around in your datagloves with your headset on, there's a billion buggers out there in the real world who are metaphorically going to be putting your car up on bricks and ripping the tyres off. I must confess that I don't see the future of gaming going too much further. Some things really do go as far as they can go, like the bicycle. You get to the point where all you can do with a bicycle is find slightly different ways of producing it. There isn't an awful lot of difference between the fastest racing bike now and the vicar's bicycle of the '30s.

It's ten years since the Discworld series started. How do you feel about it all now? Is it getting more difficult to come up with new ideas?

Nope. Seems unfair really, doesn't it? Even if I never had another Discworld idea, I've got three more books

planned that I could write. Anyway, ideas aren't the important thing. People always ask me where I get my ideas from, but it's like saying "where do you get your potatoes from?" The answer is from the garden, so that's the important thing, not the potatoes. What you have to do is cultivate the kind of life and mind where ideas tend to crop up. I'm very pleased to say that happens quite a lot.

I've got a character in the book I'm writing now called Foul Old Ron. He's a street person, and he's so smelly that his smell has actually evolved its own personality. You know there are some people who can walk off - and the smell lingers? His smell actually arrives before he does. It's not a schizophrenic thing. There actually is him and his smell. I hadn't thought that one up. It just turned up while I was writing.

The book's about Discworld rock 'n' roll and what rock 'n' roll actually is... What it really is. That's been incredible fun, and will be out in the Spring. There may be another for the Autumn, but I'm not quite certain about that yet. I've also just finished the Mort Big Comic. I'm not really interested in the Discworld soap, towel and body-splash - that's taking it a bit too far - but there's a lot of Discworld stuff happening at the moment...

Discworld (the game) is due out Christmas 1994... PGG

Terry Pratchett

DISCOGRAPHY

The Colour Of Magic (1983) • **The Light Fantastic** (1986) • **Equal Rites** (1987) • **Mort** (1987) • **Sourcery** (1988) • **Wyrd Sisters** (1988) • **Pyramids** (1989) • **Guards! Guards!** (1989) • **Moving Pictures** (1990) • **Eric** (1991) • **Reaper Man** (1991) • **Witches Abroad** (1991) • **Small Gods** (1992) • **Lords And Ladies** (1993) • **Men At Arms** (1993) •



(Above) The detailed view from Ankh-Morpork's bustling rooftops, as realised by Teeny Weeny's artistic team. The overall effect is intended to be claustrophobic, but comical. It's a bit like Coronation Street gone horribly wrong.

(Far right) What article would be complete without that perfumery press shot? Here Gregg, Terry and Angela demonstrate how they're the best of chums while, erm, Death himself lurks rather menacingly in the background.

> "I wanted to create a big, movie-quality adventure game system for the new wave of CD-based machines," he explains. "And I wanted a flagship game to launch that system. We needed something that would be a high-profile licence but, more importantly, something that was very well suited to making an adventure game. Discworld is 100% suited. It's a great licence and it gels so well. Terry Pratchett's world is unique, and the characters, locations and events are ideal ingredients for a great game."

With an idea in place, all that remained was to secure

the co-operation of the one man who could make it all happen - Pratchett himself. "It took us about six months to convince Terry that it was worth doing, because he'd been bitten once before," Angela explains. "But we showed him our demo of Rincewind and the luggage and he really liked it. It warmed up from there."

In Discworld, the player steps into the boots of Rincewind, the bungling wizard from The Colour Of Magic and several other Pratchett titles. But rather than adapt an existing Discworld book, TWG decided to come



(Right) Another of Teeny Weeny Games' original Discworld artwork - here showing Ankh-Morpork's town square prior to the digitisation and touching-up procedure. Once a backdrop is completed on card, it only takes a few hours to transform it into an in-game location.



(Left) TWG's digitising system is so good it's often difficult to tell if you're looking at a game graphic or the original painted artwork. This, by the way, is The Mystic Forest. The big toadstools are always a dead giveaway.

(Below) In an early version of Discworld, Rincewind and the luggage approach the city gates. Look out for the utterly hopeless Corporal Nobbs and Sergeant Colon of the City Guard.

"I'm only willing to acknowledge LucasArts because, to be honest, I don't see any other competition."
Gregg Barnett, co-founder of TWG

up with an original storyline based on selected material from the entire series of novels - a decision which led to one of the first 'artistic differences' with Pratchett.

"I was very unwilling to pick on just one book," Gregg explains. "We wanted to licence the whole of Discworld. And that's what the game, as it stands, is. It doesn't follow the story of any of the novels, but takes a lot of the events from a few of them - in particular Guards! Guards! and The Colour Of Magic. But, initially, Terry wanted us to just do The Colour Of Magic and work sequentially through the books. We had to explain that it would have been detrimental to the game to do that. I've worked on book licences since The Hobbit, and it's very hard to make a game from just one book."

Although details of the game's plot are being kept top secret (it's something to do with a dragon, but that's all they'll reveal), the team is

keen to point out that most of the Discworld's most famous characters and locations have been shoe-horned into the storyline.

Much of the action takes place in and around the pestilent twin city of Ankh-Morpork, but players must travel all the way to the Edge Of The World before they'll really be able to unravel all of the game's mysteries.

"We've effectively written a complete film script for the game," explains Gregg. "It's a three act structure, with an extra act at the end which is equivalent to the final fight scene at the end of an action movie. Each of the three acts is comprised of a major quest, which in turn is broken down into about six or seven sub-quests. Each one of those sub-quests is basically the sort of thing you'd find in the Monkey Island or Indiana Jones games in that the puzzle structure is quite complex. But every major puzzle has a very humorous result or reward when you finally solve it."

A lot of Discworld's in-game humour stems from the novels, although maintaining the spirit and feel of the original books has been partly the responsibility of Pratchett himself - every element of the game hangs on his final approval, after all. His input, Angela says, has been invaluable. "He's a great, fun guy and he comes up with really interesting ideas. He understands games, and that's very helpful. He also names everything for us. In Ankh-Morpork, for example, we have a location which is

basically a cighthouse, but Terry renamed it as the House of Negotiable Affections, because that's much more Discworld."

Another example of Pratchett's helpful influence came during the development of the first draft of the script. The inclusion of a practising psychiatrist got his back up simply because it didn't seem right in Discworld. But after it was explained that the game's plot really needed such a character, Pratchett added his inimitable touch and a psychiatrist became a retrophenologist. A conventional phenologist studies bumps on heads, but this guy violently puts bumps on his patients' heads in order to adjust their attitudes. Only on Discworld...

Even at this early stage in the game's development things are looking very good, but there's still the competition to take into account. Even so, Gregg and Angela are extremely confident. "I'm only really willing to acknowledge LucasArts because, to be honest, I don't see any other competition," says Gregg

bullishly - and then mentions that Discworld will be at least three times bigger than LucasArts' current fave Day Of The Tentacle. Interestingly, the game's full-screen, no-icon interface is almost a dead ringer for the new, enhanced version of the LucasArts SCUMM system. "We're not competing with the games that are out there now," says Angela. "We've got to compete with the games that LucasArts will be bringing out late next year."

Hold on, what's all this about late next year? Well, given the size of the project and Psygnosis' own plans for the game, Discworld won't be released until Christmas 1994. Even so, everyone is pulling out all the stops to get such a mammoth project completed on schedule. Then there's the CD version to take into account, with the possibility that a few ever-so famous names may provide the vital voice-overs for all of the principal characters. "I'd really like to have John Cleese as Rincewind," enthuses Gregg, "and Rowan Atkinson would make a great Death..." PGG

