

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Folklore of Discworld[®]

Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson

About the Book

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 libelled in the uniquely imaginative universe of Discworld[®].

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THE FOLKLORE OF DISCWORLD®

Legends, myths and customs from the Discworld®
with helpful hints from planet Earth

Terry Pratchett
and
Jacqueline Simpson

Introduction

by Terry Pratchett

A 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 heaven's 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 children's TV programme *Magpie* - 'One for sorrow, two for joy'. It wasn't 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 moment's 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 shouldn't 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 isn't 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 Midsummer's 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.

Introduction

by 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. What's the point of reading about things that aren't 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 couldn't 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 doesn't 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 it's perfectly natural that Mrs Gogol's house moves about on four large duck feet, because Baba Yaga's 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 there's 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, Mother's 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, there's a drum-roll, the curtains part, and you can watch how the conjurer works ...



Chapter 1

**THE COSMOS:
GODS, DEMONS
and THINGS**

VERY VAST IS the expanding rubber sheet of the space-time 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-a-plate, 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, they're 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, it's 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 T'Phon and Jerakeen), whose bones are living iron, and whose nerves are living gold. These elephants themselves stand upon the shell of the Great A'Tuin, a ten-thousand-mile-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 *diśāgaja*, '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 (*kūrma*), 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 it's turtles all the way down.'² Another variation, briefly mentioned in the film *A 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 creature's 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 Turtle's 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 Ephebe, 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 Pachydermacy. 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.

THE GODS

At the last count, the number of major gods known to research theologians on the Discworld was 3,000, and rising. The potential number is unlimited, since at any moment a new one may be called into existence by the mere fact that it has occurred to a human being (or to a member of any other sentient species) to believe he, she or it exists, and to feel an urge to worship him, her or it. The greater the number of devotees, rituals, shrines, temples, sacrifices, and sacred books which develop from this initial urge, the greater the status of the deity. Conversely, of course, since belief is the life-force and nourishment of gods, in the course of time particular gods can and do lose power as the number of their believers drops. Rarely, however, do they dwindle into total insignificance, and any

good dramatic miracle quickly restores them to their previous status, as was proved by the events narrated in *Small Gods*. Two of them, Fate and Luck (The Lady), are almost certainly immune to change – they don't have temples, but there can hardly be anybody, anywhere in the multiverse, who does not believe in *them*. In addition, dwarfs have formulated the notion of a Creator quite distinct from any individual gods, whom they call Tak; we shall have more to say on this in the next chapter.

Discworld people vary considerably in their attitude to the gods. Certain groups, notably witches, wizards, policemen and dwarfs, ignore them. Not that anybody would actually deny that they exist – it is known that they are quick with a thunderbolt if they detect actual atheism – but it is perfectly possible to get on with one's life without thinking about them. Similarly, the citizens of Ephebe do not pay very much attention to their numerous divinities. On the other hand, the land of Djelibeybi is swarming with local gods, in whose honour devoted priests carry out an endless round of sacred rituals. In Omnia and Borogravia, every aspect of life is dominated by the very demanding cult of a single god, Om and Nuggan respectively. As for Ankh-Morpork, it is rather a paradox. Street after street has a temple in it, enough of them to suit every ethnic group, yet nobody could call it a pious city, exactly. The citizens seem willing to worship any god at all, provided he or she is good for trade. In that city, we learn (in *Making Money*), there is even a god-of-the-month club. And a deity currently in the ascendant is Anoaia, goddess of Things That Get Stuck in Drawers. That's life in the big city for you. People will take a chance on heaven, but they would like to get their hands on the corkscrew right now, amen.

The major gods, loosely organized into a rather grumpy pantheon, have chosen to make their home on the peak of a truly remarkable mountain, Cori Celesti – a spire of rock

and ice, ten miles high, rising above the clouds at the very centre and hub of the Disc. The home itself is of course a vast marble palace, a pile of pillars, pilasters, pinnacles, pyramids, parapets, peristyles, porticos, porches, portals and pavilions, which they have decided to call Dunmanifestin. Gods are not noted for good taste or a sense of the ridiculous, nor indeed, in most cases, for intelligence.

If the gods have the ability to look into other dimensions, then they will see some remarkable resemblances to themselves in the cosmic soap operas of Earth. One thing they have apparently taken notice of is fashions in divine accessories and lifestyles – thunderbolts, goat's feet, a jackal's head, and so on – whatever. If Zeus and his gang have a Mount Olympus, and Vishnu and *his* gang have a Mount Meru, they get themselves their Cori Celesti, and it's higher than the other two put together. This passion for keeping up with the Zeuses means that anyone with a working knowledge of inter-dimensional mythology who drops in at Dunmanifestin will feel quite at home there.

The Disc gods will have noticed, too, that all pantheons pass their time in banqueting, and that many also like playing board games. For example, one of the first things the Norse gods did when they had finished creating the cosmos was to settle down for a happy session of *hnefatafl*, played with pieces made of pure gold. As *hnefi* is 'fist' and *tafl* is 'table' or 'board', the name means roughly 'The Punch-up Board-Game'; it is a bit like draughts but much more like the Discworld game of Thud. It is thought that the run of play determines the destinies of men, gods, giants and the world itself. Apparently the game will be disrupted and the pieces scattered when gods and monsters fight at Ragnarok, the War at the End of the World, also known as the Doom of the Gods and the

Twilight of the Gods. Afterwards, according to the Old Icelandic prophetic poem *Völuspá*, a new world will arise and the surviving younger generation of gods will restore both the cosmic order and the game which expressed it:

Then once again in the grass are found
Draughtsmen all of gold,
The wondrous draughtsmen the gods had owned
In the earliest days of old.

On Earth, however, not everyone relishes the idea of being a pawn in a game played by gods. The twelfth-century Persian poet Omar Khayyám made a resigned but gloomy comment on life in his *Rubâiyât*:

'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

The gods of the Discworld lack the patience and imagination to play chess, draughts, *hnefatafl*, or even chequers; their idea of amusement is a form of Snakes and Ladders (played with greased rungs), accompanied by heavy betting and a good deal of bluffing and cheating, which brings it nearer to poker. The currency staked is the souls of men. The gaming board is a finely carved map of the Disc, overprinted with squares. Occasionally, the playing pieces represent monsters; more often, they are beautifully detailed models of those human beings who have foolishly done something to get themselves noticed. It is said that these unfortunate mortals sometimes faintly hear, as they hasten to their doom, the rattle of dice in the celestial (skull-shaped) shaker.

This is one of the reasons it's wise to steer clear of the gods, as the wizard Rincewind knows:

'I don't like the idea of going *anywhere* near the gods. We're like toys to them, you know. And they don't realize how easily the arms and legs come off.' [*The Last Hero*]

Or maybe (and even Rincewind in his darkest moments didn't think of this) they *do* realize, and find it funny. That at any rate is what Will Shakespeare thought when he wrote *King Lear*, in one of *his* darkest moments:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.

The gods have an age-old feud with the Ice Giants, a species of super-troll the size of large houses, craggy and faceted, and composed entirely of ice which glints green and blue in the light – apart from their small, deep-sunken, coal-black eyes. Just as Zeus and the Olympians defeated the gigantic Titans and imprisoned them inside volcanoes such as Etna (where they still wriggle about, causing eruptions and earthquakes), so Blind Io and the other Discworld gods defeated the Ice Giants and imprisoned them under the eternal ice at the Hub. There is, however, a prophecy. A very Norse-sounding prophecy, a prophecy of End Time doom:

At the end of the world they'll break free at last, and ride out on their dreadful glaciers and regain their ancient domination, crushing out the flames of civilization until the world lies naked and frozen under the terrible cold stars until Time itself freezes over. Or something like that, apparently. [*Sourcery*]

Whether it comes with ice ages, global warming, a nasty bang or a little whimper, the end of a world is never much fun.

Blind Io

Io is the chief of the gods. He is elderly, white-haired and white-bearded, dressed in a toga and wearing a white blindfold which conceals the blank skin where his eyes should be. Despite this, and despite his name, he sees everything that is going on, since in fact he has a number of detached eyes (several dozen of them) which hover around him and keep a sharp look-out in all directions. His throne too is encrusted with eyes. He is the Supreme Thunderer, having absorbed every other thunder-god on the Disc into himself. However, he keeps a stock of seventy hammers, double-headed axes, and thunderbolts, each of a different design, to blend in with local expectations wherever he may appear. This avoids unnecessary distress to worshippers.

At one time he employed a pair of ravens to fly hither and yon and keep him informed of everything going on in the world. In another universe Odin, chief of the Norse gods, had had exactly the same idea; his two ravens were named Memory and Thought. From the god's point of view, it's a good plan, efficient and energy-saving. From the ravens' point of view, regrettably, Io's free-floating eyeballs were altogether too much of a temptation (Odin's one eye is firmly fixed in his head, so in his case the problem did not arise) and after some embarrassing scenes Io's ravens had to be dismissed.^{[3](#)}

Earth is well stocked with thunder-gods, including Zeus, Jupiter, Thor, Perkun, Indra and Jehovah. Usually, a thunder-god is also the ruler of his particular pantheon, but Thor is an exception, taking second place to Odin (god of

war, magic, death and poetry). Blind Io's insistence on being the Disc's *only* Thunderer is an example of how Discworld gods love to outdo those of Earth in displays of status. It's the same with his lavish use of detached eyeballs, whereas on the Earth even the mightiest deities are satisfied with only one. These are mostly to be found in Ancient Egypt, where the Eye of a major god such as Ra, Atum, or Horus embodied the concentration of his divine power and could be sent out to act on his behalf. The separated Eye, called the *wedjat*, was often shown in religious art, and worn as an amulet. It was sometimes identified with the sun or the moon, and sometimes personified as itself a goddess. That's something Io has not yet thought of.

Dagon

A very ancient, mysterious and probably unpleasant god, believed to have been once worshipped on the mud-flats where the city of Ankh-Morpork was later built. At least, *something* happened not so long ago when the late Mr Hong opened a takeaway fish bar on the site of an old temple in Dagon Street, at the time of the full moon – or, some say, of a lunar eclipse. Everybody has heard about it, in general terms, but nobody says just *what* it was ...

Traditions of the Earth are fuller. It appears that Dagon was first worshipped there some four thousand years ago by Philistines and Phoenicians in the Middle East; there were temples to him in Gaza and other coastal towns. According to the Bible (1 Samuel 5), his statue stood in a mighty temple at Ashdod, but when the captured Jewish Ark was brought into this temple the statue crashed to the ground and its head and hands broke off, leaving only a stump on the threshold.

There is argument among scholars as to what he looked like, and what it was he was god of. The older generation thought his name came from a word for 'fish' and that he must have been the god of fishes, shaped like a merman, human above the waist and fishy below. Most poets and occultists agree. More recent scholars say no, the name comes from a word for 'corn', and he was a god of farming (no fish tail required). The matter could easily be settled if one could find an old temple of his and set up a bakery in one corner and a fish-and-chip shop in the other, and see what happened.

One writer who had no doubts at all on the matter was the American H. P. Lovecraft, whose eerily receptive mind picked up many strange influences from the worlds of gods and demons, and indeed from the dreaded Dungeon Dimensions. In 1917 he published a story, 'Dagon', in which a shipwrecked man reaches an unknown land of mud and rocks, newly risen from the ocean floor. There are weird buildings there, with repulsive carvings. Then he sees, emerging from a deep abyss, a vast and loathsome monster with scaly arms, webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, and bulging, glassy eyes. Though he escapes, he remains haunted by the thought of huge nameless things crawling and floundering at the bottom of the ocean until the day when they will come to destroy mankind:

Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon the Fish-god; but soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my enquiries.

This may well be significant, since it is strongly suspected on the Discworld that Dagon had some connection with the sunken land of Leshp, which occasionally rises to the

surface of the Circle Sea, as described in *Jingo*. On Leshp, there are fragments of buildings with an uncomfortably non-human look about them, a bodeful atmosphere, and plenty of pretty mosaics showing squid and octopuses. All in all, it seems probable that Dagon is actually one of the Things from the Dungeon Dimensions still lurking on the Disc, like Bel-Shamharoth (see below).

Fate

This, possibly, is the god most feared and hated by men. He is proverbially stern and implacable. Some Earthbound poets have claimed that he is blind, but this is far from true; anyone who looks into his dark and bottomless eyes will see that they are holes opening on to the blackness of infinite night. He enjoys gambling and chess, largely because when he plays, the roll of the dice is always fixed and there are always two queens on his side of the board – unless, of course, his eternal rival the Lady has a hand in the game, in which case there is a million-to-one chance that somebody might cheat Fate.

In the mythologies of the Earth, Fate is sometimes personified as three old women, the Fates – three because triplicity symbolizes power. More often, however, he remains an abstract figure.

The gods of Djelibeybi

In the river kingdom of Djelibeybi, the national religion has been accreting and fermenting and bubbling away for seven thousand years, during which time nobody ever threw away a god, in case he might come in useful one day. As a result, the gods are far too numerous to list. One might start by mentioning Scrab the Pusher of the Ball of the Sun, Thrrp the Charioteer of the Sun, Jeht the Boatman of the Solar Orb, Vut the Dog-Headed God of Evening, Bunu

the Goat-Headed God of Goats, Ket the Ibis-Headed God of Justice, Hat the Vulture-Headed God of Unexpected Guests, Bast the Cat-Headed Goddess of Things Left on the Doorstep or under the Bed ... From which, two things are already obvious: they just love fooling around with funny faces, and most of them reckon they can do the top job. They can also be quarrelsome:

There was a monstrous splash out in the river. Tzut, the Snake-Headed God of the Upper Djel, surfaced and regarded the assembled priesthood solemnly. Then Fhez, the Crocodile-Headed God of the Lower Djel, erupted beside him and made a spirited attempt at biting his head off. The two submerged in a column of spray and a minor tidal wave. [*Pyramids*]

There are remarkably close and no doubt wholly coincidental similarities here to the pantheon of Ancient Egypt, where many of the deities have the heads of animals or birds, and where it was perfectly possible for several of them to be credited with the same important function. Thus, Amun, Aten, Atum, Ptah, and Ra were each said to have been the creator of the world, and all except Ptah were also sun gods. This does not seem to have caused any quarrels, either among the gods themselves or among their priests. In Egypt, as in Djelibeybi, priests, very much in the way of advanced physicists, took for granted that mutually incompatible statements could still both be true, and that in any case the *really* important thing was to carry out rituals correctly.

The kings of Djelibeybi, also called pharaohs, are regarded as gods even while still alive; the divine part of their souls comes from the sun in the form of a bird – in the case of Teppicymon XXVII, a seagull. Kings have the power (and duty) to make the sun rise every morning, and to make the river Djel flood the land in due season; they do this by