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By Linda Washington, Carrie Pyykkonen

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A fascinating guide to the international bestselling Discworld series and the award-winning *The Wee Free Men*?soon to be a major motion picture

Before J. K. Rowling became the best-selling author in Britain, Terry Pratchett wore that hat. With over 45 million books sold, Pratchett is an international phenomenon. His brainchild is the Discworld series?novels he began as parodies of other works like *Macbeth*, *Faust*, and *The Arabian Nights*. *The Wee Free Men*, one of Pratchett's most popular novels, will be made into a movie by *Spider-Man* director Sam Raimi. It's the story of 9-year-old wannabe witch Tiffany Aching, who unites with the Nac Mac Feegle (6-inch-tall blue men who like to fight and love to drink) to free her brother from an evil fairy queen.

A fun, interactive guide that will explore the land of Discworld, *Secrets of The Wee Free Men and Discworld* is filled with sidebars, mythology trivia, and includes a bio of the fascinating author Terry Pratchett, and an in-depth analysis of his work. This unofficial guide is a great resource for readers of *The Wee Free Men* and the other books of the Discworld series.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up—This fan-fueled guide to all things Pratchett compares and contrasts the contents of the "Discworld" series with references to popular culture and not-so-well-known science and history. Written in a humorous style with footnotes (in tribute to Pratchett), this is mainly a work for and by devotees of the 35-plus novels. Chapters are themed based on origins of the Discworld or a comparison to other works including the mystery genre and theater. Characters are discussed in depth, including Death, the witches, and wizards. Spoiler warnings are given as major plot points are divulged along the way. Wikipedia and other online sources are heavily relied upon for quotes and references. The book suggests a larger focus on the juvenile series that begins with *The Wee Free Men* (HarperCollins, 2003), but its audience is really well-versed Pratchett readers.—*Corinda J. Humphrey, Los Angeles Public Library*

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About the Author

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Secrets of The Wee Free Men and Discworld

Part One

Pratchett, Parodies, and Plots: The Literary Roots of Discworld

1

Blueprint for a World

THE ARCHITECT AT WORK

Sometimes old buildings inspire us, sometimes the opposite is true. We look at an old building and ask ourselves, "What on earth were those people thinking of?"

--Witold Rybczynski, *The Look of Architecture*⁷

If you were on an architectural tour of, say, Saint Peter's Square in Rome, maybe your tour guide would say something like, "This is a true example of Italian baroque--one of Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini's finest" in the lilting tone that many tour guides have. Then, while telling you how the architect was inspired to design such a masterpiece, he or she might slip in a genteel pun, one certain to be a cut above the if-it-ain't-baroque-don't-fix-it variety that you might hear and chuckle at out of pity back home.

We brought that up for two reasons: (1) A fantasy writer like Terry Pratchett is an architect of sorts, but on a much grander scale than an Italian baroque master like Bernini or his rival, Francesco Borromini. After all, he had a whole world to design. Bernini and Borromini only had to influence Italy and several generations of would-be architects. (2) In this chapter, we're about to take you on an architectural tour of the Discworld, but one without the lilting tone or even remarks (at least not many remarks) about the *actual* architecture, such as

Unseen University. (You would've bought *The Discworld Mapp* or *The Streets of Ankh-Morpork* for that, wouldn't you?) Instead, we'll discuss words--the building blocks of Discworld. Like the furniture in the office of Ladislav Pelc, the Professor of Morbid Bibliomancy in *Going Postal*, Discworld is a world designed out of books. It is a veritable library of literary allusions. By the end of the tour, you might feel like A. Clarence Shandon in *Silverlock* by John Myers Myers--as if you've walked through literary history. And since we're discussing Discworld, where characters named Flatulus (the god of winds, of course) abide, we'll throw in puns for free. Let's get write to it, shall we? (Feel free to ask questions while on the tour. We'll do our best to answer them. No question is considered dumb.)

Since this is not a short chapter, maybe you should send out for pizza. We like pepperoni

DISCLAIMER (or in honor of Discworld, Disc-Claimer):

This tour is by no means exhaustive. You might easily think of some aspects or allusions not noted here. We won't hold that against you.

Like any good architect's, Pratchett's work should be judged by whether it fulfills the three purposes of good architecture, namely: (1) to shelter people; (2) to be durable against the elements and gravity; (3) to be beautiful or delightful.⁸ Judging by the millions of fans, shelves of books written over decades, awards, and several Discworld conventions (the first North American one coming in 2009!), we would venture to say that Discworld fulfilled all three.

If you read *Strata*, you caught the gleam of Discworld in Pratchett's eye. But if you read *Ringworld* by Larry Niven, you caught the inspiration for that gleam. After all, *Strata* is considered a parody of *Ringworld*, Niven's 1970 sci-fi classic detailing the discovery of a 600-million-mile, ring-shaped world by an intrepid, eclectic collection of explorers. (In comparison, the Disc is only 10,000 miles wide.)⁹

But the world beginning with *The Color of Magic* didn't just spring into being in 1983, or two years previous to that when *Strata* appeared, or even when *Ringworld* was read. If you look even further back, you'll find other elements that went into the blueprint of Discworld. There's a little bit of this and that in Pratchett's design.

INSPIRATION FROM THE PAST

Throughout our history we have clung to elements of our past as carriers of our culture Where we can, we need to preserve its triumphs and occasionally its follies, the best and even sometimes the mundane examples of how our society lived, worked, worshiped, and played.

--John George Vanderbilt Henry Spencer-Churchill¹⁰

An architect can look at an old building, with its crenellations or cornices, its Gothic or baroque style, and find inspiration to design something new to wow a twenty-first-century population. Or he or she, for the love of a particular time period (say, the 1920s), might design a building to revive a style of the past.

Terry Pratchett looked at several old myths and was inspired to create Discworld.

Greek, Roman, and Norse Mythology: Pratchett Mines the Myths

Pick any of the Discworld books at random and you'll soon know that Terry Pratchett is very familiar with Greek, Roman, Norse, and Celtic mythology. Go on. We dare you. First, look at the Disc itself. In the world of Norse mythology, Earth is a flat disc in the branches of a tree called Yggdrasil. (Not a name you'd stick on a baby these days.) In Pratchett's world, the earth is a flat disc mounted on the backs of four elephants standing on a humongous turtle traveling through the multiverse (rather than the universe). That turtle is based on a myth he read as a child. More on that myth later.

Second, check out the population. As you remember from high school or even middle school if you went to a fancy one, in Greek and Roman mythology, there are creatures like centaurs, fauns, satyrs, naiads, dryads, nymphs. But intervening or interfering in their lives are gods/goddesses such as Zeus, Hera, Minerva/Athena, Ares, and so on, who live on Mount Olympus. (Yeah, yeah. Like in the old *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules: The Legendary Journey* shows.) In Norse mythology, the gods/goddesses Odin, Thor, Eir, and so on live in Valhalla. Let's begin our population examination (it won't hurt) with the Discworld pantheon.

The Gods Must Be Crazy. In the pantheon of Discworld, there's a smidgen of Greek and Roman mythology,

plus a smattering of Norse as well. Instead of the two-eyed chief god Zeus (Jupiter in Roman mythology); Thor, the Norse thunder god; or even Thor's father, Odin, the one-eyed chief of the Aesir gods in Norse mythology, Blind Io, the thunder god, is the chief of the Discworld gods. Instead of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, there's Bibulous, the god of wine and things on sticks. Instead of Loki, the trickster god kicked out of Valhalla, there's Hoki the Jokester. Instead of Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess of love, there's Astoria (like the hotel). And who can forget Pratchett's Fedecks--the messenger of the gods? ("When it absolutely has to be there overnight," as a FedEx advertising slogan proclaimed.) He can give Hermes, the messenger god (Mercury in Roman mythology), a run for his money. And of course, Discworld has minor deities similar to those in Greek and Roman mythology: Vulcan (the Greek Vulcan) and Hephaistos (the Greek Hephaestus). Pratchett includes unique gods and goddesses as well, like Anioia, the minor goddess of things that stick in drawers (and also lost corkscrews and things that roll under furniture), and Aniger, the goddess of squashed animals. (She must work overtime.)

Although we said we wouldn't talk about architecture, we can't help mentioning one place--Dunmanifestin, the place where the gods apparently were *done manifesting*. In *The Last Hero*, Ghengiz Cohen (a.k.a. Cohen the Barbarian with a bit of Genghis Khan, the Mongolian conqueror of the thirteenth century) and his posse, the Silver Horde, argue with the Valkyries who want to take them to the Halls of the Slain in Dunmanifestin on Cori Celesti. Well, Dunmanifestin is referred to as "the stuccoed Valhalla" in *Guards! Guards!*¹¹ (The Valkyries, the female warriors who take the dead to Valhalla, come from Norse mythology.)

According to *Fairies and How to Avoid Them* by Miss Perspicacia Tick (a book mentioned in *Hat Full of Sky*), the Nac Mac Feegles believe that Earth is like Valhalla.

Other Stories (But the Gods Are in Them, Too). Not content to tweak just the gods of Greek myths, Pratchett tweaks other people or their situations to include in Discworld. For example, you know the story of King Midas, right? An allusion to the greedy king's story appears early in *Witches Abroad*, which seems to be a veritable "glodmine" of allusions. Instead of King Midas, there is Seriph Al-Ybi, whose curse by a god with poor spelling causes everything he touches to turn to a dwarf named Glod.

And how about the story of Daedalus and Icarus? It gets a send-up in *Jingo* and *The Last Hero*. Leonard of Quirm, Pratchett's answer to Leonardo da Vinci (more on them in chapter 19), has a similar goal of perfecting the art of flying, but not airline food.

And of course, there is the story of Prometheus, the Titan and creator of man (according to the Greek myth) who dared to steal fire from the gods and suffered for it by having his liver eaten by an eagle every day. (But not with bacon or onions.) He's Mazda in Discworld and his theft is the inspiration for *The Last Hero*, where Ghengiz Cohen and the Silver Horde try to return fire to the gods by blowing them up. (A weird way of saying thanks. Flowers would've been better.)

At this point, we have to mention another place--the Underworld, or realm of the dead. The Greeks and Romans had it in their mythology. This kingdom is ruled by Hades and surrounded by rivers that include Acheron, Styx, and Lethe. A three-headed dog named Cerberus guards this realm.

Discworld not only has an Underworld, it has an infern...

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Nathan Marker:

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