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Guards! Guards!



Synopsis

The eighth Discworld novel! This is where the dragons went. They lie . . . not dead, not asleep, but . . . dormant. And although the space they occupy isn't like normal space, nevertheless they are packed in tightly. They could put you in mind of a can of sardines, if you thought sardines were huge and scaly. And presumably, somewhere, there's a key . . .

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Corgi Audio; Abridged edition (July 26, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0552152994

ISBN-13: 978-0552152990

Product Dimensions: 4.9 x 0.9 x 5.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 428 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,986,654 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in [Books > Books on CD](#) > [Authors, A-Z](#) > (P) > [Pratchett, Terry](#) #578 in [Books > Books on CD > Children's Fiction > Fantasy](#) #1020 in [Books > Books on CD > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction](#)

Customer Reviews

"Pratchett has a masterful ear for dialogue, a keen eye for the ridiculous and a real feel for language" Time Out "This is one of Pratchett's best books. Hilarious and highly recommended" The Times

Here there be dragons...and the denizens of Ankh-Morpork wish one huge firebreather would return from whence it came. Long believed extinct, a superb specimen of draco nobilis ("noble dragon" for those who don't understand italics) has appeared in Discworld's greatest city. Not only does this unwelcome visitor have a nasty habit of charbroiling everything in its path, in rather short order it is crowned King (it is a noble dragon, after all...). --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I was looking forward to giving this one a "very unpredictable" quick-rating, but for once, didn't ask. Guards is definitely a broader, meatier novel than its predecessors in the series as I've been reading through, and probably does top my prior favorite, Equal Rites, for character development. As might be expected of any author with an extensive canon, Pratchett is definitely well into his

stride pulling in references from prior books, but the core of the story does not rely upon prior knowledge. Neither is it as extensively action/adventure as might be expected from a fantasy novel with a dragon on the cover and a call of alarm in the title. Imagine something more along the lines of, say, a video meme of a kitten struggling to not slide off the edge of an armchair by having its claws embedded in a blanket which in turn is covered in other kittens who are consequently being dragged over to the edge as the whole blanket shifts, only in book form, arguably backwards, and with dragons. Not dragons in place of the kittens, no, that isn't... I mean... ok. What I'm trying to get at is that you may think you know where it's going, and on a macro scale you're probably right, but some of the kittens are magic, one of them is an orangutan, one may or may not exist, and besides, the laws of physics don't behave the way you'd expect. Which is all to say that the reason you're reading to begin with isn't because you know exactly what's going to happen, but is rather, in fact, because you don't, but you would anyway even if you actually did.

It is *It's a Wonderful Life* and things are amiss as usual. A motley crew of manipulated misfits is meeting in secret to summon a dragon as part of a secret plot to overthrow the Patrician and install a puppet king. The Watch begins to watch, perhaps they have been joined by Carrot a 6' 6" orphan raised by dwarves. Carrot embodies great naiveté with enthusiasm to do a good job and enforce the law. A novel concept for the Watch. And then there is Errol the swamp dragon! No aspect of the story is immune from Terry Pratchett's wry wit from two very funny pages of bumbling around through recitations of silly complicated passwords to the Patrician in his dungeon and finally to the 1 million to one odds of success of the Watch. Reliable entertainment, but there are no witches and no wee free men.

The last few weeks, my reading has been monopolized by the mind of Terry Pratchett. I have been sucked into the Discworld, and I am just fine with that. I sought out experts on which order to read the books, since there is no one straight linear way to read the books. I read the entire sequence centered on Death (and his extended family) first, since my introduction to the world of the Disc was the movie version of *Hogfather*. I bought the first one, *Mort*, just to see if I would like it. I liked it well enough; I bought the next two books in the series on the Death story-arc. A quarter of the way through the second book, I bought the final two books of the arc. I neared the end of one of those books and I bought the first three books from the "Guards" story-arc. At this point, I have only read one of those books, the first *Guards, Guards*. I was pleased, since I have to admit that I was a bit

worried about the continuity of quality between story-arcs. Was I just interested in the character of Death, or did I like the world as a whole? It turns out that I like the world as a whole, and this is a huge strength of Pratchett. I want to learn about all the inhabitants and read all the stories, no matter how tangential. I don't usually keep many books in my wish list, but it is now filled up with Discworld books. He builds a world like Vonnegut did. There are many familiar elements of the world we inhabit but there is the magic element that rips from genre fiction: what Vonnegut did with science-fiction, Pratchett does with fantasy elements. There are a couple of things about the series generally that I really enjoyed. The first is what you try to develop as a writer, a unique voice. I've been struggling on finding the right word to really describe what I would characterize as Pratchett's voice. It is arch and tongue-in-cheek and just fun if you've read enough. He's a post-modern Tolkien, but that's a little off. Secondly, he is funny, and he's not afraid to go for the easy joke. There are puns-galore, if you like that sort of thing. I happen to. There is one very memorable one that he just sort of sneaks in during *_Soul Music_*. He takes the reader 90% of the way to the pay-off but allows the slow dawning to set on the reader, so that a bad pun feels like it was done masterfully. Which it is, it really is. If I had to make a critique of the books in the series that I have read so far is that I have read them too fast. My wife often tells me to slow down and enjoy the books you like, but I seldom listen to her. I should have here. There have been a couple of times that I enjoying the ride so much, I didn't even bother to remember what I had just read. I had to go and reread the last 50 pages of *_Guards, Guards_* because of this. I enjoyed it too much. Otherwise, this is an unqualified recommendation for the Discworld books. Spend some time there, you won't regret it.

When I read about the Guild of Thieves, I couldn't help thinking about the corporate bandits in our various Chambers of Commerce, and I had to grin.... Pratchett's "Guards! Guards!" introduces Ankh-Morpork society, from the turgid, noxious river to the shady beat cops to the master manipulator Lord Vetinari, all in a delightful nancy story swirling around dragons (real and imagined), the power of belief, and the power of manipulating belief. Plus some magical stuff, of course. Descriptions of Corporal Vimes' epic drunk times in ditches are really funny, especially if you can relate. The introduction to the peculiar nature of library space-time is brilliantly accurate - I have experienced this myself! It's very easy to get lost in library surrealities (of course this was before the era of e-books and e-libraries.... not sure how the vortices and loops of bookshelf magic would work there.....) The sidelining and manipulation of police and various organs of society in Ankh-Morpork are funny as well as sly social commentary. Pratchett also manages to totally spoof secret societies; the slimy and obsequious, yet sadistic and ambitious nature of the civil service (via Lupine Wonse);

and the whole idea of heroism and justice (from the earnest literalness of Carrot to the unsung effectiveness of Vimes). A book I thoroughly enjoyed for its rollicking tale, and because it made me laugh, as well as - sometimes - think about the absurdities of governance. Oh, did I mention the farting dragon? Priceless.

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