

Small Gods: A Novel of Discworld Study Guide

Small Gods: A Novel of Discworld by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

In Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods*, the God Om rises from his existence as a lowly tortoise back into godhood. His disciple Brutha rises with him, becoming the leader of a newly enlightened nation.

Outside the Omnian Citadel at Kom, Novice Brutha's gardening duties are interrupted by a talking tortoise. The animal claims to be the Great God Om himself, trapped in the form of a reptile. Brutha is dubious, but nevertheless quickly develops a friendship with creature. Meanwhile, the oppressive "Qquisition," lead by exquisitor Vorbis, has caused so much grief in Omnia that a secret society of revolutionaries has arisen called the Society of the Turtle.

Hearing of Brutha's photographic memory, Vorbis drafts the novice for a delegation to Ephebe. While waiting to leave, Brutha notes a group of Divine Legionaries mustering separately. Vorbis advises the novice to forget that he saw anything. During the trip to Ephebe, Vorbis foolishly commands the captain to violate a taboo of the sea, angering the sea goddess. The tortoise, meanwhile, who truly is Om, buys the sea goddess's mercy for a price to be determined later.

The Ephebians demand a non-negotiable peace treaty with Omnia. Vorbis accuses the Ephebians of killing an ambassador named brother Murduck. Omnia's navy has recently attacked Ephebe and was repelled by virtue of superior technology. Brutha, hoping to consult someone about why Om is stuck as a tortoise, eventually meets the philosopher Didactylos, who provides a scroll on the nature of the gods.

With Brutha's photographic memory, Vorbis navigates back through the maze where they are contained, opening the front gates from the inside. This allows entry for the army Brutha saw earlier. They've walked all the way across the desert. The Ephebian palace is quickly overtaken by the invaders. Brutha memorizes the most important contents of the Ephebian library, which is then burned and escapes with an assortment of allies.

Brutha's seaborne escape is interrupted by a sudden hurricane. The novice soon discovers that Vorbis has suffered a similar fate, though he is much worse for the wear. Brutha carries Vorbis through the desert until finally the treacherous exquisitor knocks Brutha upside the head with a rock, carrying Brutha out of the desert himself. Brutha wakes a week later to discover that Vorbis has declared himself the new Propget of Om.

Separated from Brutha, Om tricks an eagle into picking him up and carrying him to the citadel. With Brutha about to be executed, Om interrupts Vorbis's prophet ordainment by falling on his head, killing the exquisitor instant. Seeing this, the people begin to believe in Om once more. Flush with the faith of his worshippers, Om manifests in his godly form and declares Brutha his prophet.

Brutha negotiates a peace treaty with several invading armies while Om travels to the heavens to prevent other gods from interfering. Brutha rules Omnia for a hundred years, changing from a theocracy to a democracy and heralding in a new age of enlightenment. When Brutha dies, he finds Vorbis waiting in the afterlife, fearful to cross the spiritual desert to his final judgment. Brutha, once again, leads Vorbis across the desert.

Pages 1-32

Pages 1-32 Summary

In Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods*, the God Om rises from his existence as a lowly tortoise and back into godhood. His disciple Brutha rises with him, becoming the leader of a newly enlightened nation.

As the novel begins, the narrator examines the relationship between eagles and tortoises. Eagles are known to drop tortoises from great distances, using gravity to shatter the animal's protective shell. Since this seems like more trouble than eating less-armored prey, the author concludes that the eagle must enjoy tormenting tortoises. He foretells that, thanks largely to the eagle's sadism, a tortoise will one day learn how to fly.

High in the Ramtop mountains, within a hidden monastery, lives an order of long-lived monks whose sole purpose is to control, observe, and record historical events. The monastery's 493rd Abbot orders his subordinate, a senior monk named Lu-Tze, to travel to Omnia, there to observe the momentous events about to transpire. Lu-Tze spends the next four years traveling to Omnia. The narrator explains that the theocracy of Omnia expects a prophet once every two-hundred years. Since this time is rapidly approaching, the church has been cracking down on heresy.

While working in the garden, a young novice, Brutha, is addressed by a mysterious voice. Certain that it must be a demon, the young man flees. The author digresses to explain that the world is full of "small gods." Small gods who are lucky enough to gather believers will eventually become big gods. Others remain unknown. Novice Brutha, still highly distraught, reports the incident to brother Nhumrod, the novice master. The elder priest lectures the novice against the temptations of what he sees as demonic influence, insisting that Brutha tell him should the incident recur.

Unbeknownst to Brutha, the voice was that of his god, the Great Om. The deity, currently trapped in the form of a tortoise, crawls through the citadel's garden, frustrated that Brutha failed to acknowledge him. Meanwhile, below the citadel, the head exquisitor, Vorbis, interrogates his former secretary, Sasho. The freshly-tortured man is accused of spying, but is unable to provide the names of any co-conspirators. When pressed for "the truth", Sasho simply says "The turtle moves." Vorbis sentences Sasho to a slow death.

Back in the garden, Brutha is once again pestered by a disembodied voice. He ignores it, concentrating on his work. Finally, Brutha sees a one-eyed tortoise among the crops. He speaks to the animal in a friendly fashion, offering it food. The tortoise becomes indignant, telepathically identifying itself as the Great God Om and demanding that Brutha fetch the citadel's high priest. Brutha is incredulous, but soon departs to report

the incident. The narrator reveals that Brutha, the product of a strict religious upbringing, is a man of simple, yet unwavering, faith.

Despite being a mere deacon, exquisitor Vorbis is afforded the fear and respect of senior clergy, something to which he feels that he is entitled. The narrator describes a hypothetical meeting between Vorbis, General Iam Fri'it, and Bishop Drunah. Vorbis insists that Omnia take action against the nation of Ephebe in retaliation for a recent incident involving the death of Brother Murduck. The two men disagree, seeing Ephebe as harmless. Vorbis paints Ephebe as a nation of heretics and heathens. He is particularly disturbed by the Ephebian notion that the world is flat and situated on the back of a giant turtle. Vorbis advocates a sneak attack against Ephebe in the guise of a parlay.

Somewhere beneath the citadel there is gathering of cloaked revolutionaries. They talk of killing Vorbis, rescuing the "master" from Ephebe, recovering "the book." A wall is adorned with a stylized symbol of a turtle. They conclude the meeting by chanting "The turtle moves." There is a strong implication that one of the figures is General Iam Fri'it. This meeting, however, is not hypothetical.

Pages 1-32 Analysis

The eagle, a recurring element of Small Gods, represents two related ideas. First, and most obviously, the animal exemplifies Om's newfound mortality. He is a god no longer. Om is now prey, a potential food-source for a predator. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the raptor represents the threat of oblivion. With Om's worshipers all but gone and his church eclipsed by the Quisition, the once-great god may be forgotten by everyone save the Caretakers of History.

This section introduces the dissonance between dogma and truth. The author establishes the truth of "small gods," thus invalidating Nhumrod's understanding of them as being malevolent demons. Ironically, in advising Brutha to ignore the voice he heard in the garden, Nhumrod is contradicting the will of his deity. Sasho, meanwhile, is telling the truth since the turtle does move. The Quisition, however, isn't prepared to accept the truth that this phrase represents. They regard it as heresy.

Brutha's reaction to the tortoise establishes him as a kind and caring man. Om's behavior, on the other hand, demonstrates that fallen deity has a poor understanding of how to judge the strength of an individual's faith. Om thinks, incorrectly, that the church hierarchy is in some way relevant. Also demonstrating this idea is Vorbis, who, though he already shows signs of demagoguery, is an esteemed member of the church. The meeting that doesn't occur shows that Vorbis no longer feels the need to work within the structure of the church.

Pages 33-70

Pages 33-70 Summary

Brutha brings Nhumrod to the garden to show him the talking tortoise. Om, who hoped to speak to the high priest, vehemently expresses his displeasure. The novice master can't hear the voice of Om, and so concludes that Brutha's religious fervor has gotten the better of him. Nhumrod picks up the tortoise, deaf to Om's impotent threats of fire and brimstone, and carries the tortoise to the kitchen, there to be made into soup.

Later, Brutha sneaks into the kitchen and rescues Om from beneath a pile of herbs. Brutha tells the tortoise that he does not believe him to be the incarnation of Om. Om, by way of proof, summons up a small thunderbolt, striking Brutha with the force of static electricity.

Fri'it and Drunah meet atop the citadel roof. Fri'it suspects that Drunah might also be a secret revolutionary, but is not willing to expose himself in case he is mistaken. Drunah seems to have similar doubts about Fri'it. The two men alternate between platitudes and innuendos, each proving inscrutable to the other. General Fri'it thinks upon his faith, balancing it against the politics of the church. He likens the coming war to an oncoming wave, one which they will, like the surfers of the Brown Islands, be forced to ride.

While Om eats a leaf of lettuce, Brutha experiences a crisis of faith. Om tries to explain his situation. Three years ago he simply woke up as a turtle, and until just recently Om had completely forgotten that he had ever been a god. To Brutha's dismay, Om fails to recognize the scripture of his own religion and denies ever having spoken to the prophets. Brutha is on the verge of finally rejecting Om when the small god suddenly reveals a painful memory from Brutha's teen-hood.

Vorbis strolls through the citadel, taking pride in the dread he inspires in others. The deacon absentmindedly wanders out of the citadel into the garden. Upon seeing Vorbis, Brutha faints dead away. Om, clearly displeased, hisses at the deacon. Vorbis places the tortoise on its back, pushing in rocks beside it to prevent it from turning over. He makes a mental note to return later, if he has time, to see how the animal is doing.

Brutha, trapped in a guilt-ridden dream, sleeps feverishly. Vorbis and Nhumrod stand over him. The two men discuss the novice, with Nhumrod extolling Brutha's simple virtues while Vorbis attempts to find some kind of fault with the young man. Nhumrod explains that, while Brutha may be illiterate, the boy has an amazing memory. Hearing this, Vorbis requests to speak to Brutha once the novice wakes. Meanwhile, upside-down and baking in the sun, Om begins to despair. Suddenly, the groundsweeper, Lu-Tze, appears and rights the stranded tortoise. Om is elated.

Sergeant Simony opens a letter emblazoned with a turtle. He takes pride in knowing that he will be the one to rescue "the master" from Ephebe, but regrets that he won't



able to kill Vorbis. Elsewhere, fuming with indignation, Om stumps along the corridors of the citadel, thinking of all the deistic vengeance he'll bestow once his powers are restored. Meanwhile, Brutha, now awake, is startled and confused by the news that Vorbis wishes to speak to him.

Om struggles to ascend the staircase of the citadel, and is occasionally jostled by the feet of passing novices. He nearly takes a tumble through a grill. Holding on by his jaws, Om is suspended for a moment over the Quisition's torture chamber, where he sees the room in action. Moments later, the tortoise makes his way through the Place of Lamentation, where once again he finds himself pushed around by passing feet. As he slowly, painfully makes his way through the courtyard, he hears the prayers of the desperate masses. Suddenly, Om is aware of an eagle circling far above the courtyard.

Brutha, answering the summons, is ushered into a barely furnished room and asked to be seated. Someone places a hood over his head. Though suddenly in darkness Brutha finds that he is not afraid. He is lead elsewhere and finally permitted to remove his hood. Vorbis is present, along with two other men. The deacon asks Brutha to describe the contents of the anteroom in which he was hooded. Brutha describes the room perfectly. He then offers further demonstrations of his astoundingly perfect recall. Vorbis and the two men whisper among themselves. Vorbis sends Brutha away, ordering him to report to the Gate of Horns at dawn. Brutha will join the delegation to Ephebe.

Pages 33-70 Analysis

Nhumrod's reaction to the tortoise is indicative of the church's relationship with its god. They are deaf to his words, listening instead to the centuries of dogma attributed to him. This is largely Om's fault, since after centuries of ignoring his flock, his worshipers have grown accustomed to silence. Om's behavior, resorting as he does to immediate threats, suggests that he's probably never tried talking to them before now. In the past, violence, or merely the threat of violence, has always done the trick.

Both Fri'it and Brutha find themselves in a situation where they are hesitant to trust someone. In Fri'it's case, it is because he fears that Drunah will give him up to the Quisition. In effect, the Quisition has instilled in him a kind of fear that separates him from friends, colleagues and potential allies. Brutha is also afraid, but his fear is that he will commit heresy by believing in a false incarnation of his god. In dredging up the memory of Brutha wishing his grandmother dead, Om overcomes Brutha's fear by setting it against a stronger emotion: guilt.

It isn't that Brutha faints merely at the sight of Vorbis. It has more to do with Brutha's state of mind. He is locked in the throes of guilt when, unexpectedly, the head of the Quisition appears or the part of the church whose function it is to root out heresy. This is not to say that Vorbis is not terrifying. He is depicted here as something of a psychopath, taking pride in the fear and anguish he instills in others. His treatment of the tortoise demonstrates his lack of human empathy while also symbolizing what his Quisition has done to the church.

Now, among the mortals who once worshiped him, Om can see firsthand the nation that was built in his name. He sees that the people are unhappy, and that beneath the Citadel, the church tortures, maims and kills. As a slow-moving reptile, Om is forced to listen to the prayers that he so often ignored as a deity. Ironically, though he is now among them, Om is no more visible than when he was a god. As a tortoise, he is as inconsequential to them as they once were to him.

Dehumanization is a common element of Small Gods. Whenever someone takes note of Om, for example, they say "There's good eating on one of those." They regard him only as potential sustenance. This is not so different from the way Om once saw mortals. He clearly once believed that mortals existed solely to sustain him with belief. Vorbis has a similar view of Brutha. Since the novice is simple, unquestioning and possessed of a useful skill, the deacon sees him, not as a person, but as a living tool. As far as Vorbis is concerned, Brutha exists to serve his interests.

Pages 71-107

Pages 71-107 Summary

The tortoise Om, looking to hide from the eagle, scrambles beneath a statue of himself as a bull. He mentally shouts for Brutha's assistance. Elsewhere, Brutha, concerned for the well-being of his garden while he is abroad, wishes to give instructions to Lu-Tze. The old man smiles and nods as usual, but this time he shows Brutha his rock garden and offers him one of his "mountains." Brutha is about to ask that Lu-Tze hang on to the gift for him when he finally hears Om's cries for assistance.

The eagle swoops down over the Place of Lamentation, scattering the people. Awed by the majestic creature, the crowd interprets its appearance as a kind of sign. Amid the commotion, a lone merchant, Dhblah, tries to sell an assortment of sugary deserts. Everyone engages in comic banter while the eagle searches for his prey. Finally, the eagle is scared away by the sound of blaring trumpets. The giant bronze doors of the Great Temple, each said to be made of forty tons of gilded bronze, open wide.

Distracted by his search for Om, Brutha unwittingly stumbles into the path of the high priest's procession. Legionaries quickly remove him, pushing him into the crowd. Still burning with guilt and embarrassment, Brutha finds Om cowering beneath a statue. Om explains that he is hunted by an eagle, and that a similar bird was responsible for dropping him in the courtyard of the church where he chanced to meet Brutha in the first place. After collecting the turtle, Brutha pauses to chat with Dhblah and is surprised to discover that the huckster is already aware of the mission to Ephebe.

Later, Brutha apologizes to Om for not telling him about the delegation to Ephebe, explaining that Vorbis only recently recruited him. The conversation turns to the topic of torture. Brutha explains that torture exists for the purpose of spiritual purification. Om is reluctant to accept Brutha's claim that the Quisition is infallible. Fearing to lose the last of his true believers, Om insists on going to Ephebe with Brutha.

Drunk and desperate in his chambers, Fri'it tries unsuccessfully to pray. He is distracted by thoughts of how the Quisition, under Vorbis, has come to dominate the church. Fri'it recalls Ephebe, where he first learned of the turtle. Ephebe, at least, made sense. Fri'it fears that the Quisition must be aware of his treason. Surely the inquisitors must have pried his name from Sasho's lips. Fri'it, resolving to kill Vorbis, draws his sword. He opens his chamber door, however, to find Vorbis waiting on the other side, flanked by two legionaries.

Prepared to travel, secure in a wicker box, Om ponders the serendipity of how he came to meet Brutha. Against all odds, the eagle dropped him on a soft mound of dirt near his last remaining worshiper in all the world. Waiting by the gate as instructed, Brutha is surprised to see a group of soldiers mustering separately from his own delegation. Vorbis arrives, announcing to sergeant Simony that general Fri'it will not be coming.

Meanwhile, Fri'it wakes in the afterlife, where Death instructs him to cross a spiritual desert to reach his place of final judgment. Fri'it takes stock in his beliefs and begins his journey.

Vorbis advises Brutha to forget that he saw another group of soldiers mustering to leave. Brutha, who never forgets anything, is perplexed by the command. As they make way to the coast, Vorbis preaches to Brutha against temptation and corruption. Om tries to telepathically get Brutha's attention, but the novice doesn't respond for fear of being overheard by the others. Seeing that they are to travel via ship, Om wonders why they do not simply cross the desert. Brutha explains that no one can survive in the desert.

The ship underway, Brutha is seasick. Seeing Vorbis for the first time, Om recognizes him as the one who stranded him outside down in the sun. Om indignantly demands that Brutha kill Vorbis, but Brutha pays the order no heed. Vorbis, hearing that sailors will not hunt porpoises due to a belief that they are the reincarnated souls of seamen, orders the captain to harpoon a porpoise for lunch. Later, alone, Om and Brutha discuss the nature of morality. Om fears telling Brutha of how important he and his faith are to the god's continued survival.

Pages 71-107 Analysis

This section is filled with symbolism. Om hides beneath a statue of himself as a giant bull, the very form he intended to take when he became a tortoise. The statue therefore represents failure and folly. Nevertheless, it is the vestige of his former faith that protects Om and scares the eagle off, foreshadowing that Om will eventually recover his faithful. He may presently be cowering beneath a statue of his former glory, but he will rise again. Later, when Om reclaims his godhood, some will see him with an eagle's head. This symbolizes Om's conquest over death.

The immediacy of Om's endangerment causes Brutha to forget himself and the decorum of the church, leading him to interrupt the high priest's procession. Brutha also, more than once, lies to protect Om and takes every effort not to be overheard speaking to him, even though the Quisition would consider these actions heretical. This suggests that Brutha's priorities are changing. This is further evidenced by the fact that, in defending the Quisition to Om, Brutha shows signs of doubt.

Fri'it's predicament demonstrates what Vorbis's Quisition is doing to the people of Omnia. Even those who are brave enough to move against it must fear the very people in whom they place their trust. Compare, however, Fri'it's arrival in the afterlife with Vorbis's eventual arrival later in the story. Fri'it arrives clear of conscience, bravely setting out on a new adventure. Vorbis, on the other hand, is confused and terrified. This suggests that the power to kill is vastly overshadowed by the power to live.

The fear that Vorbis inspires in people has a malignant effect. Even Brutha, who has begun to question the infallibility of the Quisition, can't bring himself to risk responding to Om (his god), let alone obey Om's command to kill Vorbis. What Vorbis forces the

captain to do nearly dooms the whole ship by angering the sea goddess. Involving the sea goddess in this way is why Vorbis's ship is destroyed later in the novel and how he winds up stranded in the desert.

Pages 108-138

Pages 108-138 Summary

The narrator offers Koomi's expert opinions on the nature of god. The philosopher suggests that, while there may be a supreme being, the imperfect universe was probably created by an underling. He postulates that gods grow or shrink relative to the amount of faith they engender in people. The Omnian Church, the narrator reveals, eventually executed Koomi.

Om uses his godly status to parlay with the ocean goddess, demanding that she spare the ship. She agrees, but only for a price to be established later. The ocean grows suddenly violent. Several sailors, looking to atone for the slain porpoise, intend to use Brutha as a human sacrifice. The novice prays and, soon after, the skies clear. Everyone, Brutha included, is amazed. Om ponders, for the first time in his long life, the concept of justice.

Om dreams of his early days as a small god, remembering his ascension to power. Through the barest miracles and manipulations Om was able to win over his first believer: a shepherd. This shepherd was eventually slain by the follower of his rival, Ur-Galish, but not before converting many followers. Om wakes wondering what became of Ur-Galish and whether or not he will share a similar fate.

On the fourth day, a glittering light appears on the horizon. Following Vorbis's instructions, Brutha counts the flashes. Noting the novice's unexpected compassion, the captain admits that he has been to the edge of the world and has seen with his own eyes the turtle upon which Discworld rests. Om avows to Brutha that the world, which he did not himself create, is indeed flat. Heresy or not, Om insists, the world is flat.

Brutha barges in on Vorbis, interrupting the deacon's prayer. The elder priest is shocked that Brutha seems to have so little fear of the Quisition. The deacon questions Brutha about his faith and upbringing, and is impressed by the elegance of the novice's answers. At Vorbis's command, Brutha repeats verbatim the sequence of flashes he observed on the horizon.

At the docks of Ephebe, the Omnians are greeted by armed soldiers. Seeing this defiant stance, Om tells Brutha that it's probably Omnia suing for peace, not Ephebe. The novice is perplexed by Om's non-deistic pessimism. Om explains that his thinking is compromised by his tortoise mind. As they make their way into the city, Om points out the statues of the Ephebian gods, referring to each by name. Brutha is surprised to discover that there are gods other than Om, feeling both wondrous and wicked. Om explains that gods survive and coexist by specializing in one area of interest.

The Omnian party is halted in the street by the sudden appearance of an old, wet and very much naked philosopher who sprang from the bath to record an idea. Om explains



to Brutha that, while philosophers are eccentric and ridiculous, they occasionally develop fantastic ideas, such as the sun-weapon that Ephebe used to burn much of the Omnian navy. Having arrived at the tyrant's palace, the Omnians are blindfolded, lead through a treacherous maze and finally disarmed. Impressed by the wonders of Ephebe, Brutha, much to his dismay, feels his mind expanding. Om telepathically sees that Brutha has begun thinking in "godly" ways. He is becoming a prophet.

Although the Ephebeans offer the Omnians food with their lodging, Vorbis reminds Brutha that the day is one of fasting. With Vorbis gone, Om gives Brutha special permission to eat or permission which Brutha, despite Om being his god, only reluctantly accepts. Om explains that he needs Brutha to find a philosopher, someone who can think of a way to help him return to being a god.

Pages 108-138 Analysis

The relationship between mortals and their god is somewhat shallow. Mortals empower their gods with belief. The gods, in turn, use that power to do whatever they wish, independently of human mortality. The implication here is that, since Om has spent so much time among mortals, he is beginning to see the value of concepts such as fairness and justice. He has experienced firsthand things that most gods never knows: pain, fear and mortality. This foreshadows the wiser god that he will eventually become.

While Brutha continues to be confused, he nevertheless adheres to his beliefs. Rather than criticizing the captain for the sin of owning a mirror, however, Brutha instead tries to allay the man's fears. This display of empathy earns him a troubling sort of honesty: the captain has seen firsthand that the world is flat and that it sits on the back of a turtle. Although Om, the very god himself, affirms that this is true, Brutha continues to serve as Vorbis's instrument and continues to believe, somehow, that the Quisition serves a greater good. Despite his doubts, Brutha cannot yet contradict his religion.

To this point, Brutha's virtue has been, literally, of the cloistered variety. Exposed to the wonders of Ephebe, however, and the new ideas that it represents of democracy, polytheism, and philosophy, Brutha is beginning to see that there is more to the world than he first imagined. The effect of this new information is so transformative that Brutha can feel the change taking hold. Brutha suspects that Om, his god, is the instrument of this change, suggesting that the experience must be truly profound.

Rather than seeking the assistance of one of his fellow gods, Om seeks out a philosopher. This speaks volumes as to the nature of the gods. Since they compete for believers, they are apparently less helpful to one another than they are to their worshippers. This finds Om with the shoe on the other foot, as he looks for help among the same mortals that he once ignored. Having to work from a position of weakness is not something to which Om is accustomed.

Pages 139-168

Pages 139-168 Summary

Brutha effortlessly retraces his steps through the trapped Ephebian maze. On the Ephebian streets once more, Brutha peers into a tavern to witness a childish, heated argument between philosophers. In speaking to the philosophers, Brutha learns that, while they may see faith as an outmoded concept, they are also unwilling to discuss the topic for fear of being struck down from the heavens. The bartender, hearing that Brutha is both broke and in need of a philosopher, recommends Didactylos. Later, as Brutha prays in his bed, Om wonders why humans, living as they do in a world of natural wonder, still are driven to kneel to the gods.

Ephebian soldiers escort the Omnian party in a manner similar to prisoners. Vorbis warns Brutha against curiosity, reminding the novice that the Ephebians are infidels. The group is escorted into the Tyrant's palace. The narrator, as an aside, explains that Ephebians are perpetually dissatisfied with their democratically elected "Tyrant." The Tyrant, after an acerbic greeting, wastes no time offering to the Omnians a non-negotiable peace treaty. Vorbis and the Tyrant trade accusations. Brutha notes that his tortoise, the Great God Om, is missing from his wicker case.

Meanwhile, Om creeps his way through the streets of Ephebe in search of a library. He soon comes upon a large barrel, near which two people are arguing. This is the infamous philosopher Didactylos and his nephew Urn. The two are discussing their beleaguered philosophy business and the resulting money troubles thereof. Looking at the shape of Didactylos's mind, Om sees that he is a brilliant man. Suddenly, Didactylos spots the tortoise, picks it up, and suggests that he might make a meal of the creature.

Back at the palace, Vorbis accuses the Ephebians of having stoned the Omnian envoy Murduck. Aristocrates, assistant to the Tyrant, explains that, while anyone may speak in the marketplace, Ephebians won't put up with the kind of religious intolerance that Murduck demonstrated. Even so, explains Aristocrates, Murduck was pelted with little more than eggs and vegetables, nothing to warrant the retaliatory naval assault that forced Ephebe to burn scores of Omnian ships to the waterline. The Tyrant warns that unless Vorbis signs the treaty, Omnia can look forward to more raids. With the day growing warmer, the assembly agrees to reconvene in the morning.

Brutha talks to a slave, trying to sympathize with the man's plight. The slave complains that he's only allowed one day off a week, and if he runs away, he has to provide his own transportation. In four more years, the slave adds, he will be free and allowed to vote and own slaves of his own. Hearing this, Brutha is puzzled. He as a "free" man, gets one less meal and no days off at all. Vorbis returns, ordering Brutha to the library, there to fill himself with "dangerous" knowledge.

At the library, Brutha finds Didactylos amassing a fortune by taking bets on whether or not Om can draw geometric shapes in the dirt. Brutha tells the two men that the turtle is a god, but Om advises that Brutha not invoke his name, fearing that the other gods will hear. The novice explains that he seeks a philosopher who can answer questions about the nature of gods. Didactylos suggests that advice costs money, but agrees to help when Brutha reminds him of his recent windfall, won at Om's expense.

Pages 139-168 Analysis

The philosophers' unwillingness to discuss religion may parallel the real-world reluctance to discuss the same topic. While the real world may not have angry, capricious deities, it does have religious segments who are likely to feel threatened by secular opinions on religion. As an author who utilizes so many humanist ideas, this is likely Pratchett's way of representing the unapproachability of religion as a topic. Humanism, and secular humanism in particular, holds that no topic, especially not a topic so important as religion, should be taboo.

The difference between Vorbis and the Tyrant is the difference between Omnia and Ephebe. As an elected official, the Tyrant represents his constituents. Vorbis, on the other hand, who schemes outside the power structure of the church, represents only himself. Whereas the Tyrant might be impeached or lose reelection, there exists no system by which Vorbis might be dethroned. Vorbis was never granted power. The power he has is the power he took for himself.

The Ephebian "slave" is not much worse off than the modern American worker. He's clothed and fed. He works under a contract. He's even given one day off a week and something similar to vacation time. Following this metaphor of slaves-as-workers, a slave can eventually acquire enough "freedom" to start their own business, in which they would employ their own "slaves." Compare this to Brutha's role as a novice, which more closely matches the traditional definition of slave.

Pages 169-200

Pages 169-200 Summary

Brutha notes that Didactylos, who carries a darkened lantern, is blind. Now in the library, Didactylos gives a quick rundown of everything that the other philosophers have written on the subject of gods, seeming none to impressed by the body of work even though he clearly reveres the idea of the library. Though he cannot read the words, Brutha is awed by the artwork among the scrolls.

Brutha balks at Didactylos's book, which depicts the world as flat, situated atop elephants, who are themselves standing atop a giant turtle. Didactylos points out that many sailors, having been to the rim of the world, have actually seen the turtle. When Brutha directly asks the philosopher if it's true, however, Didactylos admits, surprisingly, that he doesn't know with absolute certainty. Considering the Omnian certainty to which he is accustomed, Brutha is staggered by the lack of sureness. Brutha now understands Vorbis's hatred of Ephebe.

Sensing Brutha's discomfort, Didactylos voices his distrust of sureness, relating an anecdote about violence born of Omnian certainty. The blind philosopher locates a text by an atheistic thinker named Abraxas, suggesting that they might find it useful. Brutha is embarrassed that he can't read. After Brutha departs, the two men wonder how it is that Brutha, who is obviously with the visiting Omnians, was able to traverse the Ephebian maze without assistance.

Om, having been reading Abraxas's scroll on the nature of gods, finally comes clean to Brutha concerning his suspicions: No one in Omnia, save Brutha, truly believes in him. The authority of the church has supplanted faith in the deity. This, Om points out, is why Brutha will not obey his command to kill Vorbis: Brutha fears the Quisition more than his god. Om suggests that Brutha should be the next prophet, but the young novice isn't keen on the idea.

Brutha walks with Vorbis, explaining to the deacon that Ephebians are driven to seek out ignorance. Vorbis contrasts Ephebe with Omnia, characterizing Ephebe as impermanent as the sea. Brutha spots a flashing light in the desert. Vorbis calls it the "light of truth." The deacon suggests to Brutha that the "real" truth must sometimes be protected by lies. He admits that brother Murduck died in Omnia because he had not died in Ephebe. The "real" truth, implies Vorbis, is that it was Ephebe's humiliation of him that sealed his fate.

Vorbis orders Brutha to lead him through the labyrinth. Brutha feels compelled to obey. As they make their way through the maze, Vorbis kills an elderly guide. Outside the maze, at the front gate, the narrator implies that Vorbis kills the gate guards as well. The narrator digresses to explain that Vorbis arranged, at great cost of human life, for waves

of soldiers to establish caches of water across the desert, enough that a sizable army might eventually cross to Ephebe.

In less than an hour, Vorbis's invaders overtake the palace. Vorbis, seated in the Tyrant's throne, announces that an Omnian fleet is on the way. Brutha is afflicted with moral confusion. Didactylos is summoned to the court. Initially the philosopher seems contrite, offering to recant everything he has written, but then suddenly shatters a hurled lantern on Vorbis's skull and shouts, "Nevertheless...the Turtle Moves." Didactylos flees. Vorbis orders Brutha to take soldiers to the library and to burn it to the ground.

Didactylos is blind, but with midnight approaching, his pursuers cannot see any better either. Unknown to the philosopher, sergeant Simony saves him by killing two assailants who are men previously under his command. Moments later, at the library, Didactylos and Urn agonize over which books to rescue. Brutha arrives with a contingent of Omnian soldiers. Moments later, sergeant Simony arrives and forcefully orders the soldiers to leave.

Simony explains, much to Didactylos's surprise, that he belongs to a secret society based on the philosopher's writing. Simony doesn't trust Brutha, but the novice nevertheless insists that, while the library may burn, he can save the contents. Simony, acting on Didactylos's advice to trust Brutha, goes back to the novice's quarters to fetch the tortoise. Meanwhile, Brutha looks through each text of the library. Even though he cannot decode the contents, he can commit each one to his photographic memory.

Pages 169-200 Analysis

Didactylos's blindness plays a similar role to Brutha's illiteracy. Just as Brutha must trust that his teachers are explicating scripture correctly, Didactylos must trust in the firsthand accounts of sailors who claim to have seen over the edge of the world. The difference between the two is that the philosopher practices responsible doubt. Whereas Brutha does not question his knowledge of scripture, Didactylos, who has never seen the turtle firsthand, concedes that he cannot be absolutely certain that it exists.

Didactylos's anecdote is a simple enough: A righteous crowd stones a man to death. This action suggests several things. First, it suggests that crowd was absolutely certain of the man's guilt. Second, the crowd was certain not only of guilt, but also of the punishment. Third, the crowd felt entitled to judge and sentence the accused. Were it not for this chain of blind certainty, the atrocity that Didactylos describes would not be possible. This suggests that certainty leads to unthinking, possibly dehumanizing, behaviors.

Vornbi's concept of "fundamental truth" is based on a twisted and backward kind of logic. He begins with an assumption and then does whatever is necessary to discredit or destroy dissenting opinion. To defend this "fundamental truth", Vorbis will resort to lies, deception and even murder. This is the attitude of the Quisition and is the backward sort of thinking that earned Omnia the distrust of its neighbors.

Didactylos's statement "Nevertheless...the Turtle Moves" refers to the idea of objective truth. Vorbis can claim that the world is spherical, and Didactylos could write a book retracting his former opinion. People can say, think of believe whatever they like, but none of this would change the fact that the world is disc-shaped and situated on the back of four elephants, which are themselves standing on the back of a giant tortoise. The truth is true regardless of opinion.

Pages 200-241

Pages 200-241 Summary

The library is aflame. The narrator reveals that all libraries are connected by bookworm holes, allowing for works to be rescued in case of fire. An apelike creature suddenly appears and begins pulling books from the shelves, only to disappear seconds later. Some time later, Brutha wakes in a shed beside Om, the novice's head swimming with fullness. Ephebe burns. Om explains that even the slaves are fighting for Ephebe.

Brutha joins Didactylos, Urn and Simony by the shore, where everyone is gathered around one of Urn's inventions: a steam-powered boat. Impressed, Simony wonders whether the technology might be weaponized. Didactylos admits that it was he, in an effort to keep knowledge from Vorbis, who set fire to the library. The group discusses the possibility of fleeing to Ankh-Morpork. Simony vocally denies the gods, advocating instead an aggressive doctrine of applied philosophy.

Finding no bones among the library's ashes, Vorbis is suspicious of Brutha's sudden disappearance. The deacon guesses, correctly, that Brutha must have escaped via one of the many tunnels beneath Ephebe. Realizing that Brutha and his allies will try to flee Ephebe, he looks to the sea. There he sees a small, white smudge on the horizon. He orders his men to the docks.

Meanwhile, still within sight of the dock, the mechanism of Urn's boat is fouled by salt. Brutha has begun to regurgitate facts gleaned from the books, causing him to worry that the books are "leaking." Om, whose physical self is fast asleep, also drifts in the spiritual world of the gods. Much to the tiny god's dismay, the sea goddess, having taken notice of the vessel, has come for the boat as payment. Contrary to his godly nature, Om finds himself arguing with the goddess about the justice of her demands.

Urn gets the engine working just in time to flee from a rapidly approaching Omnian vessel. Urn is momentarily puzzled by the quickness of the vessel when the explanation unexpectedly presents itself: a hurricane is upon them. The weather quickly fouds. Bolts of lightning rain from above. Om, aware of the sea goddesses plans, commands Brutha to leap from the ship. Brutha obeys, jumping into the ocean just as lightning strikes the engine.

The narrator suggests that gods are capricious, unimaginative, and non-reflective. Proving this to be so, the sea goddess is distracted by the proximity of the much larger Omnian vessel, the Fin of God. Lightning strikes the mainmast most of the crew unceremoniously finds itself in the afterlife, with Death, piloting a ghost ship. They are disappointed to hear that Vorbis had survived. The ship sets sail, ghostly dolphins following in its wake.



Brutha wakes near Om on a rank, pebble-strewn beach. Brutha, disappointed to hear that Om can't even produce water, resolves to return to Omnia. Trudging down the hot, shadowless beach, Brutha eventually comes upon the still-breathing form of Vorbis. Om commands Brutha to leave the deacon behind, but Brutha disobeys, lifting Vorbis from the sand. Om, indignant, decides to remain behind.

Brutha trudges onward, thinking of gods and how they become what people want them to be. In mid thought, he passes out from heat exhaustion. By the time Om catches up with Brutha, it is twilight. Brutha and Vorbis lay unconscious on the sand. Brutha wakes the next morning to discover that Om has dug a crude well. Brutha and Vorbis are able to drink via a soaked rag. Vorbis is sick with fever and still non-responsive, but Brutha is determined to take him back to Omnia to stand trial.

The group travels at night. Om admits to Brutha that he never intended to be a "great" god, only a successful god. Brutha admonishes Om for never leading or guiding his worshipers. They discuss the relationship between mankind's need to believe and a god's need for mankind to believe. Om explains that gods are multifaceted, wearing different masks in different cultures, according to the belief of that culture. With the sun coming up, Om and Brutha discuss taking shelter in a cave.

Pages 200-241 Analysis

Urn, having lived a peaceful and unruffled Ephebian existence, wouldn't have thought to weaponize the steam engine. Simony, however, whose nation was conquered by Omnia, has lived under an oppressive government for the better part of his life. Although Simony considers himself a rationalist where his thinking is compromised by the many traumas he has suffered. He is trapped in a militant mindset.

Although the sea goddess seems to have little interest in ideas such as justice or fairness, she is nevertheless compelled, somehow, to uphold her earlier agreement not to hurt Brutha. Om even says, reassuringly, to himself, that "she wouldn't dare" to renege on the verbal contract. This implies that some authority, higher even than the gods, may compel certain behaviors. Or it may mean that in Discworld, contracts hold a kind of power that even the gods cannot deny.

Vorbis is indirectly responsible for the destruction of his own ship. Earlier in the novel, he angered the sea goddess by insisting that his ship's captain harpoon a porpoise. While Om was able to stay the goddesses wrath for a time, she returns in this scene to exact her payment. Had Vorbis never angered her in the first place, the sea goddess would have had no reason to become involved. Frustratingly, although many innocents suffer for Vorbis's belligerence, he is blissfully unaware of his share in the blame.

This is the second time that Brutha refuses Om's command to kill Vorbis. One cannot argue, however, as Om earlier suggested, that this indicates Brutha fears Vorbis more than he fears Om. Vorbis, after all, is helpless and alone. He can do nothing. Brutha's willingness to leave Om behind shows that he has become an independent thinker. For

the first time, Brutha has begun to seriously question his god. From this point on, Om must prove himself worthy of Brutha's devotion.

Pages 242-266

Pages 242-266 Summary

With the engine exploded, Urn's once-steam-powered boat now relies on a makeshift sail. The group discusses where it should go. Simony mentions his belief in the Turtle, prompting Didactylos to point out that it was never his intention to incite people to "believe" something which empirically exists. He is, however, pleasantly surprised that the Turtle Society has redistributed his work by the thousands. The small crew weighs anchor in a gully. Simony recognizes the location as being only a few miles from the village of a friend.

Brutha and Om, along with the still-unresponsive Vorbis, have taken shelter in a desert cave. While Brutha sleeps, Om stands guard, fending off a horde of small gods hoping to tempt Brutha into worshipping them. He also meets the haunt of a now-forgotten god, turning Om's mind to thoughts of his own mortality. He must protect Brutha. It occurs to Om that, since lions must drink, finding a lion would lead them to water.

Om mentally locates lions and wakes Brutha to tell him of a nearby water source. Brutha is surprised, since Om earlier said that he can only find minds, not water. He's equally surprised when Om insists that he bring Vorbis. Meanwhile, Didactylos, Urn and Simony, having made their way to Omnia, consider ways to breach the giant doors of the Citadel. Simony suggests a steam-powered battering ram. Urn agrees that it is possible.

When Brutha finds bones scattered on the ground, Om is forced to concede that he is tracking a lion in the hope of finding water nearby. His plan is that the lion will become lethargic after eating Vorbis. Brutha refuses this plan. An injured, half-crippled lion emerges from its cave, a spear hanging from its side. Brutha carefully extracts the weapon while Om attempts to mentally comfort the animal. Afterward, Brutha notes that the lion's den features a set of man-made stairs descending into darkness.

Simony urges Didactylos to address a large gathering of the Turtle Society, but the old philosopher, who has no interest in sparking a revolution, is at loss. Meanwhile, Brutha has found an ancient, sunken temple occupied by a standing pool of water. Brutha is curious about the civilization that once used the temple, but Om finds it unsettling and wishes to leave. A talk of mortality leads Brutha to rebuke Om for his negligent godship.

Didactylos lectures that A'Tuin, the great turtle, does not require anyone's belief. He simply exists. Afterward, Simony and Urn discuss their strategy for assaulting the citadel and their reasons for doing so. The sergeant is frustrated that Didactylos's speech offered nothing symbolic but only mere "facts." Meanwhile, Brutha travels inland until he finds the tracks of the soldiers who injured the lion. He then proceeds, with thirst growing, to follow the tracks back toward Omnia.

Pages 242-266 Analysis

Pratchett examines the strange relationship between truth and belief. The Turtle Society has turned the reality of the great turtle, A'Tuin, into a symbol of their revolution against Omnia. The two have nothing directly to do with each other, and yet the revolutionaries accept A'Tuin's existence as a matter of faith. Unlike the small gods of the desert, however, A'Tuin would continue to exist whether anyone believed in it or not. This suggests that the gods are not as objectively true as A'Tuin.

Brutha has achieved a state of moral enlightenment, placing his principles above his own safety, even above the will of his god. Brutha refuses, yet again, to sacrifice Vorbis, and instead of killing the helpless lion, Brutha risks his life to lend it assistance. Interestingly, while Brutha does ask Om for assistance, it is the request of an equal. This foreshadows the climax of the novel, with Brutha utilizing his conscience-directed freewill and Om following his lead.

Small Gods presents human beings as predisposed to belief. The Turtle Society, having latched on to the idea of Didactylos as a kind of prophet, are disappointed when the philosopher does not affirm their faith. Didactylos, however, is not a man who deals in subjectivity. This is not true of Om. Brutha seems to feel that Om, as a god, has a responsibility to those who believe in him. This responsibility surpasses one of mere personal survival, entering into the realm of moral imperative. In essence, gods should help people because gods can help people.

Pages 267-323

Pages 267-323 Summary

Brutha, his dreams haunted by promises of food and drink, wakes to find Om fending off a gathering of spirits, each a would be god. Later that day, Brutha and Om meet an addled anchorite hermit, St. Ungulant, who lives atop a pole and communes with the small gods of the desert. Half-mad, the hermit dines on hallucinatory food and drink, only taking real sustenance for "medicinal purposes." St. Ungulant's only friend is a seemingly imaginary being that he refers to as "Angus." The hermit tells Brutha how to extract fluid from the leaves of a certain plant. Meanwhile, in Ephebe, the invaders have been defeated and the reinstated Tyrant works to muster an alliance for invading Omnia.

Omnia is close. Brutha begins to consider talking to the people of Omnia, telling them what he has learned. Later, while Brutha sleeps, Vorbis becomes suddenly animate. The deacon brings a heavy rock down on Brutha's head, rendering him unconscious. Then, mistaking another tortoise for Om, Vorbis hurls the animal into a pile of rocks. Vorbis picks up Brutha's unconscious body and begins walking toward Omnia.

Brutha wakes in the Citadel, brother Nhumrod standing over him. The novice master explains that a week ago, the prophet Vorbis brought Brutha out of the desert. Brutha asks after the fate of his tortoise, leading Nhumrod to conclude that Vorbis was right about the sun having affected Brutha's mind. He adds that Vorbis demanded to see Brutha as soon as he awoke.

Upon answering Vorbis's summons, Brutha learns that he is to be elevated to archbishop. Vorbis reminds Brutha of the difference between something which is true and something which is fundamentally true, suggesting that Brutha's recollection from the desert is confused. Listening to Vorbis's claims of prophethood, Brutha realizes that Vorbis fears him. Vorbis shows Brutha a giant furnace fashioned to look like a turtle or a device for punishing heretics.

Without Om, and with Vorbis soon to be declared prophet, Brutha, despite now being an archbishop, works in his garden. Elsewhere, Urn and Simony discuss the manufacture of their war machine, deciding to fashion in the likeness of a turtle. Lu-Tze flits about the encampment of the Turtle Society, doing odd jobs. The old man also stops by to give Brutha a strange pep-talk. Seeing the completed war machine, Didactylos is appalled by Urn's weaponized philosophy. Meanwhile, in the desert, Om stumps along at a tortoise's pace, moving toward Omnia.

While wandering the halls of the citadel, Brutha encounters two infiltrators, one of them being Urn. After a short chat, the two men duck into a tunnel and vanish. Urn and Sergeant Fergmen arrive at the control room of the Doors of the Great Temple. After a short scuffle with some guards, they manage to engage the mechanism. The temple



doors open. Elsewhere, Sergeant Simony tries to start the Tortoise War Machine only to have the ignition lever break off in his hand.

Sensing that Brutha is about to confront Vorbis, and feeling that he is not yet ready, Om devises a desperate plan. Meanwhile, in the throes of religious crisis, Brutha asks Om for a sign. Just then, the Doors of the Great Temple open wide. Within the temple, Vorbis's ordainment as prophet is underway. Brutha walks up to Vorbis, pulls back to strike him across the face, but stays his wrath at the last minute. Nevertheless, the guards immediately drag him away. Vorbis commands that Brutha be tortured to death.

Somewhere, an eagle descends to grab a tortoise from atop a hill. Brutha, meanwhile, his flayed back in agony, wakes to find himself chained to the top of a giant stove fashioned in the shape of a turtle. Far above Omnia, an eagle has Om in its clutches. Om, sensing Brutha's imminent danger, bites down on the eagle's groin. The Great Om mentally contacts the eagle, demanding its full cooperation.

Seeing Brutha in chains, Urn wishes to rush to his rescue. Sergeant Simony, however, seeing that the crowd is displeased at what's happening to the novice, suggests that Brutha would serve better as a martyr. Urn, disgusted, suggests that Simony has become as bad as Vorbis himself. Vorbis taunts Brutha. The novice-turned-archbishop steadfastly denies that Vorbis ever heard the voice of Om. Brutha pronounces, in a whisper that echoes across the courtyard, that Vorbis is going to die. Just then as if on cue, Om falls from the sky on to Vorbis's head, killing the man instantly.

Pages 267-323 Analysis

St. Ungulant represents a kind of nihilism. He lives in a world of almost complete subjectivity, eating shadows and listening to whispers. While the small gods may very well exist, St. Ungulant is all but alone, cut off from his fellow man. On the one hand, this seems tragic, but in another sense Ungulant's experience of the world is no less valid than anyone else's. While his sociocultural worth may be negligible, he is still living the life of a man. St. Ungulant seems very much alive and happy.

As the returning prophet, Vorbis is back to his old tricks. Unlike St. Ungulant, who lives in a illusion not of his own design, Vorbis has taken it upon himself to create a "fundamentally true" version of his own ascension. He is, essentially, trying to write his own mythology. Vorbis no doubt hopes that the ever-gullible Brutha will be confused enough to corroborate his version of what happened. It apparently never occurred to Vorbis that Brutha might find the will, and the courage, to contradict him.

The Doors of the Great Temple, thought to be opened by the breath of Om himself, are revealed to be operated by a complex system of machinery. This suggests that Vorbis isn't the only member of the church to have written his own mythology. The very Citadel itself is perpetuated, at least in part, on a veritable show of smoke and mirrors. This suggests that the Omnian religion is less about spirituality, and more about political control through mass deception.

In his head, Om hears Brutha's agony. The way Om he parses it, however, is quite telling. He hears, "I'm on my back and getting hotter and I'm going to die." This calls back to the earlier scene when Vorbis left Om upside-down to bake in the sun. This suggests that Om has developed a quality that no god before him has demonstrated, which is empathy. Because Om has known suffering and he can recognize suffering in others. Brutha's pain is his own. In allowing himself to be taken by eagle, Om puts Brutha's safety above his own. In doing so, he proves himself worthy of ascension.



Pages 324-357

Pages 324-357 Summary

Seeing Vorbis struck down, the people begin to believe. The Great Om, belief flowing into him, manifests for all to see, shifting between different forms. The god reborn decrees that Brutha is his prophet. Om then melts the temple doors, destroying the commandments writ upon them. He asks that Brutha to write new commandments. After some discussion, Brutha agrees, but insists that Om obey the same rules expected of mortals. Om agrees to do so for a period of one hundred years.

Om warns that an army approaches. Sergeant Simony wishes to fight, but Brutha insists on another way. Brutha advises Om to never manifest again and to never forget the desert. Brutha leaves to do what he may, leaving Om alone with his worshipers. Dhblah asks Om for professional advice. Om gives him the idea to sell turtle paraphernalia.

Vorbis finds himself in the desert, cold and completely alone save for the specter of Death. For the first time in his existence, Vorbis is uncertain, feeling nothing beyond his own thoughts and memories. Death implies that Vorbis, despite being surrounded by so many other souls, may spend an eternity alone.

A navy, comprised of forces from multiple nations, lands on the shore of Omnia. Brutha walks out to greet them. Brutha drops the body of Vorbis at their feet. He suggests that peace would be in everyone's best interest, offering to surrender, pay recompense and even allow foreign religions into Omnia. He wishes Omnia to take its place among the nations of Discworld.

Om, speaking in Brutha's head, voices his opposition to allowing foreign gods in Omnia. Meanwhile, the Omnian army, lead by sergeant Simony and Urn, takes the field behind the steam-powered tortoise. The opposing generals cry trickery. Brutha, calling for patience, walks back to the Omnian line. Om offers to smite the invaders, but Brutha forbids it. Brutha points out, to Urn's shame, that his weapon will be used to fight Urn's own people.

When Simony suggests that Omnia will win by virtue of having god on their side, Brutha punches him. Disgusted, Brutha retreats to sit with Didactylos. Meanwhile, Om travels to Cori Celsti, home of the gods. Seeing that the gods are playing games with mortal lives, Om starts a brawl. In the world of mortals, the sky opens up with lightning, thunder and great winds. The mortals, distracted by the harrowing display, forget their differences.

Hurricane winds dash a ship upon the shore. Sergeant Simony, together with the Ephebian general, leap into action to pull people from the wreckage. Unexpectedly, the gods appear in the heavens, speaking in unison. They collectively tell mankind that their

lives are not a game and that, here and now, they are alive. The skies are now calm and the urge to fight has passed.

Brutha decrees that he will put Simony in charge of dismantling the Quisition while he copies out the library stored in his head. With Didactylos's help, Brutha will change Omnia from theocracy to democracy. With Urn's help, Brutha will see to it that Omnia has architecture and irrigation. Fasta Benj, a tribal fisherman who was unwittingly swept up in the naval coalition arrayed against Omnia, returns to his people, bringing them knowledge of fire, metal and perhaps most significantly, of war.

No one, not even Brutha, notices that Lu-Tze is missing. Back among the Caretakers of History, Luz-Tze confesses to his superior that, owing to the shoddy quality of today's history, he had to nudge things a little. The superior, who seems to be playing chess with Death, complains that Brutha was supposed to die, culminating in a hundred years of war. Lu-Tze admits that his eyesight isn't what it once was. Lu-Tze departs on a couple weeks of vacation. Death asks his opponent to remind him how the "little horse" moves.

Brutha reaches the venerable age of 118. Rather than replace the Doors of the Great Temple, a set of stairs were built over them, a feat which the people see as symbolic in some non-specific way. Omnia's copper-domed library, now the biggest non-magical library in the world, featuring books both philosophical and religious, attracts people from across Discworld.

An elderly Brutha breakfasts on gruel, waiting for a subdeacon to read off his itinerary for the day. The subdeacon tells Brutha that it has been a hundred years since he and Vorbis emerged from the desert. Brutha laughs, suddenly remembering how much time has passed. At long last, he has forgotten something. Brutha is about to say "But here and now, we are alive," but expires mid-sentence.

Death leads the ghost of Brutha through a wall and out into a vast desert. There he finds the hunched figure of Vorbis, paralyzed with fear. Death explains that Vorbis was unable to walk the desert alone. The reaper offers a short litany of Vorbis's crimes. Brutha concedes that it's all true, but he also insists that Vorbis's was a person of significance. Vorbis stands tall and follows Brutha into the desert. Death watches as they walk away.

Pages 324-357 Analysis

In telling Om not to forget the desert, what Brutha is actually saying is that Om must remember what it means to be mortal. The hope is that, in knowing pain and fear, Om will have the empathy necessary to rule as a more just god. Since it was Om's distant and selfish nature that caused him to lose his worshipers in the first place, this tact should prove beneficial for Om as well. That Om agrees to follow his own commandments shows that he has learned something of humility.

Brutha's willingness to approach an army, unarmed, shows that he has now conquered his fear. His willingness to surrender and offer recompense, meanwhile, shows that he has also conquered his ego. Brutha has achieved a state of almost total selflessness. His first concern lay with the safety and happiness of his people. In this way, Brutha has exemplified his most fundamental quality: that of a custodian. Rather than caring for a single garden, however, he now tends to all of Omnia.

Brutha understands that escalation is the worst thing that can happen. If Om intervenes, so will the gods of the invaders. If Simony fields the metal tortoise, foreign nations will soon be fielding metal tortoises of their own. The only solution is to relax, remain peaceable, and strive for tolerance. While Brutha negotiates on Discworld, Om "negotiates" in the heavens, ensuring that mortals are allowed to decide their own fate. While Om's efforts do spill over into the mortal world, they only serve to further unit people of different nationalities.

Brutha delegates authority to the friends and allies he's gained since leaving Om. This demonstrates that he understands this fundamental task of leadership, but also that he understands people and their specific capabilities. Curiously, Brutha suggests that Didactylos would make a good bishop. Considering that Didactylos is fairly agnostic, this suggests that Brutha's idea of for the new church is very different from the old.

Back among the Caretakers of History, it is strongly suggested that Lu-Tze has, in some way, nudged events in favor of a happy ending. This presents Lu-Tze as a proxy for the author himself, managing events in such a way as to make them more fulfilling. Such interference contradicts the earlier moral of life not being a game. Finally, it is revealed that the chess player among the Caretakers is none other than Death himself. The fact that Death does not play well suggests that it would be easy to cheat against him.

Omnia flourishes under Brutha's influence, vindicating his philosophy of governance. He dies one hundred years to the day from the time he emerged from the desert. It is no coincidence that this is also the duration of his contract with Om. In the afterlife, Brutha shows the mercy and compassion he was known for in life, leading Vorbis across the desert to his judgment as he intended to do one hundred years before.

Characters

Brutha

Novice Brutha is initially defined by faith and obedience. He accepts, without question, that Omnian scripture is not only true, but the whole of truth. Faced with questions of morality, Brutha repeatedly demonstrates that he can, using his perfect recall, regurgitate scripture from memory, line and verse. Brutha is, in effect, a walking text. At the start of the novel, that text is the Book of Om. As the story progresses, Brutha pages come to hold different "words."

It's interesting to note, however, that Brutha is illiterate. His religious knowledge was transliterated to him via word of mouth. Everything he knows about Om and of his religion, was filtered through his teachers. He has never read scripture with his own eyes, and therefore has never been allowed to engage the text without an intermediary. This dependence on religious authority sets the stage for Brutha's relationship with Vorbis, a man who uses religion as a tool of manipulation.

As the story progresses, and Brutha sees more of the world, his religion begins to conflict with his conscience. Religious authority, once thought by him infallible, begins to steer him down dark paths. Vorbis presents to Brutha "facts" that are favorably false. When Brutha saves the library, taking its contents into his own memory, this is a symbolic rise from ignorance to enlightenment. Brutha has replaced dogma with truth. Once Brutha emerges from the desert, where he applies his new found wisdom, he is a changed man.

Vorbis

Vorbis is the very definition of a psychopath. He is charismatic, amoral, and completely devoid of empathy. This is a man who would overturn a tortoise, leaving it bake in the sun, without feeling so much as a twinge of guilt or shame. This is also an individual who would torture, maim or kill as he sees fit, believing that, if Om did not wish him to do such things, Om would, in his omnipotence, put a stop to it. This ideology serves to insulate Vorbis against accountability, since one cannot question the man's actions without metaphorically placing themselves above the judgment of Om.

One of Vorbis's defining characteristics is his monstrous sense of entitlement. Whether or not he believes himself to be chosen by his god, Vorbis most certainly thinks that he deserves the fear and respect that he receives. With Brutha seemingly vanquished, Brutha says "So much for Om, perhaps?" and then goes on to openly declare himself the embodiment of Om's justice. This suggests that Vorbis's faith has been cynical all along, the church being a mere vehicle for his personal ambition.

In the afterlife, Vorbis is alone. Unable to see the thousands of other souls passing by, he has only the echoes of his thoughts and memories to keep himself company. Since



the desert is a reflection of the soul, the implication is that Vorbis is spiritually empty. In life, he viewed others as either pawns or obstacles. Now, in death, he is without friends. Only Brutha, with his messianic compassion, can pull Vorbis from the depths of his self-imposed hell and lead him, once more, through the desert.

The Great Om

The Great Om begins the novel as an impotent version of a wrathful god, only a little better than a child throwing a tantrum. As the story progresses, the once mighty deity learns something of humility and weakness. Om sees with his own eyes the horrors that have been wrought in his name and comes to understand that he is accountable to man just as man is accountable to him. By the novel's conclusion, Om has formed a partnership with Brutha, agreeing to be governed by the same rules that govern men. This serves to humanize Om.

Lu-Tze

Lu-Tze is a caretaker of history. He is sent to Omnia to carefully observe unfolding events, but winds up becoming directly involved.

Caretaker of History

The Caretakers of History are an order of long-lived monks dedicated to observing, controlling, and recording history.

Brother Nhumrod

Brother Nhumroid is the master of novices and Brutha's direct superior.

Sasho

Sasho is the former secretary to Vorbis. He is tried by the Quisition and found guilty of spying.

General Iam Fri'it

General Iam Fri'it commands the Divine Legion of the Citadel of Om.

The Divine Legion

The Divine Legion is the army of Omnian church.



Bishop Drunah

Bishop Drunah is the secretary to the Congress of Iams.

The Congress of Iams

The Congress of Iams is the legislative assembly of the Omnian church.

Brother Murduck

Brother Murduck was ambassador to Ephebe. Supposedly he was stoned to death for preaching the word of Om, but in truth he was martyred by the church of Om as justification for war.

The Turtle Society

The Turtle Society is an underground organization bent on the overthrow of the Omnian theocracy.

Dhblah

Dhblah is a smarmy traveling merchant. He sells low-quality desserts.

Didactylos

Didactylos is the Ephebian philosopher who wrote *De Chelonian Mobile*, or "The Turtle Moves," the foundational text of The Turtle Society. He is blind and carries a lamp without oil.

Urn

Urn, an Ephebian philosopher, is the student of Didactylos. He is also the inventor of the steam-powered boat and the tortoise war machine.

Death

Death is the traditional grim reaper, responsible for ushering the souls of the newly dead into whatever lay beyond. He is a recurring character in the Discworld series.

Sergeant Simony

Sergeant Simony is a Divine Legionnaire and secretly a member of the Turtle Society.

St. Ungulant

St. Ungulant is a shamanistic hermit who lives in the desert among the small gods.

Angus

Angus is the not-quite-imaginary friend of St. Ungulant the hermit.

Inquisitors

Inquisitors are the torturers of the Omnian church.

Exquistors

Exquistors, unlike the inquisitors, do not themselves participate in torture. Instead, they are the individuals who arrange for prisoners to be tortured.

Ur-Gilash

Ur-Gilash was the chief god of the Omnian region before Om's usurpation. His fate is unknown. Ur-Gilash represents the end that Om would avoid.

Abraxas

Abraxas is an atheistic philosopher known for routinely angering the gods. He wrote the book *On Religion*.

Fergman

Fergman is the Turtle Society soldier who infiltrated the Citadel with Urn.

General Argavisti

General Argavisti, of Ephebe, is one of the commanders leading the assault on Omnia.



Admiral Rham-ap-Efan

Admiral Rham-ap-Efan leads the navy of Djelibeybi in the assault against Omnia.

Fasta Benj

Fasta Benj is a fisherman from a small village whose vessel was unwittingly swept up in the armada assaulting Omnia.

Imperiator Borvorious

Imperiator Borvorious, of Tsort, commands the largest navy participating in the attack on Omnia.

P'tang-P'tang

P'tang-P'tang is the newt god worshiped by a small population of island-dwelling fishermen.

Objects/Places

Discworld

Discworld is the world of Small Gods. It is a disc-shaped world situated on the back of four elephants that in turn, stand on the back of a giant turtle.

Omnia

The primary setting of Small Gods, Omnia is an oppressive theocracy dedicated to the god Om.

Ankh-Morpork

Ankh-Morpork is one of the larger, more populous cities of Discworld. It is mentioned several times in the latter half of the book.

The Hub

The hub refers to the mountain range located at the center of Discworld. Characters who mistakenly believe that Discworld is spherical refer to the hub as "the pole."

The Books of History

The Books of History are a flawless record of past events. They are the books from which all history is derived.

The Citadel of Om

The Citadel of Om is located in the city of Kom in the nation of Omnia. It is the seat of power for the Omnian church.

Kom

Kom is the capital city of Omnia, which is located between the deserts of Klatch and the jungles of Howandaland.

The Pits of Justice

The Pits of Justice are located below the Citadel of Om. It is home to the Quisition. This is where heretics are questioned, tortured, and imprisoned.

The Doors of the Great Temple

The Doors of the Great Temple are thought to be made of 40 tons of gilded bronze. They are said to be opened by the breath of Om himself.

The Mechanical Tortoise

The Mechanical Tortoise is a war machine armored with interlocking plates similar to those of a tortoise.

The Tiny Mountain

The Tiny Mountain is the rock given to Brutha by Lu-Tze. Brutha imagines that it is much heavier than it seems, comprised of tiny tons.

Ephebe

Ephebe is a coastal nation loosely modeled after ancient Athens. It is known for liberality, polytheism, and its many philosophers.

The Giant Turtle

The Giant Turtle is torture device based on a wood-burning stove. The victim is strapped to the "shell" while the fire within slowly heats the surface of stove, thus cooking the subject alive.

Themes

Truth

As Brutha's character develops, so does the story's treatment of truth. Initially, Brutha's understanding of truth is based on divine scripture and the infallibility of the clergy. Although his brother has a perfect memory, he is also illiterate. This means that Brutha's education was oral, spoon-fed to him by his grandmother, interpreted for him by others rather than self-built by an authentic engagement with scripture. This means that, at the beginning of the story, Brutha's understanding of truth is based on trust, trust in his religious authorities.

Ideologically, Brutha is torn between Vorbis and Om. This is the experience that Brutha refers to as "doubling." On the surface, since Om is also Brutha's god, this appears to be a struggle between religion and faith. In practice, the dissonance is between dogma and reason. Vorbis's concept of "fundamental truth" is based upon the assumed infallibility of his knowledge, and is perpetuated by lies, manipulation and murder. Om's truth, on the other hand, is based more on questions, undermining the assumptions upon which Brutha has based his very existence.

Ultimately, the moral of *Small God's* is that truth is not subject to opinion. What is true is considered true regardless. Even though the rational mind may reject the idea of a disc-shaped world, sitting on elephants' backs, themselves standing on a giant turtle, it is nevertheless true of Discworld. When mankind rejects truth in favor of a more palatable explanation, the only way to maintain that more explanation is through oppression. Omnia intimidates, tortures and kills to defend its position, but ultimately the turtle still moves.

Belief

Pratchett depicts religious belief as something of a two-way street. The gods grow strong on the faith of mortals. The mortals, on the other hand, are allowed the comfort of knowing that they have something like a divine parent watching over them. In practice, however, Pratchett's gods are anything but paternal, seeming childish, capricious and self-serving. This dynamic parallels the real-world stereotype of the politician who, having been elected by the people, now uses his power for his own gratification.

Pratchett also suggests that belief can become misdirected. Omnia grows to fear the Quisition more than god that it supposedly represents. The consequence is that Om is stripped of his godly powers and frozen into the form of a tortoise. Later in the story, the Turtle Society comes to see A'Tuin, the great turtle upon which Discworld rests, not as the empirical truth that represents, but as a symbol of revolution. The consequence is that the revolution loses sight of what it is fighting for: the truths that the church would deny.

Small Gods could be read as a cautionary tale against the dangers of blind faith. Brutha invests wholeheartedly in the tenets of his religion, trusting that they represent the will of Om, and that the Great God Om is wise and knowing. Brutha eventually learns, however, that his revered scripture originated with opportunistic men like Vorbis, not Om, and that Om himself is both fallible and largely uncaring. Until Brutha knows Om personally, he can never be certain about the basis of his beliefs.

Justice

Small Gods has a definite opinion regarding the nature of justice. In Omnia, valued behaviors include obedience, unquestioning faith and self-denial. Brutha, however, who embodies these characteristics, is neither promoted nor respected within the church. This suggests that the Church's stated values are not in line with its reality. Vorbis, on the other hand, who uses faith as a vehicle for his own ambition, is widely regarded as an unofficial member of the senior clergy. His use of fear and intimidation produces results. This suggests that the citadel is, at its core, merely a crude political entity.

Vorbis considers himself to be the embodiment of Om's justice. He says as much in the moments leading up to this death. This suggests that Vorbis, as a divinely inspired agent of the Great God, is above reproach. If he suspects someone of wrongdoing, they are guilty by definition. He is, after all, infallible in his judgment. Vorbis also believes that there can be no punishment without a crime. If someone is punished, by whatever means, they are deserving of said punishment. Since this model of justice is ostensibly based on the will of Om, who does not answer to man, it is entirely without accountability.

Small Gods argues in favor of constitutional justice. Under Brutha's direction, Om is bound by the same rules that govern mortals. In effect, this means that the Omnian god answers to a higher authority than himself. He is bound by a contract, which reflects an idea of fairness and compromise. Om gets his worshipers. Mankind, meanwhile, gets a more compassionate god. Pratchett seems to be arguing that, for justice to be possible, religion cannot have power over government.

Style

Point of View

Small Gods is written from a third-person and omniscient perspective. While most of the action follows the protagonist, Brutha, there are several scenes in which Brutha does not appear. While the focus is apt to shift between characters, the reader is only privy to one internal world at a time, with the narrative strongly influenced by the personality of the active character. Following Brutha, for example, the world seems idealized and hopeful, whereas when the story follows Om, the perspective is more cynical and jaded.

Small Gods is a highly allegorical work and clearly intended as a vehicle for humanist ideology. The work prizes reason over faith, depicting the gods as fallible, interfering, and disconnected from the cares of human beings. Instead, the narrative places higher priority on matters of day-to-day existence, such as governance, fairness and doing right by one's fellow man. While it wouldn't be precisely accurate to call the work "secular," the gods are so humanized as to lack divinity. They metaphorically fill the real-world roles of kings, aristocrats or dictators.

Although the author is not himself a character in the story, Pratchett is nevertheless felt as the supreme authority of Discworld. While the characters may be wrong, confused or uncertain, what the author presents as true is undeniably so. The reader, for example, can trust that the world is shaped like a disc, that it rests on the backs of four elephants, and that those elephants in turn, stand on the back of a giant turtle. Pratchett himself is the authority that establishes for the reader that the Omnians are wrong in their opinions and views.

Setting

The world of Small Gods is called Discworld. As the name implies, Discworld is not spherical, but rather is flat and round. It is situated on the back of four elephants, which in turn stand on the back of a single giant turtle known as A'tuin. A'tuin swims through the nothingness of the universe. The sun orbits the disc, rising above the rim during the day, and passing below the disc at night. The mechanics of Discworld are a central concern of Small Gods.

The novel begins and ends in the desert nation of Omnia. Omnia is an oppressive theology governed by the Omnian Church. The nation's official stance, enforced by the church Quisition, is that the Om is the one true god. The nation also believes, all evidence to the contrary, that the world is spherical and that it orbits the sun. To contradict the Omnian Church is to risk torture and death. Omnia is also aggressive and expansionist, constituting a military threat to any nation of differing ideals.

The middle section of the novel is set in Ephebe. Ephebe, patterned after ancient Athens, is a nation situated between the desert and the sea. A foil to Omnia, Ephebe is

democratic, religiously tolerant government, which prizes philosophy and education. Ephebe's erudite nature gives it the technological advantage to repel an Omnian naval assault. When Ephebe is briefly conquered, its citizenry, being accustomed to freedom and thus unwilling to be dominated, are able to liberate themselves.

Language and Meaning

Vorbis's concept of "fundamental truth" afflicts Brutha with a kind of Orwellian doublethink, as the novice is repeatedly forced to reconcile contradictory ideas. Murduck was murdered in Ephebe, but somehow also died in Omnia. Vorbis lead Brutha through the desert, even though Brutha, with his infallible memory, remembers it the other way around. By continually playing with the definition of true and false, Vorbis keeps the ever-obedient Brutha confused and misdirected.

Symbolism plays an important role in *Small Gods*. The identity of the Omnian Church, for example, is articulated with symbols: the statues, the holy horns, the Doors of the Great Temple. Symbols, however, are also mutable, subject to change over time. The gods themselves are symbolic, their identities drifting based on how they are understood by their worshipers. A badly carved statue, for example, can change the identity of a god. A god worshiped by multiple cultures, meanwhile, might become faceted, taking on different faces for each group of worshipers.

The danger of symbols, Pratchett warns, is that their significance may eclipse the very things they were intended to represent. As with Vorbis's "fundamental truth," symbols can serve as a kind of surrogate truth. Vorbis's Quisition, for example, inspires so much fear in the Omnian people that they begin to fear the church more than the god it supposedly represents. As a result, the Great God Om, deprived of reverence, loses his godly powers. Similarly, the Society of the Turtle begins to think of "the turtle" as a symbol of revolution, rather than the objective truth to which it originally referred. The larger significance is thus lost.

Structure

Small Gods' chapters have neither name nor number. Instead, different sections are separated by a single blank line. The earliest sections concern Om's efforts to convince Brutha that he is the Great God Om trapped in the body of a tortoise. From there, Brutha and Om are swept up into the invasion of Ephebe and eventually stranded in the desert. The final sections involve the near-war between Omnia and its neighbors. The story culminates with Omnia's democratic rebirth under the wise leadership of Brutha.

Small Gods' narrative is strongly bound to the character of Brutha. While there is a sense that larger plots are moving forward independently of the protagonist, the focus of the story is on Brutha and his trials and tribulations. While there are indeed several scenes in which Brutha does not appear, they generally serve as either context or contrast with Brutha and his trials. This makes the story more about Brutha, and the choices he makes, than about the overarching situation in which he finds himself.

The novel is framed with the character of Lu-Tze, beginning and ending with the Caretakers of History. The story's progress, however, is measured by Brutha's arc from faithful, to cynic to visionary. The earliest sections involve the slow deconstruction of Brutha's belief system as he is repeatedly forced to address the way his ideology contradicts empirical truth. The final chapters involve Brutha's discovery of a new ideology, one which works with the world rather than against it.

Quotes

"The turtle moves" (pg. 16.)

"There's very good eating on one of these, you know" (pg. 34.)

"Gods don't like people not doing much work. People who aren't busy all the time might start to think" (pg. 76.)

"But of course we are not prey to such superstitions" (pg. 102.)

"Vorbis would have been better. Be rational. A man like that could do anything!" (pg. 106.)

"I imagine that fish have no word for water" pg. 160.)

"They were sure all right. They were sure it wasn't them in the pit" (pg. 172.)

"Look at us, stuck in the past. Held back by a repressive monotheism. Shunned by our neighbors. What good has our God been to us? Gods? Hah" (pg. 207.)

"but why is it that the heathens and the barbarians seem to have the best place to go when they die?" (pg. 225.)

"In a hundred years' time, he'll be dead anyway. We'll all be dead." —page 260

"Men should die for lies. But the truth is too precious to die for" (pg. 327.)

"We get the gods we deserve" (pg. 340.)

Topics for Discussion

What is it about Didactylos's book that the Turtle Society finds so inspiring?

Did Lu-Tze do anything to significantly change the story's outcome and if so, what?

Why does Vorbis carry Brutha out of the desert if he feared him?

Why does Om briefly wish to have Vorbis, rather than Brutha as his prophet?

In what way is Brutha's illiteracy similar to Didactylos's blindness?

Why does the church lie about the operation of the Doors of the Great Temple?

If Brutha had abandoned Vorbis in the desert, how might the story be different?

In the afterlife, Vorbis is too afraid to cross the desert. Why? What does he fear?