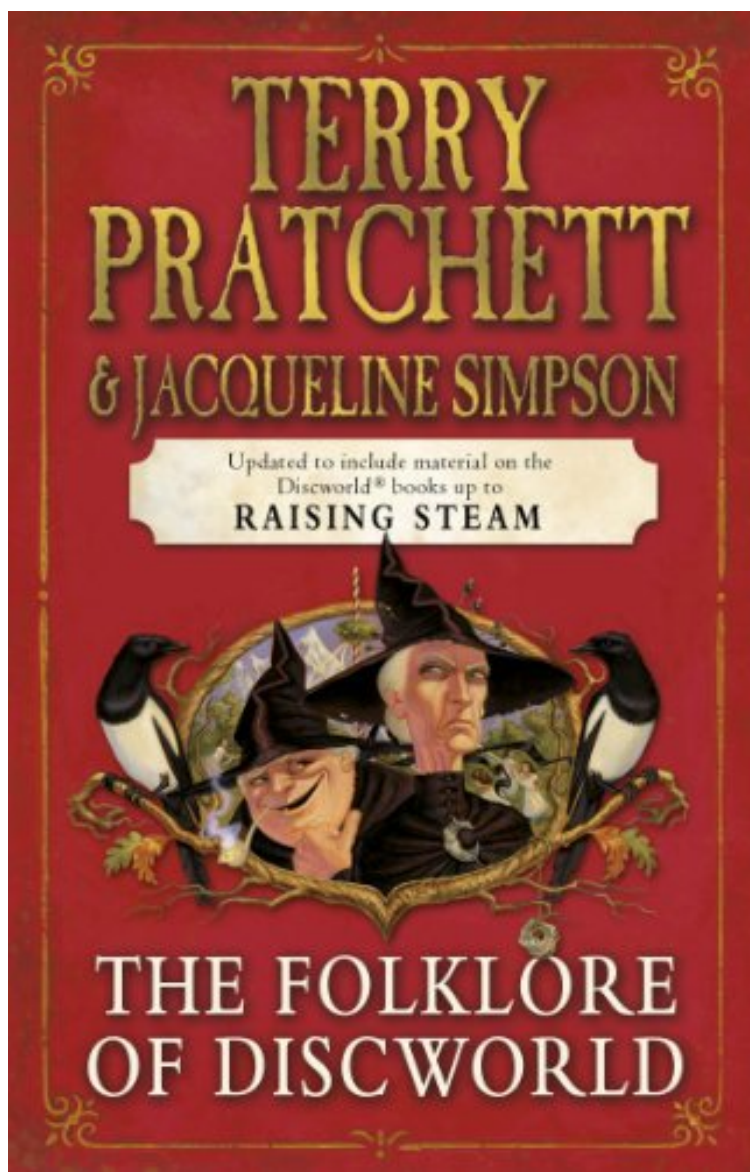


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The Folklore of Discworld



Par Terry Pratchett, Jacqueline Simpson
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNOW UPDATED to include material on the Discworld books up to Raising Steam. Most of us grow up having always known to touch wood or cross our fingers, and what happens when a princess kisses a frog or a boy pulls a sword from a stone, yet sadly some of these things are now beginning to be forgotten. Legends, myths, fairytales: our world is made up of the stories we told ourselves about where we came from and how we got there. It is the same on Discworld, except that beings which on Earth are creatures of the imagination - like vampires, trolls, witches and, possibly, gods - are real, alive and in some cases kicking on the Disc. In The Folklore of Discworld, Terry Pratchett teams up with leading British folklorist Jacqueline Simpson to take an irreverent yet illuminating look at the living myths and

folklore that are reflected, celebrated and affectionately labelled in the uniquely imaginative universe of Discworld.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

TERRY PRATCHETTA number of things conspired to cause this book to be written. There was the time when I was in a car with several other grown-up, literate people and we passed a sign to the village of Great Dunmow, in Essex. I said aloud, Oh, yes. Home of the Dunmow Flitch. They had not heard of it, yet for centuries a married man could go to that village on a Whit Monday and claim the prize of a flitch (or side) of bacon if he could swear that he and his wife had not quarrelled, even once, during the past year. And that he had never wished he was a bachelor again. Back in the late fifties and early sixties the Flitch ceremony used to be televised, for heavens sake. Not long after this I did a book-signing on the south coast, when I took the opportunity to ask practically every person in the queue to say the magpie rhyme (I was doing research for *Carpe Jugulum*). Every single one of them recited, with greater or lesser accuracy, the version of the rhyme that used to herald the beginning of the 1960s and 70s childrens TV programme *Magpie One for sorrow, two for joy*. It wasnt a bad rhyme, but like some cuckoo in the nest it was forcing out all the other versions that had existed around the country (some of which will appear in a later chapter). Then a distinguished-looking lady was in front of me with a book, and I asked her, with some inexpressible hope in my heart, how many versions of the magpie rhyme she knew. After a moments thought, she said about nineteen. And that was how I met Jacqueline Simpson, who has been my friend and occasional consultant on matters of folklore, and once got me along to talk to the British Folklore Society, where I probably upset a few people by saying that I think of folklore in much the same way a carpenter thinks about trees. Some of the things in this book may well be familiar, and you will say but everybody knows this. But the Discworld series, which on many occasions borrows from folklore and mythology, twisting and tangling it on the way, must be the most annotated series of modern books in existence. And one thing I have learned is this: not many people know the things which everyone knows. But there are some things we shouldnt forget, and mostly they add up to where we came from and how we got here and the stories we told ourselves on the way. But folklore isnt only about the past. It grows, flowers and seeds every day, because of our innate desire to control our world by means of satisfying narratives. I used to live a short distance away from a standing stone which, at full moon and/or Midsummers Eve, would dance around its field at night, incidentally leaving unguarded a pot of gold which, in theory, was available to anyone who dared to seize it and could run faster than a stone. I went to see it by daylight early on, but for some reason I never found the time to make the short nocturnal journey and check on its dancing abilities. I now realize this was out of fear: I feared that, like so many stones I have met, it would fail to dance. There was a small part of me that wanted the world to be a place where, despite planning officers and EU directives and policemen, a stone might dance. And somewhere there, I think, is the instinct for folklore. There should be a place where a stone dances. For those who feel the same way we have included a short reading list, in theory for those readers who would like to know more, but also because people who love books always want to recommend them to other people at the least excuse.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

JACQUELINE SIMPSON Ah yes, I remember it well, that book-signing on the south coast! A misty, moisty November evening in 1997, a long queue inching its way towards a very impressive black hat, the eager voice demanding, Tell me everything you know about magpies! A little ahead of me in the queue, one woman had been explaining to all and sundry as we waited that it was for her nephew, not herself, that she wanted a signed copy of *Jingo*. She herself never, ever read novels of any kind, let alone fantasy fiction. I only want facts. Whats the point of reading about things that arent real? As for a world flying through space on a turtle . . . Her voice died out in a splutter of indignation, and the combined arguments of a dozen Discworld readers couldnt budge her one inch. I was not surprised to learn what her job was: she was an accountant which is to say, very nearly an Auditor of Reality. Give her a small grey robe with a cowl, and she would find a perfect niche on the Disc. The truth of the matter is, the Disc is the Earth, but with an extra dimension of reality. On the Discworld, things that on Earth are creatures of the imagination (but sometimes quite powerful, even so) are alive and, in some cases, kicking. Sometimes we recognize them at once (is there anyone who doesnt know a dragon when they meet one?). Sometimes we simply feel that something is deeply familiar and completely right, but we have no idea why. Hours, days or weeks later, we may find the key, when the rich soil that accumulates at the back of the mind suddenly yields the fruit of memory. Then we realize that the key to the familiarity lies in folklore. Whatever is folklore on Earth finds its mirror in the reality of the Disc. Of course its perfectly natural that Mrs Gogols house moves about on four large duck feet, because Baba Yagas hut spins around on chicken legs in the forests of Russia; of course the Nac Mac Feegle are pictsies, not pixies, because of stories the Scots told about Picts; of course theres an ancient king

sleeping in a cavern deep under a mountain in Lancre, because that's what King Arthur does in England and Scotland, and the Emperor Barbarossa in Germany. We've known about such things for ages, even if we called them fairy tales, myths, and folklore; now that we're on the Disc, they are real, and we feel quite at home. Well, then, what is the folklore of Earth, and more specifically of British tradition? It's the sum total of all those things people know without ever having been officially taught about them, all those stories and images which drift around with no apparent source, all those funny little customs people follow simply because everyone has always done them (and, usually, it's fun). If we were bookish children, we may remember precisely when we first discovered some of them. Terry still has the copy of Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable which he bought second-hand when he was twelve years old, and read from end to end (it cost him 10/6 OK, OK, 50p, about three weeks pocket money). I remember the hot summer day I spent sitting against a haystack, aged thirteen, and embarking for the first time on the genuine full-length tales of King Arthur and his knights, as written by Sir Thomas Malory in the 1460s, funny spellings and weird words included. But most people, most of the time, just grow up having always known how and when to touch wood or cross their fingers, and what happens when a princess kisses a frog or a boy pulls a sword from a stone. They take for granted that there will be pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, pumpkins and scary costumes at Halloween, bonfires on Guy Fawkes Night, mince pies at Christmas. (Non-British readers, please adjust to fit your own traditional foods and calendars.) So who are the folk who have all this lore? The answer is, any of us. It's a mistake to think that the only folklore worthy of the name is what you get by finding the oldest crone in the dirtiest cottage in the poorest village in the remotest mountain valley, and cross-examining her on her deathbed. Every group and sub-group in society has its jokes, its beliefs, its tales and traditions. At this very moment, there are children in the playground giggling over the latest naughty joke (it may or may not be one their great-grandparents knew too); young mothers who take for granted that little girls must wear pink; college students teaching each other the equivalent of Nanny Ogg's Hedgehog Song. And because where there is fun there is also money to be made, there's a large-scale trade in birthday cards, Easter eggs, Mothers Day cards, Halloween masks and so forth, which no parent dares ignore. And any town or pub or castle which wants to attract tourists will go looking for colourful local legends and customs to exploit. The days are long gone when scholars insisted that real folklore must always be something passed on by word of mouth, not in print. This was never very realistic, at any rate in literate societies, where generations of poets and novelists and dramatists have drawn material from myth and folk tale, twisted and embroidered it, and then handed it on to future readers. And then, maybe, the readers become tellers in their turn, and hand it on again. The Tree of Folklore has no objection whatever to creative carpenters. Stories and beliefs grow and multiply in all the media available, old and new; they are forever feeding on, and then feeding back into, the rich soup of tradition. Take vampires, for instance. How much of what everybody knows who knows anything about vampires comes from the basic five-hundred-year-old East European folklore, and how much from novels, films, comics, TV? Specialists can work it out, but does it really matter? Here and now, in the twenty-first century, all vampire lore has blended together into a luscious soup. Folklore may look as if it never changes, but if you keep a watchful eye on it, you will notice some things dying out and others springing up. In Britain nowadays, people do not wear mourning for months on end after a death in the family, but because grief needs an outlet a new custom has appeared out of nowhere and is spreading fast thirty years ago nobody built roadside memorials of flowers and mementoes at the site of tragic accidents, but now this is felt to be right and proper. Customs also travel from one country to another much faster and more frequently than they once did; since the 1980s Britain has learned from America that if you tie a yellow ribbon to a tree or a fence, this means you're praying for the safety of some prisoner or kidnap victim who is in the news. In fact, variously coloured ribbons and plastic wrist-bands in support of good causes are popping up all over the place now, in the way that lapel badges used to do, and everyone understands what each one means. On the Discworld, folklore is much more stable. New symbols sometimes arise the black ribbon recently adopted by reformed vampires, for instance (its earthly parallel was the blue ribbon of Victorian teetotallers), and the commemorative spray of lilac which Vimes and some others in Ankh-Morpork wear on one day of the year, as explained in *Night Watch* but nothing ever seems to be discarded and forgotten. This makes the Discworld a wonderful place in which to rediscover the solidity, the depth which tradition brings to a society, and learn to cherish it. So when Terry invited me to join him in exploring this incredibly rich network of links, I had only one misgiving. Is it wise to explain so much? Might it not be best to let readers enjoy the glimpses and hints and clues half understood, and gradually make their own discoveries? But as Terry has said elsewhere, a conjurer is more entertaining than a wizard because he

entertains you twice: once with the trick, and once with the trickery. So now, theres a drum-roll, the curtains part, and you can watch how the conjurer works . . .Chapter 1The Cosmos: Gods, Demons and ThingsVERY VAST IS THE EXPANDING rubber sheet of the spacetime continuum. Should we not call it infinite? No, as a matter of fact, we should not, not unless we want to get into an interminable argument with both physicists and philosophers the kind of argument where people steeple their fingers and say, very slowly, We-ell, it all depends on what you mean by infinite. And go on saying it, with variations, till the beer runs out. If you are very unlucky, they will explain how infinities come in different sizes.What we can fairly safely say is that there are clumps of matter on that rubber sheet, moving about and organizing themselves into complicated systems. Billions of them. Two of these deserve our close attention. One consists of a rather lumpy and intensely hot spherical core of iron and rock, much of it in a molten state, held together by its own pressure, and wrapped in a thin solid crust. It is whirled through space by the force of gravity. This is the Earth, which is round-like-a-ball. The other is round-like-aplate, and is moved at a more sedate pace by a team of elephants and a turtle. This is the Discworld.What they have in common is that each carries through the cosmos a cargo of conscious, imaginative we could even say, charitably, intelligent living species. Over the many centuries of their existence, these species have generated an accumulation of thoughts, information, emotions, beliefs and imaginings which envelops their world like a mental atmosphere, a noosphere. Within this noosphere patterns have formed, driven by the irresistible force of narrativium, the narrative imperative, the power of story. Some scholars call the patterns motifs, others topoi, others memes. The point is, theyre there, everyone knows them, and they go on and on. More remarkably, some of the strongest can replicate themselves and go drifting off across the multiverse as particles of inspiration, which leads to some truly amazing similarities between the Earth and Discworld.THE ELEPHANTS AND THE TURTLE The absolutely central, incontrovertible fact about the Discworld is that it is a disc. At least, its incontrovertible unless you adhere to the Omnian religion, in which case you must controvert it like billy-o. This disc rests upon four gigantic elephants (named Berilia, Tubul, Great TPhon and Jerakeen), whose bones are living iron, and whose nerves are living gold. These elephants themselves stand upon the shell of the Great ATuin, a ten-thousandmile-long star turtle, which is swimming through space in a purposeful manner. What this purpose may be, is unknown.A child once asked, Why does the Turtle swim?A wise man replied, Child, there is no Why. IT . . . IS . . . SO.And that could be said of many things.On Earth everyone knows that people used to believe that their planet was also flat, if they thought about it at all. In fact for several thousand years a growing number of educated people have shared the knowledge that it is a globe. Generally speaking it was wisest not to shout about it in the street, though, because of the unrest this could cause. No doubt scholars in the ancient Hindu India partook of this knowledge, but since truth comes in many forms, the age-old epic poems of India declare the world to be a disc.Further details of Hindu cosmology vary. According to one myth, there are four (or eight) great elephants named the diggaja or disagaja, elephants of the directions, guarding the four (or eight) compass points of this disc, with a type of god called a lokapala riding on the back of each one. But the oldest texts do not claim that they carry the world. According to another myth, however, the world rests on the back of a single elephant, Maha-Padma, and he is standing on a tortoise named Chukwa. Finally, it is said in yet another myth that the god Vishnu once took on the form of a vast tortoise or turtle (kurma), so huge that Mount Meru, the sacred central mountain of the world, could rest on his back and be used as a stick to churn the ocean. At some stage, though nobody knows just when, these insights began to blend, with the result that some (but not all) Hindu mythographers now say the world is a disc supported by four elephants supported by a turtle.Variations of the myth spread out from India to other areas of the globe.(1) One that has proved particularly popular involves an infinite regression of turtles. It is said that an arrogant Englishman once mocked a Hindu by asking what the turtle stood on; untroubled, the Hindu calmly replied, Ah, Sahib, after that its turtles all the way down.(2) Another variation, briefly mentioned in the film The Thief of Baghdad, involves different creatures but is of value because it adds one vital factor, that of movement. It tells how the world rests on seven pillars, carried on the shoulders of a huge genie, who stands on an eagle, which perches on a bull, which stands on a fish and this fish swims through the seas of eternity.Chinese mythology also knows of an immense cosmic turtle, but with a difference. According to the Chinese, our world is not balanced upon the creatures back (with or without elephants), but is sloshing about inside it. Its plastron contains the oceans upon which all our continents are floating, and when we look up at the dome of the night sky we are seeing the inside of its vast carapace, studded with innumerable stars.Clearly, fragments of information have drifted through the multiverse and taken root here and there. But the full and glorious Truth is known only on the Discworld. The Turtle Moves!And beyond

that Truth lies an even deeper mystery, one hinted at in the legends of the dwarfs the legend of the Fifth Elephant. For the dwarfs of Uberwald say there was once a fifth elephant supporting the Disc, but it crashed: They say that the fifth elephant came screaming and trumpeting through the atmosphere of the young world all those years ago and landed hard enough to split continents and raise mountains. [The Fifth Elephant] Nobody actually saw or heard this, but the dwarfs say that the vast deposits of iron ore, gold and fat under their mountains are all that remains of the Fifth Elephant. Also that the crash buried thousands of acres of prehistoric sugar cane, creating a mass of dense crystalline sugar which can now be mined. These raw materials form the basis for a flourishing trade in confectionery and in very fine-quality candles, soaps and lamp-oils. The iron, the gold and the fat undoubtedly exist. Yet the legend itself poses great problems. If the Four Elephants mark the four quarters, where did the Fifth stand? Centrally, to form the pattern known as a quincunx? If it slipped and fell from the Turtles back, how could it strike the Disc did it fall upwards? And if so, wouldn't it strike the underside of the Disc rather than crashing down through the atmosphere? Did it perhaps briefly go into orbit? Dwarfs are a secretive race, so we are unlikely ever to learn the truth of this. Some philosophers in Epebe, hearing the tale, have concluded that the Fifth Elephant is not a gross material being subject to normal physical laws, but the pure, subtle, ethereal Quintessence of Cosmic Pachydermy. It is nowhere to be seen because it is present everywhere. Without it, the whole Universe of the Discworld would cease to exist. By a remarkable coincidence, this is exactly how the Earth philosophers of Ancient Greece described their hypothetical Fifth Element the invisible, impalpable, ethereal Quintessence which provides the essential counterbalance to the four material elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, the five together making up their universe. Or it may just be a legend. Legends don't have to make sense. They just have to be beautiful. Or at least interesting. (1) And some may be locally grown. Humanity seems predisposed to see the turtle as a massive carrier. (2) Yes, we know that there are several versions of this story! *Revue de presse* Beautiful analysis of the overlapping myth and legends in both Discworld and ours. You'll learn a lot about each. *The Bookseller* Praise for Terry Pratchett "Like all great creators of imaginary worlds, Terry Pratchett writes like an enthralled and driven reader. He creates a brilliant excess of delectable detail, he respects his own creation and his readers." --A. S. Byatt "It is [his] closeness to reality--within a fantasy context--that makes Pratchett's books so popular with a wider readership than merely the goblin junkies and interplanetary nargs." --*The Sunday Times* (London) One of the most interesting and critically underrated novelists we have. . . . *The Folklore of Discworld* co-authored with the eminent folklorist Jacqueline Simpson emphasizes his irreverence and drollery. *The Times* Pratchett is, like Mark Twain or Jonathan Swift, not just a great writer but also an original thinker. . . . Funny, exciting, lighthearted and, like all the best comedy, very serious. *The Guardian*