

The Protocols of Used Bookstores: A Guide to Dealing with Certain Perils Which Could Be Encountered in a Used Bookstore

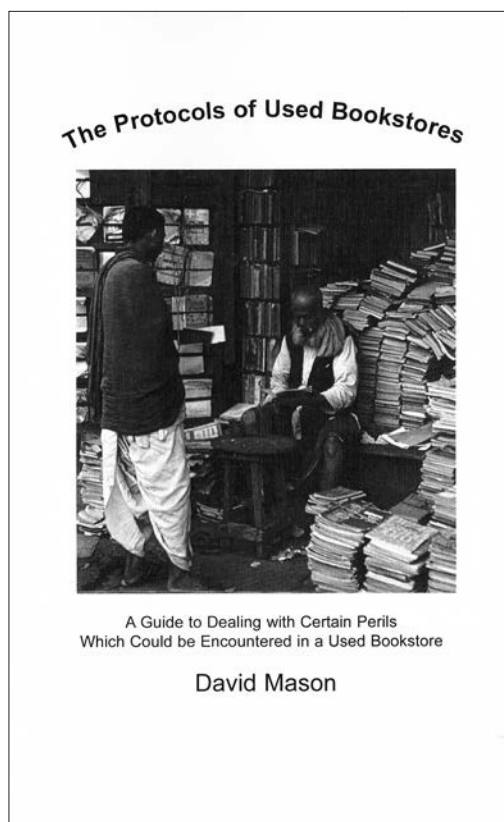
BY DAVID MASON
(DAVID MASON, 2010, \$10)

DESPITE THE ECHO in the title of that other notorious book of protocols, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, this 20-page chapbook from Toronto bookseller David Mason is more about the economics of the used book trade than exerting complete domination over customers. It would be a mistake to come away from this work without a greater desire to buy at least one item for the asking price every time you visit a book dealer, however.

The essay originally appeared a year ago in the literary magazine *Descant*. It was actually one of the pieces that sold me on that particular issue of *Descant*, and upon reading showed itself to be in that fine tradition of intelligent trade humour found in works such as Terry Belanger's *Lunacy and the Arrangement of Books*. The chapbook edition is an edited version of the original essay, but it remains largely the same work (the copy sent for review is the second edition, issued in September 2010).

Mason captures the eccentricities of bookstore customers (and store proprietors) well. Reading this little volume will do much to acquaint novice collectors with some of the otherwise curious encounters they'll have in bookshops. Some of the rules Mason outlines recall early visits I made to Mason's shop and others; some fit the age of Amazon and AbeBooks, and the wealth of data they offer prospective bookstore clients.

But as Mason underscores, a little learning can be a dangerous thing. Booksellers know their business, and even if they don't (he enumerates some dangerous characters in Rule 40), it's house rules when you enter a shop. As he helpfully points out in Rule 31: "You should know that the rule in most used bookshops is that the customer is always wrong."



Mason delivers his protocols with biting wit and a knowledge gleaned from more than 40 years in the business. To offer too many teasers would diminish sales of this chapbook (of which two editions totalling 600 copies have been printed), and that would surely not please Mason. The bookseller needs to make ends meet, as most of the illustrations in the chapbook note. But if you must avoid buying something in a bookshop, do so quietly; it will expose your character to less scorn, and avoid confirming to the bookseller that you're worse than you've already proven yourself to be by not buying something. After all, Mason notes: "No real book lover has ever left a bookstore without buying a book."

~ REVIEWED BY PETER MITHAM