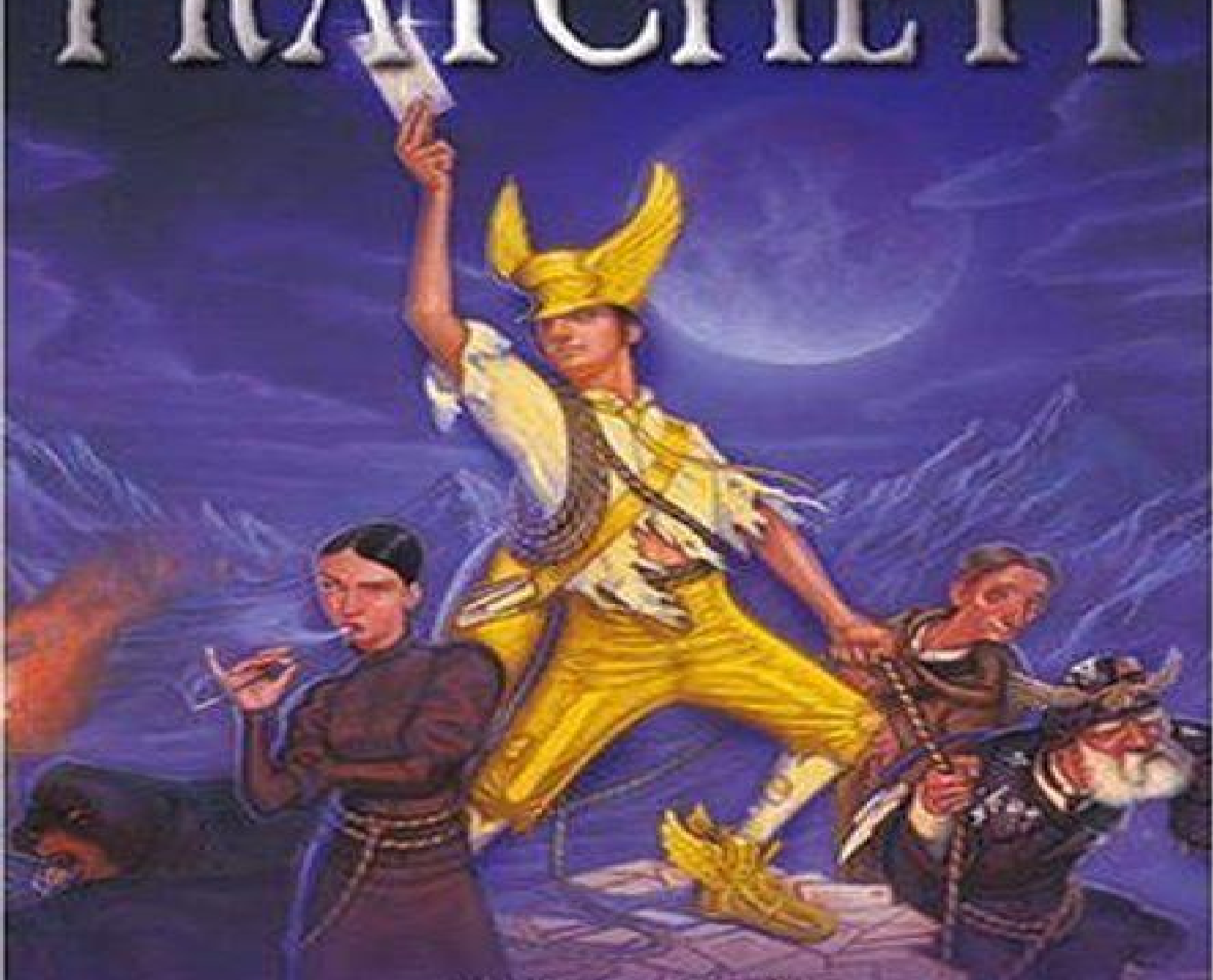


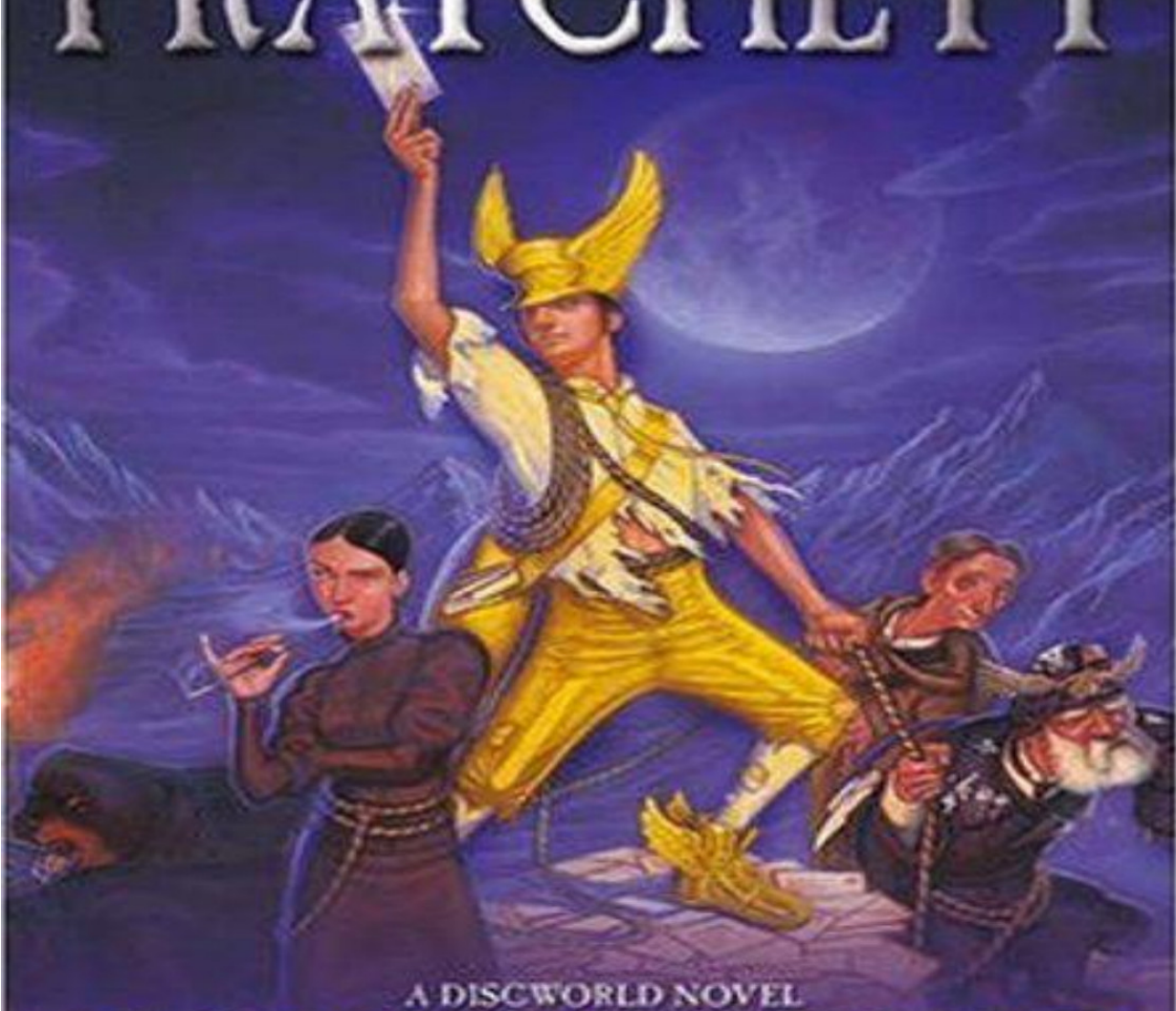
TERRY PRATCHETT



A DISCWORLD NOVEL

GOING POSTAL

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Going Postal

A Novel of Discworld®

Terry Pratchett

 HarperCollins e-books

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The Nine-Thousand-Year Prologue

THE FLOTILLAS OF THE DEAD sailed around the world on underwater rivers.

Very nearly nobody knew about them. But the theory is easy to understand. It runs: the sea is, after all, in many respects, only a wetter form of air. And it is known that air is heavier the lower you go and lighter the higher you fly. As a storm-tossed ship founders and sinks, therefore, it must reach a depth where the water below it is just viscous enough to stop its fall.

In short, it stops sinking and ends up floating on an underwater surface, beyond the reach of the storms but far above the ocean floor.

It's calm there. Dead calm.

Some stricken ships have rigging; some even have sails. Many still have crew, tangled in the rigging or lashed to the wheel.

But the voyages still continue, aimlessly, with no harbor in sight, because there are currents under the ocean, and so the dead ships with their skeleton crews sail on around the world, over sunken cities and between drowned mountains, until rot and shipworms eat them away and they disintegrate.

Sometimes an anchor drops, all the way to the dark, cold calmness of the abyssal plain, and disturbs the stillness of centuries by throwing up a cloud of silt.

One nearly hit Anghammarad, where he sat watching the ships drift by, far overhead.

He remembered it, because it was the only really interesting thing to happen in the last nine thousand years.

The One-Month Prologue

THERE WAS THIS...disease that the clacksmen got.

It was like the illness known as “calenture,” which sailors experienced when, after having been becalmed for weeks under a pitiless sun, they suddenly believed that the ship was surrounded by green fields—and stepped overboard.

Sometimes the clacksmen thought they could fly.

There was about eight miles between the big semaphore towers, and when you were at the top you were maybe a hundred and fifty feet above the plains. Work up there too long without a hat on, they said, and the tower you were on got taller, and the nearest tower got closer, and maybe you thought you could jump from one to another, or ride on the invisible messages sleeting between the towers, or perhaps you thought that *you* were a message. Perhaps, as some said, all this was nothing more than a disturbance in the brain caused by the wind in the rigging. No one knew for sure. People who step onto the air one hundred and fifty feet above the ground seldom have much to discuss afterwards.

The tower shifted gently in the wind, but that was okay. There were lots of new designs in *this* tower. It stored the wind to power its mechanisms, it bent rather than broke, it acted more like a tree than a fortress. You could build most of it on the ground and raise it into place in an hour. It was a

thing of grace and beauty. And it could send messages up to four times faster than the old towers, thanks to the new shutter system and the colored lights.

At least, it would be able to, once they sorted out a few lingering problems...

The young man climbed swiftly to the very top of the tower. For most of the way he was in clinging, gray morning mist, and then he was rising through glorious sunlight, the mist spreading below him, all the way to the horizon, like a sea.

He paid the view no attention. He'd never dreamed of flying. He dreamed of mechanisms, of making things work better than they'd ever done before.

Right now he wanted to find out what was making the new shutter array stick *again*. He oiled the sliders, checked the tension on the wires, and then swung himself out over fresh air to check the shutters themselves. It wasn't what you were supposed to do, but every linesman knew it was the only way to get things done. Anyway, it was perfectly safe if you—

There was a clink. He looked back and saw the snap-hook of his safety rope lying on the walkway, saw the shadow, felt the terrible pain in his fingers, heard the scream and dropped...

...like an anchor.