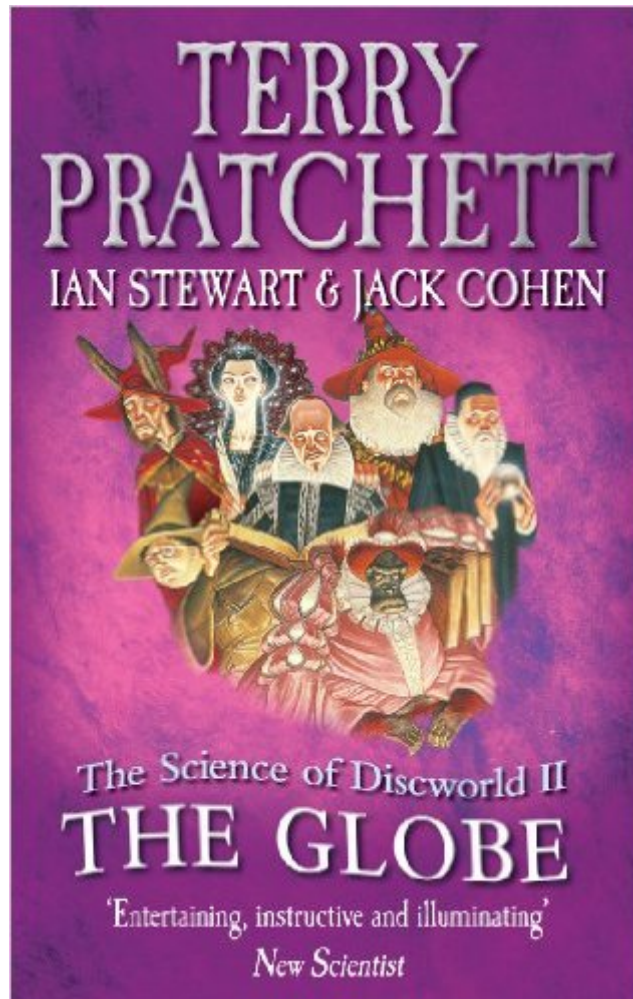


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The Science Of Discworld II: The Globe



Synopsis

The sequel to the bestselling Science of Discworld. The acclaimed Science of Discworld centred around an original Pratchett story about the Wizards of Discworld. In it they accidentally witnessed the creation and evolution of our universe, a plot which was interleaved with a Cohen & Stewart non-fiction narrative about Big Science. In *The Science of Discworld II* our authors join forces again to see just what happens when the wizards meddle with history in a battle against the elves for the future of humanity on Earth. London is replaced by a dozy Neanderthal village. The Renaissance is given a push. The role of fat women in art is developed. And one very famous playwright gets born and writes *The Play*. Weaving together a fast-paced Discworld novelette with cutting-edge scientific commentary on the evolution and development of the human mind, culture, language, art, and science, *The Globe* presents a fascinating and brilliantly original view of the world we live in. The scene of the final epic battle is the first production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* at the Globe Theatre.

Book Information

Series: Discworld (Book 2)

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Ebury Press (May 6, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0091951712

ISBN-13: 978-0091951719

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.9 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,176,753 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #84 in [Books > Reference >](#)

[Encyclopedias & Subject Guides > Science Fiction & Fantasy](#) #468 in [Books > Reference >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Try enlivening a party with this question: "What's on your mind?" When the babble has become truly raucous, ask another: "How did it get in there?" This book is about those questions, how we came to consider them, and how we've tried to learn to understand them. Interleaving a fantasy story with analyses of scientific thinking about thinking carries certain risks. In the hands of this trio, however,

the balance is successfully achieved. Don't be deceived by the name of Terry Pratchett as lead author of this volume. There are wonderful touches of humour in this book, but the basic theme is a serious question: "Who are we, and how did we get to be this way?" This book repeats a technique used in *The Science of Discworld I* - two stories in parallel. Discworld is a mirror of Roundworld. The wizards used the computer Hex to construct Roundworld in *SoD I*. They were shocked at the many differences. Shape was only a beginning. They were confronted with the many ways in which life evolved on Roundworld. They were also forced to reflect on how illogical it seemed for living things to struggle for survival, only to be snuffed out by natural forces. In this sequel, the most advanced life form is going to be confronted with an extinction threat noted in the first book. How to deal with it? It turns out that the best solution is to ally with a great evil force. Humanity has a strange and illogical heritage, this book tells us. As our forebears learned to cope with changing conditions on the African savannah [or on lake shores or even in the sea] they learned to stand upright, to grasp tools, and to think. This has always seemed like a long, continuous progression of small improvements over time - a process in the best Darwinian gradualist sense. This trio of authors reminds us that this picture is false for humans. After a good start, our ancestors simply halted in place, keeping social, mental and technological progress at bay. The "pause" went on for a hundred millennia. At some point about fifty thousand years ago, all that changed. We went from the "standing ape" to become "the storytelling ape". Thinking and speaking resulted in story-telling. In trying to understand ourselves and our surroundings, Pratchett and his colleagues see humans as inventing stories for explanations of nature's mysteries. Magic, allied with the element "narrativium", runs the Discworld. On the Roundworld, magic has to be invented. Narratives are the means to bring it about and spread it around. Every human society forges its own stories which are imparted to children as "Make-A-Human Kits". Each society creates explanations which become legends which become religions as one example. While we might dispute whether we've "progressed" argue the authors, there's no question that once the process started, humans changed rapidly resulting in what we see around us today. This "advance", they argue, was not inevitable. While we may not yet understand what prompted this change, we can list alternatives and reject the impossible or implausible. That's why the Discworld parallel story comprises part of this book. It teaches you how to recognise the difference. To long-standing Discworld fans, this book will be a serious challenge. Unlike the "laugh per page" of Pratchett's other works, he and his colleagues confront the most serious of issues: "where do we come from?" and "where are we going?". Cohen and Stewart, who have dealt these questions elsewhere, and Terry Pratchett, who posits them with every book, have produced a significant contribution in attempting an answer. The use of the parallel story line offers

great opportunities for the reader to "step outside the box" and consider life and beliefs from a detached view. Pratchett has long confronted us with ourselves. Adding Cohen and Stewart's scientific and cognitive abilities to his imagination results in a compelling and informative read.
[stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

The authors have conspired to make use of Terry Pratchett's popularity to inject some extremely thought provoking scientific theory and philosophy into the Fantasy reading community. Pratchett's Discworld characters muddle their usual way through a story that offsets the points that Stewart and Cohen make in the 'Hard Science' chapters. Stewart and Cohen maintain Pratchett's familiar voice throughout, and there are frequent references to other Pratchett stories, a feature that serious Pratchett readers will enjoy while not detracting from the enjoyment of first time readers.

The authors use the Discworld setting to provide some genuine insight into the way in which we think about the world around us. This is science in the biggest sense, as a way of understanding the world and our minds, not just a set of rules for how molecules are constructed. The Discworld frame story is entertaining -- kind of slight, I suppose, but more compelling and plot driven than the frame from the previous Science of Discworld book.

I am generally a fan of Terry Pratchett's work and loved the preceding merging of a Discworld story with basic scientific explanations. Sadly, as interesting as elements of the science chapters were, they became horribly tedious, rambling, and repetitive even before they got to the section on Judaism. Like many assimilated Jews, they regard Judaism with an intense and deeply irrational paranoia. Before I continue, I should point out that I am in not way related to Jews or an adherent to Judaism. I just think that many Jews fail to understand Judaism in its intellectual and historical context. As fascinating as a short story about a scientist using logic circuits to evolve a more advanced means of replicating a signal, the section on Pan Narrans deviated from a discussion of humans advancing by telling stories (an idea I am intrigued by as a student of History) and into a lengthy and frequently absurd complaint against Judaism. I think much of it has to do with Mr. Cohen. I seriously doubt any similar complaints would be issued against Bhaal, Marduk, or Jupiter. The general gist of the complaints were that Judaism: "stifled creativity", repressed people's spirits, was horribly legalistic, and led to religious wars. Given that the authors, like Mr. Pratchett, are atheists, these are likely key elements of their generalized view of all religion. As a student of History (as I do not have a PhD or a specialized job, I cannot call myself a historian), I know that the various

religions in the past (not to mention present) were very different. Not least of these differences was human sacrifice. Almost every society in human history has practiced human sacrifice as a legitimate means of honoring or bartering with the "gods". Judaism (and the Romans for different reasons) was radically different. People have supposed that Abraham was confused why God told him to sacrifice his son. He couldn't have been because that was NORMAL procedure among neighboring peoples. Given that Judaism prohibited human sacrifice, prostitution, and sexual slavery, I consider Judaism to have been a most favorable development in human history. Nonetheless, Mr. Cohen seemed infuriated when an Israeli asked what it must have been like to be a descendant of the Cohens (an ancient religious caste in Hebrew society that still provided most of the rabbis and religious leaders even in the 1800's). Mr. Cohen's response was one of great shame at what his ancestors must have done in condemning other people and generally being repressive. The only real grounds I can find for such a view exist not in classical history (when the Cohens really existed as a religious office) but in the sometimes insular world of the Polish shtetl where some Jewish communities were dominated by charismatic rabbis with more influence than sense. Even still, others shtetles had more reasonable rabbis who did not threaten to cast people out for disagreeing. I suspect that Mr. Cohen is unreasonably conflating the two periods in his mind and fails to understand the moral philosophy of Judaism. One of the excellent points made in the book (or is it the earlier book?) is that under polytheism, you needed a theopsychologist to understand the weather. Monotheists just needed a regular observation of the weather because they assumed some continuity in natural laws. There are wonderful elements in the book. The idea of Pan Narrans is interesting (although like many people excited by their ideas, they go too far and assume it explains everything) and is worth considering. Many smaller lessons such as the process of evolution and the nature of life is portrayed in a wonderfully simple and easy to understand manner. The book outside of Pan Narrans and Mr. Cohen's rant is a good and worthwhile read. I would have given it four stars had it not been for the repetitiveness of their Pan Narrans idea and the historically absurd accusations against Judaism.

I love Terry Pratchett ever since I first read him and have got almost all his books. The thing about him is that you can read any of his books many a time over and still be shocked and amazed at how brilliant it is. The science of the Discworld series are truly amazing and mind altering. A must read :)

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