

# Why a Disc? Why the Turtle?

The Discworld, which looks like an extraordinarily improbable object (at least until one examines some terrestrial concepts of cosmic structure), can exist because it occupies a region of Highly Stressed Reality. There can be wizards, trolls, and dragons because the physical constraints that prevent them in other parts of the multiverse are relaxed – in fact, downright limp. There are still rules of existence, but they're permissive, not exclusive.

Or, to put it another way, the Disc is the handiwork of a Creator working to a specification that was more poetic than usual.

Either way, it exists at the far end of the probability curve. It is consistent, in its way, but not *likely*. Furthermore, this

improbability – and the laws of narrative causality which have real force here – are important to more than just its origins. They pervade life on the Disc.

## The Power of Story

Part of what enables the Discworld to exist as it does is the power of narrative. Stories have *serious* clout in a universe like this. A flat world carried on top of four elephants may be unlikely, but it makes a good story. Part of the fundamental structure of the Disc's universe is a material – or particle, or something – called *narrativium*, which holds the whole thing together. The effects propagate down to the level where it's hard for a royal family to produce three sons without the lads being bound to go off on adventures at some point, the youngest achieving the most impressive results.

This is known to scholars and philosophers on the Disc, is a part of the local system of magic, and can be manipulated. Indeed, there are people on the Discworld who've built lengthy careers on the power of their personal story. But this isn't always a safe or easy thing to do. Stories can turn round and get nasty if you're not very careful – and you have to make sure that you're playing the right part in the right story.

## METAPHOR AND BELIEF

Metaphors, too, tend not to sit like Patience on a monument smiling at grief, but to get off the monument, hunt Grief down, and demand to know why he done her wrong and how about the maintenance payments? Death is not an abstract concept represented by a robed skeleton with a scythe; he *is* a robed skeleton with a scythe.

Belief has powerful effects. Discworld gods are created – or at least empowered and maintained in their power – by their followers' collective belief. Wizards and witches draw power as much from other people believing in their abilities as from their command of magical energy. (After all, convince enough people that you can turn them into frogs with a hard stare, and you may never have to prove it.) Conversely, disbelief can prevent something from existing, or from being seen even if it does exist.

A side-effect of this tendency towards personification is the recurrent and sometimes tiresome literal-mindedness of the Disc's inhabitants. People take metaphors literally because metaphors all too often become literal. Talk about your true love as a rose, and people are likely to point out that she (a) isn't green and red, (b) doesn't have thorns, and (c) walks about a lot. Poets, like engineers, can have a tough time of it on the Disc – and indeed have been severely controlled by law on occasion. On the Disc, "poetic licence" isn't metaphor, either.

## NARRATIVE CAUSALITY

*Narrative causality* is the fundamental power of stories. People want and need events to follow certain courses and come to proper resolutions. A war is supposed to end with the "right" side winning and the "wrong" side having learned its lesson forever. The fact that in the extremely long history of warfare this has hardly ever happened doesn't alter the fact that people want it to happen and resolutely believe, at the start of each new war, that it'll happen again. And on the Disc, there's a chance that it *will* happen – but the power of that story must battle human nature and the personal stories of the war-leaders.

### Great A'Tuin

The Disc is borne through space on the back of a world-turtle, of the species *Chelys galactica*. This *is* a species, not a unique specimen; a cluster of eight baby turtles, each bearing four elephant-calves and a little Discworld in its geological youth, were once observed to hatch from moon-sized eggs that had been left in orbit around a full-sized star. They spent a little time orbiting Great A'Tuin, but have since departed on their own cosmic voyages. It's possible that they're the literal offspring of Great A'Tuin, but the turtle's gender remains unknown, despite heroic research programs.

Great A'Tuin is 10,000 miles long – slightly smaller than the Disc it carries. Its shell is encrusted with methane ice and pocked with meteor impacts; its eyes are like oceans. Wizards have tried for centuries to peek telepathically into its consciousness, and they discovered one thing: it's *slow*. Time is of little importance to a turtle; to a really big turtle, time is *really* unimportant. Its thoughts move like glaciers, although it *does* think, and it seems quite content.

### Berilia, Tubul, Great T'Phon, and Jerakeen

Even less is known about the four elephants who stand on Great A'Tuin, and on whose backs the Disc rests. It's even harder to get a look at them – they're well under the rim. They are not completely static, however. The Disc's sun and moon trace complex orbits, ensuring phases for the moon and seasons for the Disc, and every now and again, an elephant has to cock a leg to let one of them go past safely.

Nor is it clear how the Disc rotates round its hub, or how the elephants avoid chafing. There is some evidence that the direction of rotation changes at geological intervals, which may be part of the arrangement to avoid such problems.

Incidentally, the Disc's moon seems to generate its own light. It *appears* like our world's moon, waxing and waning regularly, whereas a lunar cycle generated by the Disc's sun's motion coupled with the local physics of light would be too complex to contemplate.



## BOROGRAVIA

Another breakaway component of the old Dark Empire, Borogravia is an agricultural country with a minor sideline in tall mines. The population is mostly human, with a few trolls and vampires, and wandering clans of Igers. There are also dwarf mines; these closed themselves off for an extended period when the humans took against them for religious reasons, but have since reopened their doors.

Borogravia is noteworthy for only two things: a state religion – now defunct – that tipped from restrictiveness into outright insanity (see *The Story of Nuggan*, pp. 299-300), and a foreign policy that resembled the attitude of an aggressive drunk challenging everyone in the bar. These got Borogravia into increasing trouble over the years, and when the faithful were enjoined to destroy the clacks system, it ended up at war – not only with its neighbours, but also with Ankh-Morpork and Genua. This might well have meant Borogravia falling under the control of the ambitious regional power Zlobenia, except that Ankh-Morpork decided that this would upset the regional balance and gave some quiet support to a few sensible Borogravians who wanted to preserve independence (see *Polly Perks*, pp. 346-347). However, the country is still recovering from its own recent past, and things may remain messy for a while.

## Widdershins Regions

Large areas of the Disc widdershins of the Circle Sea and Klatch haven't featured much in the chronicles. Klatchistan, the mountainous borderland on the edge of the continent of Klatch, is doubtless a hotbed of traditional mountain-pass folkways (banditry, feuding, and hawk-eyed sentinels sitting behind rocks). Various lands lie further to rimward, including the substantial coastal land of Muntab. Few details about Muntab have reached the rest of the Disc, other than that its ruler is known as the Pash, but Discworld diplomats are becoming increasingly preoccupied by the Muntab Question.<sup>1</sup>

Further round, there's a temperate area of rolling plains and hills. Much of the country is pleasant, in a fairy-tale sort of way – deciduous woodland, punctuated with farming villages. One of the nations is Brindisi, known in Ankh-Morpork as a land of opera singers and pasta.

At the far widdershins limits of this region, the Trollbone, Rammerock, and Blade mountain ranges are *serious* geology. The Trollbones, especially, are as high, sharp, and generally challenging as such things get, save for the foothills of Cori Celesti itself. They're troll, dwarf, and little-bald-enlightened-monk territory.

## THE VIEUX RIVER

The Vieux River rises in the mountains of Uberwald but leaves as soon as possible, descending into flatter country and slowing down once it's safe. It becomes a broad and useful waterway, navigated by paddleboats (powered by trolls on treadmills), which in turn provide profitable venues for countless professional gamblers. The Vieux enters the Swamp Sea through a broad and marshy delta, dominated by the city of Genua (below).

## GENUA

As the main port on the Vieux delta, Genua is prosperous, if foetid; the climate is usually Hot (see *Temperature Extremes*,

## The Dark Empire

The Dark Empire – sometimes referred to as the Evil Empire or simply The Empire – is defunct, but its *consequences* loom large in the Disc's recent history.

It was founded, some hundreds of years before the chronicles' present, by a sinister figure known simply as the Evil Emperor, who was reputed to be some kind of magical adept – though given the way he operated, that might just have been an inevitable rumour. He was certainly the most successful classical dark lord in Disc history, at least in raw geographical terms. At its height, his Empire dominated what are now Borogravia and Mouldavia, as well as large parts of Uberwald. Igers created armies of orcs (p. 119) as soldiers for him. Quite what stopped him from conquering more of the Disc is unclear.

However, it would seem that the Emperor proved mortal in the end – so far as anyone knows, anyway. Frankly, people like that are just too effective as hero magnets, and he may have grown cocky enough not to bother to make provision for his return in a sequel. His Empire lingered into recent times, but considerably reduced in size; Borogravia and Mouldavia broke away long enough ago to have since developed their own political traditions and rivalries. Uberwaldian towns such as Lipwig were part of the Empire in living memory, though, until it finally, messily disintegrated.

All this helps explain why Uberwald and its neighbours remain so politically disorganised and unstable, despite their long history; they're *still* recovering from this collapse. Fortunately, there are competent and broadly ethical operators – including Lady Margolotta (pp. 349-350) and Low King Rhys (p. 349) – working to patch over the results, with Lord Vetinari assisting from a distance. But dead empires have a nasty way of attracting sentimental admirers. Someone with the nerve and resources to go up against the best politicians on the Disc might regard the Dark Empire's power as something worth salvaging.

p. 191) and also humid. Genua – which has been called the Magical Kingdom and the Diamond City – is an independent city-state, with a population whose ancestors came from all over the Disc, and who have the skin tones to prove it. Centuries ago, it was a colony of Ankh-Morpork, but it broke away.

The dominant local style of magic is voodoo. The place's cooking reflects the same eclectic roots; Genuan cooks are generally brilliant, although a wise gourmet doesn't ask about their ingredients.<sup>2</sup> There are small white buildings around the city's perimeter, large white houses closer in, and at the centre a castle with lots of ice-cream-cone turrets. All this whiteness dazzles against the muted swamp colours.

1. "Where the hell is Muntab?"

2. *This is a swamplands city.*



## The Lady Sib

A recent foundation in Morpork, the Lady Sibyl Free Hospital is a charitable institution – sponsored by the Vimes family – which provides free medical care to the city. It's run by Dr. John "Mossy" Lawn, who in game terms has a 5-point Unusual Background, "Klatchian Medical Training," meaning that his medical skills are at TL4 (see *Medical Skills*, p. 77). He enforces the same standards on his staff and may be successfully training some young doctors in exotic ideas such as hygiene.

Ironically, this means that the poor patients who use the "Lady Sib" frequently receive better treatment than wealthy people who employ prestigious traditional doctors. It's quite likely that adventurer PCs will end up there at some point and benefit from this. Unless they genuinely appear to be dying, though, they may well find themselves in a long queue. Also, while the hospital is definitely free, it *is* a charity, and it can always find a use for donations; individuals who look like *successful* adventurers will receive a lot of polite-but-firm hints on this subject before they leave.

Failing to respond appropriately to that is one way to acquire a new negative Reputation in Ankh-Morpork – but making actual trouble at the hospital is *really* stupid. Not only do many of the city's toughest street brawlers receive good treatment there, and want it to remain standing so that they can go back if necessary, but Dr. Lawn is personal physician to the Vimes family. While Lawn has a full set of medical ethics, and he knows the value of discretion after years of work for the Seamstresses' Guild, he isn't required to remain silent about absolutely everything; patients who show up with *interesting* injuries may well be mentioned to the authorities.

The hospital also looks after a few mental illness cases. It has a whole wing dedicated to people who think that they're Lord Vetinari.

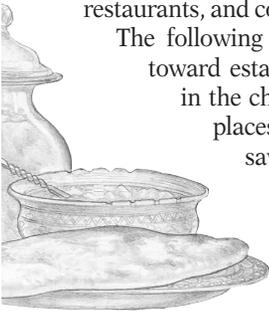
*The Strippers' Guild:* Strictly, the Guild of Ecdysiasts, Nautchers, Cancanières, and Exponents of Exotic Dance, another all-female guild (although it, too, might well be broad-minded enough to accept male applicants; Ankh-Morpork is an unreconstructed sort of society, but if people are willing to pay for something, nobody much argues). This one even has troll members (who specialise in putting clothes *on* – trolls have some odd ways), but no dwarfs, as the idea of removing clothes is largely outside of dwarf experience. The Guild is run singlehandedly by the legendary Miss Dixie "VaVa" Voom, who retired from the stage a few years ago, possibly after causing one riot or heart attack too many.



## Food, Drink, and Lodging

Ankh-Morpork derives a lot of income from visitors. There are a great many rooms-to-let available, a variety of food shops and restaurants, and countless places for a drink and a brawl.<sup>1</sup>

The following list just skims the surface and leans toward establishments which feature prominently in the chronicles; e.g., the Drum. Because such places *are* so significant, the GM may want to save them for specific encounters or big moments. Then again, *everyone* in the city-based stories seems to end up drinking at the Drum – usually sooner rather than later.



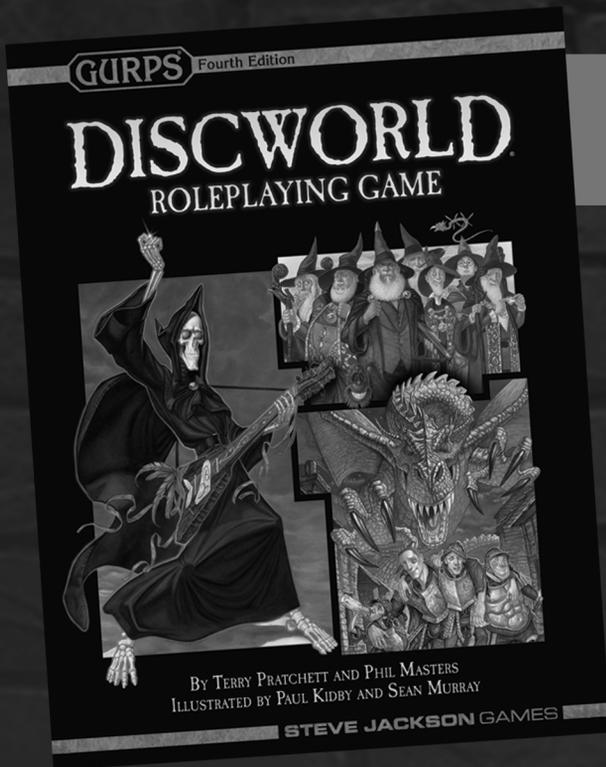
### The Drum

The Mended Drum, on Filigree Street, is an Ankh-Morpork institution (especially if "institution" is defined to mean "a place with lots of screaming and people with funny ideas about reality"). It's a *well*-established hostelry. It has burned down many times, but somehow, it always gets rebuilt. At times, it has been known as The Broken Drum ("you can't beat it," ho ho), and then renamed after the next fire by a new owner with a quick sense of humour.

The Drum opens directly onto the street; traditionally, the door is guarded by a troll. It backs on the River Ankh. Steps lead down to the main room, which is thick with the smoke of generations, and whose floor is paved with matted rushes and trampled beetles, many of otherwise un-encountered species.

1. The brawl may be included with the cover price.





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