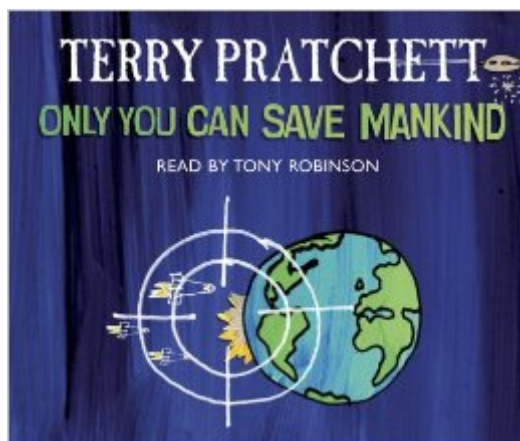


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Only You Can Save Mankind (Johnny Maxwell)



Synopsis

The first of Terry Pratchett's terrific fantasy novels starring Johnny Maxwell. IF NOT YOU, WHO ELSE? As the mighty alien fleet from the very latest computer game thunders across the computer screen, Johnny prepares to blow them into the usual million pieces. And they send him a message: We surrender. They're not supposed to do that! They're supposed to die. And computer joysticks don't have 'Don't Fire' buttons. But it's only a game, isn't it. Isn't it?

Book Information

Series: Johnny Maxwell (Book 1)

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Best Sellers Rank: #4,608,333 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #58 in Books > Books on CD >

Authors, A-Z > (P) > Pratchett, Terry #1630 in Books > Books on CD > Children's Fiction >

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Only You Can Save Mankind is the first book in Terry Pratchett's Johnny Maxwell trilogy. While this is considered juvenile or young adult fiction, it's a lot of fun for adults as well. It seems a little strange to journey with Terry Pratchett to a place other than the Discworld, but this little jaunt is quite enjoyable. Johnny Maxwell is a rather typical twelve year old boy; he's not smart or popular or rich, and he tends to prefer operating below the radar of those around him. He is living in Trying Times, basically having to take care of himself for the most part while his parents argue and come ever closer to splitting up. Like any kid, he enjoys a good computer game every now and then, and his friend Wobbler, born to be a hacker, supplies him with just about any illegally pirated game he could want. As earth's last remaining fighter, he has destroyed all but the last big alien ship in the game Only You Can Save Mankind when a message suddenly appears on the screen: We wish to talk.

Thus begins a journey that takes him inside the game as the Chosen One, the human who will lead the alien ScreeWee race back to safety beyond The Boundary. The reptilian captain of the ScreeWee is tired of fighting; the human fighters appear out of nowhere, kill and destroy ships in her fleet, and keep coming back no matter how many times they are killed. She has seen what happened to the Space Invaders and would rather surrender than die fighting. You don't have to remember playing Space Invaders to enjoy this book, but it does make the story a little more enjoyable. As always with Pratchett, the characters are well-developed and quite remarkable.

That's really the question, isn't it? The old saw says that one person can make a difference, but no one ever thinks that it's them so no one does anything. And no difference is ever made. That's what the question on the cover of the book points out, if not you, then who else will? In this case, Johnny is that one person, one out of thousands, but the only one who listens and takes on the responsibility of trying to do something. He has no power in the "real" world; his parents are on the verge of splitting up and he feels like he's just drifting through life. But now he has both power and responsibility, as little as he thinks he wants either. It's always been just a game to him; kill the aliens and advance to the next level. But what happens when the aliens surrender? When they place their lives in his hands, ask for his protection? They just want to go home, to escape the strange humans who attack them without provocation. Johnny has the challenge of not just helping them, but learning to see them as people instead of just "things." Because it's all too easy to kill a thing. When you let that "thing" become a person to you, become real instead of an object, then it's not easy anymore. And that's the lesson here, in a story where the first Gulf War is always on the TVs and being discussed in the background. It's all too easy to wage war when you see your opponents as less than human. When they're nothing more than a target on a screen. It's a lesson that Johnny initially fights against learning, but one that he comes to accept, just as he accepts that he's the only one both willing and able to help these aliens who are becoming people to him.

Best known for his "Discworld" series, Terry Pratchett actually penned several books prior to starting that. One of those is "Only You Can Save Mankind," the first book of a young adult trilogy, which shows some of his initial roughness but is still convincing and enjoyable. Johnny Maxwell is an extremely smart but otherwise ordinary English boy, who enjoys hanging out with his friends Wobbler, Yo-less, and Bigmac (their respective nicknames are all explained in the book) and exchanging pirated video games. One of these, "Only You Can Save Mankind," focuses on defeating reptilian aliens called ScreeWees. But suddenly the ScreeWees surrender. Johnny is,

unsurprisingly, quite taken aback: video game enemies are supposed to continue fighting, not surrender and ask him to stop firing. Then the game shows nothing but empty space. Johnny assumes that there is something odd about it, but nothing can prepare him for what it turns out to be: The ScreeWees are real aliens, who are attacked when someone uses the video game. Though very different from his Discworld series, "Only You Can Save Mankind" has the stamp of a Terry Pratchett book. From the quiet hero who sees it all, to supporting characters called "Wobbler," it's all Pratchett. The conversations are Pratchett's usual slightly rambling, nuggets-of-wisdom dialogue. The narrative style is much rougher and starker than in his later books, without the polish to be found in his later books. However, he also adds in some swsssh and fplatfplatfplat sound effects whenever the video game is dealt with. The ScreeWees are interesting and original, although I hope Mr. Pratchett has since learned that amphibians do not have scales.

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