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>> Hello. I'm Cheryl Kennedy from the Library of Congress. The National Book Festival is in its 7th year and it has attracted tens of thousands of book lovers of all ages to the nation's capital to celebrate reading and lifelong literacy. This free event is sponsored and organized by the Library of Congress and hosted by First Lady Laura Bush. This year the festival will take place on Saturday, September 29th on the National Mall in Washington, DC. Festival goers will meet and interact with 70 best-selling authors, illustrators, and poets. There will be activities for the entire family. If you're unable to attend in person, we invite you to experience the festival online. Our podcast interview series with well-known authors along with webcasts from the festival will be available through the National Book Festival's website at [loc.gov/bookfest](http://loc.gov/bookfest). We now have the pleasure of talking with award-winning English fantasy and science fiction author, Terry Pratchett. He is best known for his "Discworld" series and is considered by many to be the United Kingdom's most popular living adult author. His novels have sold more than 45 million copies worldwide and have been translated into 27 languages. His latest book is "Making Money." He will appear in the Fiction and Fantasy Pavilion at the National Book Festival on September 29th. Welcome Terry.

>> Hello.

>> Your first story was published in science fantasy at the age of 15. Your first full-length book was written when you were 17 and published when you were only 21. It's obvious that you have a vivid imagination. Could you give us just a glimpse into your creative process, how you come up with all of these wonderful stories.

>> I have to say that largely my creative process consists of sitting in front of the keyboard and then banging my head on the screen until it bleeds.

>> Oh no!

>> At least that's what it feels like. You cannot describe it from the inside but one of the things I always say is that no one who's a writer fails to have been a reader and though you start with the reading and the reading is absolutely vitally important and I discovered reading when I was about 10 years old. You know, no one at school had told me how interesting it could be and I'm sure lots of people know this feeling that suddenly you want to read every single book that's ever been written and you'll just read absolutely everything and I was like for, I don't know, five or six years before I settled down and I must have cleaned out the shelves in the library. And that kind of formed some kind of [inaudible] in my brain from which things grew. This is an extremely bad explanation but it's probably the best one there is.

>> We'll I'm certain that a lot of fans will understand exactly what you're saying. Did you have a favorite genre when you read so many books?

>> Curiously enough, I read an awful lot of nonfiction. I mean, let me explain. In those days, especially in a small English library, the

fantasy was not particularly well represented and indeed I remember the head librarian handing me three books that had come in that day and saying, "You, you like this kind of thing, I think." And it was "The Lord of the Rings."

>> Really?

>> And even though it was "The Lord of the Rings," in those days, "The Lord of the Rings" wasn't exactly "The Lord of the Rings!" if you know what I mean. It was a comparatively new book. It was assumed almost as a matter of course that it wouldn't be any good and not a proper book and so they put it on one side for me to read. So I started off reading fantasy but then there wasn't much of it, so I started reading folklore and mythology because, you know, what the hell, they're pretty much the same things, guys with helmets hitting one another with swords and I read all the folklore and mythology that I could find in the library and then I started reading all the ancient history because, you know, it was guys with helmets hitting one another with swords and some kind of magic happened. One book led to another book and I think I read most of the nonfiction shelves by in large, at least the ones that had anything interesting to say. So while I read quite a lot of science fiction and whatever fantasy there was around, an awful lot of my reading career has been reading nonfiction.

>> You mentioned that you started reading Tolkien and I noticed that the Houston Chronicle said that "Think J.R.R. Tolkien with a sharper, more satiric edge" describing you. How do you--

>> I don't think I can take the blame for that.

>> Would you agree with that?

>> Oh, if I'm back into a corner and I'm sweating with alcohol, I'd have to say that if I have to describe "Discworld" to someone that's never heard of it, I say it's "Lord of the Rings" 500 years later. At least it's "Lord of the Rings" 500 years later if it ran on the [inaudible] as planet earth does. So, you know, the big battles are over, the dwarves and trolls and the elves and so forth, you know, they given up the old animosities and now they're in the big city and they're trying to make a dollar and in a sense in the "Discworld" series, the fantasy is quite real. You know, there are trolls in the streets and there are werewolves in the city [inaudible] who have an affirmative action hiring process and no one thinks it particularly unusual. So in a sense, the fantasy in the story, the fantasy is simply the background and quite a lot of "Discworld" books have been murder mysteries or police procedurals or even romances. It just so happens that, you know, there may be a few vampires around.

>> Well that was a perfect [inaudible] because I was actually interested in hearing more about the "Discworld" series. I saw a description that said "lost in the chilled depths of space between the galaxies, it sails on forever, a flat circular world carried on the back of a giant turtle, a land where the unexpected can be expected, where the strangest things happen to the nicest people." What was the genesis of Discworld?

>> Back in the early 80s, there was a big boom in fantasy. Some of it was good and some of it was, shall we say, not so good. But the point was it was out there and it was selling and so I thought now is the time to have a certain amount of fun with it because you can't start making jokes about things until they become familiar things. So in the mid 70s, Douglas Adams started making jokes about science fiction because by then there were grandparents who could speak [inaudible]. So once you know you've got your readership out there, you know, then is the time to strike. So I took, if you like, the classic fantasy universe, you know, the one with the wizards and the trolls and the elves and so on and so on and said, I asked one simple question in fact, what would it be like it was really true and interesting things then start to happen. For example, if you have your large fantasy city of half a million people, traditionally you don't ask where do they get the fresh water and after they've drunk the fresh water, where does it go after that. You know, they don't think of how the city actually operates. Classically in fantasy we're interested in the princesses and the dragons and the heroes and we're not interested in the plumbing, but if you do take an interest in the plumbing or how the city is fed or whatever, suddenly whole new stories happen and really that was the genesis of, if you like, the "Discworld" approach, taking the fantasy seriously and because I take the fantasy seriously, by some strange alchemy, it then becomes funny.

>> I've seen many adjectives to describe you and your work, witty, satirical, irreverent, funny. Give us examples of those traits.

>> Oh! Dear me! Half the time I don't know if I'm doing it. What you've just asked me, it reminds me of my first visit to Russia, which was a couple of months ago. And I was surrounded by journalists and they said, you know, you delight in incongruity. Can you give us an example of-- Oh no, you delight in irony. Can you tell us something that's ironical, which is, you know, a bit of a question to ask some guy when he's just got off the plane but I said, well I'll tell you something ironical, I found it much, much easier to get into Russia than I find it get into the USA these days.

>> Well I guess there's a certain degree of irony there.

>> Well yes.

>> So do you think you're a funny person? Have you always been, have you always had a sharp wit?

>> I think I've always had an eye for the incongruous, the thing that is funny simply because it's out of place, and again within the "Discworld" books, I think a lot of the humor especially in the latest books is to do with incongruity, something familiar but in circumstances that are downright unfamiliar. For example, in a recent book, which was called "Thud," I had the chief of police in Morpork, which is the most biggest and most influential city on "Discworld," he's chief of police and he's got a baby son and every night he must read to him from the book called "Where's My Cow." I mean, all parents know about this sort of thing. The kid has a favorite book. Every night, you've got to read a few pages or

the kid won't get to sleep and so every night at 6 o'clock he's got to be home to read "Where's My Cow" to his son. And this kind of a beacon in his mind, whatever else he fails to do, he will read this book to his son every night at 6 o'clock and indeed an important part of the story on which it pivots is the fact that this man will read that book at that time every night no matter what he's doing, no matter where he is. From his point of view, there's nothing humorous about that. From ours, there is because he's a man battling against enormous odds at some point but at 6 o'clock every evening you know what he's going to be doing.

>> I'm assuming that you will be talking about your newest book "Making Money" at the National Book Festival on September 29th. Can you give fans a little preview of what you'll be talking about then?

>> The thing about "Discworld" is that although there's more than about 34 books now, there are some big story [inaudible] but a lot of the books stand alone. In fact, most of the books do stand alone but it helps if you know some of the background. "Making Money" brings back a character called Moist von Lipwig, who I've already used once before in "Going Postal" and he was very, very popular and so was that book, so I thought I'd bring him back to reorganize the royal mint of the city of Ankh-Morpork and he's a criminal. He's a confidence trickster. He's reformed but he still has all the instincts of a confidence trickster, which makes him exactly the right person to reorganize the financial services industry and that's really the starting point. We have lots of [inaudible] and strange things happening and gold disappearing and an early computer made of glass. It's kind of discord business as usual. If I say too much more, I'm giving the plot away.

>> Well we don't want you to do that. I have learned that series work very well because readers become invested in the characters. Is there a favorite character among your fans or do you have one?

>> I regret to say that the favorite among my fans, I think without a shadow of a doubt, is death.

>> Really?

>> Death on "Discworld" is a lot like Bergman's death in "The Seventh Seal." You know you can speak to him, you can see him sometimes, and to an extent you can even negotiate with him and he's quite solemn and rather sad and kind of likes human beings, as we might kind of admire a fly which continuously buzzes against a windowpane trying to get out. He sort of likes the dogged that we keep on trying and the way we try to ignore his existence and he is I suppose very likeable in some respects and has been, I'm pleased to say, of some comfort to people who have actually been dying and so yes, he stands out as a popular character. Now how about that for irony?

>> Tell me, how did you make Death human, popular?

>> Because he's kind of vulnerable. He doesn't understand about us. He thinks he does because he can see us and he can watch what we do but that isn't the same thing. For example, he cannot understand why human beings

keep clocks because sooner or later we're going to die and the clock is a reminder of passing time. So from his point of view, this is, the clock should be the enemy of humanity. We would not dream of looking at clocks but we just use clocks. There is one book in which he's in human form for reasons which I won't go into and he starts playing pool with some guys in a bar and finds that being Death, of course, he can get a maximum score every time but this does not make him popular. If he keeps just failing to get a high score every time, people will buy him drinks. He doesn't actually understand how human beings work and in many of the books, he's on a steep learning curve.

>> Well it must be really extraordinary that you have actually made Death popular. Now you've gotten really great reviews from the American Press. For example, the "Chicago Tribune" said about "Making Money," "Pratchett has created an alternate universe and he uses that universe to reflect on our own culture with entertaining and gloriously funny results. It's an accomplishment nothing short of magical." Now based on those tremendous reviews, why do you think it's taken so long for American readers to catch up to British readers in terms of your popularity?

>> Oh dear, well I think for the first ten years at least of "Discworld" popularity elsewhere in the world, it was not particularly well published in the States. It was not so much the fact published as released without much backing and without much PR and then suddenly in about 1999, I had a new editor and a new publicist and indeed a new approach and very quickly, astonishingly quickly in fact over a matter of a few years my sales went from sort of practically nothing to extremely satisfying. It was quite astonishing. It was as if a dam had burst. And I'm remarkably relieved about that I have to say because it was getting a bit tiring. And that's it, suddenly America discovered me and I became an overnight success after 15 years.

>> Well we certainly anticipate long lines at your book signing and, of course, at your presentation on September 29th. You were a journalist for the "Bucks Free Press."

>> Uh-huh.

>> Now how did journalism and your love for fantasy and science fiction meld?

>> To be any kind of writer, you've got to be really, really interested in people and when you're a journalist, you meet people. You meet all kinds of people in all kinds of situations, especially situations they don't want you to meet them in like when they're dead for example. You know I think I saw my first corpse on the first day that I started on my first newspaper and that was a very interesting experience and on the newspaper I worked on, if it happened on your patch you covered it, so there I was, you know, a kid of about 18 or 19 covering murders and very serious crimes. And all kinds of little things, the [inaudible] of small town affairs and that kind of thing is like gold dust. You couldn't buy it. If someone's going to become a writer of any kind of fiction, being a journalist first of all, a hardworking newspaper journalist is just the best thing to be.

>> What kinds of things did you learn that you were actually able to use in your books?

>> Oh I think it's largely the way people behave, the strangeness that lurks behind the curtains in every street. The way that there's hardly any such thing as a normal person but we all pretend that there is. I just became fascinated by the way people react in various circumstances.

>> You've obviously collected a lot of books and you have a rich library, but do you do much online research?

>> I use internet quite a lot. Usually I know what it is I'm looking for. I just want to sort of refresh my mind of something but it's pretty good for, you know, if you want if you like, take away information, you just need it quick but and actually it's getting a lot better than it used to be but I do research in all kinds of ways, you know, if you're just sitting down in a railway station and watching people can be research. The thing is research is ultimately serendipitous. If I want to know about how you make chocolate, that's easy to do. You know, I can buy a book, I could do online research, I could talk to people [inaudible] but there's some research you do when you don't even realize you're doing research and then later on, you know, a couple of years later, you need something and you remember you read a book about it, you know. So mostly research should be fun first. You should kind of practice serendipitous research, read books that look interesting because one day they'll be useful as well.

>> So is that the kind of advice you would give to budding writers?

>> Oh dear, I'm asked for advice for budding writers all the time and what I would say is this. I would say imagine you want to be a boxer and you thought of me as a champion. I would say to you things like okay, it's about diet and it's about the roadwork and you've got to get down to the gym and you've got to go watch the guys who are climbing the ladder, you know, get a few pointers from them. See how they do it and you've got to do more roadwork and you've got to get your diet right and you've got to go down to the gym and that's it. Follow these rules and if you have any talent whatsoever, you know, you'll [inaudible] boxing fraternity, but if you want to be an author, it's exactly like that except there's no boxing.

>> You mentioned that there was bad fantasy and good fantasy at a certain period and I'd like to know what do you think the state of fantasy is in 2007.

>> Well by bad fantasy I think there's a phase EFP, extruded fantasy product, which looks pretty much like the last fantasy you read, you know, with the heroes and stuff, so what I'm talking about here is the books that don't bring very much to the party, that don't come up with anything new, which are to fantasy what sort of certain types of romance novels are to romance. What was happening in the 80s was everyone was looking for the next Tolkien and lots of people were writing as if they were the next Tolkien, which was a bit of a shame. I got through because

"Discworld" was considered so weird it was worth taking a [inaudible] and it was instantly a success, so I was okay. I think now everybody's who looking for the next J.K. Rowling, which is really the same mistake, you should really be looking for, you know, the first [inaudible], who's going to come out with a type of fantasy that we haven't actually thought of yet and it's going to be really amazingly successful. Publishers always seem to be looking for something which is like what we've got now only different, where possibly the stuff that's really going to work is stuff like "Discworld" just came out of the blue and worked.

>> You create fantastic characters and worlds and, of course, you have a lot of talent. If you could have one magical talent, what would that be?

>> Well first of all, I don't have a lot of talent. I have a small amount of talent but I work it very hard, extremely hard, and I know this because my daughter said she thought exactly the same thing about herself, you know, you have a small talent so you keep it shiny and new, you don't waste it, and you train yourself to use it properly. Oh, I'd like to play any kind of musical instrument. I have absolutely no skill with any musical instrument whatsoever. I'd settle for the double bass, you know, the violin if I could.

>> Well I think anyone who has a talent for making Death popular, then you are ahead of the game. Do you have any closing remarks for your fans or for what we can expect to hear and see you on September 29th?

>> Something that I'd like to say over the years is this, that there is nothing more fantastic than real life. This actually takes some thinking about but there was a British author called G. K. Chesterton. He wrote all kinds of things, religious books, detective stories, and books that these days we would call fantasy, and he said that the role of fantasy or a successful fantasy, shall we say, lay in taking that which was ordinary and everyday and therefore no longer looked at and picking it up and turning it around and showing it to people so that they once again see it with fresh eyes for the first time and think that's really, really wonderful. And indeed, I think one of the best things a fantasy writer can do is demonstrate how interesting the everyday, the mundane can actually be.

>> [Background Music] Well Terry, that was wonderful. Thank you very much.

>> Thank you very much indeed.

>> We look forward to hearing more at the National Book Festival on September 29th on the National Mall from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. For more details and a list of participating authors, visit [loc.gov/bookfest](http://loc.gov/bookfest). Thank you for listening.