



THE SUBTLE KNIFE

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Subtle Knife is the second part of the trilogy that began with **The Golden Compass**. That first book was set in a world like ours, but different. This book begins in our own world.

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In **The Subtle Knife**, readers are introduced to Will Parry, a young boy living in modern-day Oxford, England. Will is only twelve years old, but he bears the responsibilities of an adult. Following the disappearance of his explorer-father, John Parry, during an expedition in the North, Will became parent, provider and protector to his frail, confused mother. And it's in protecting her that he becomes a murderer, too: he accidentally kills a man who breaks into their home to steal valuable letters written by John Parry. After placing his mother in the care of a kind friend, Will takes those letters and sets off to discover the truth about his father.

Will does indeed make an astonishing discovery, but it's not about his father. Along a busy road, he happens upon an extraordinary window in the air. Almost invisible to the eye, it opens into an entirely different world. Anxious to remain hidden, Will ventures through this window into the shimmering, haunted city of Cittàgazze, where he meets Lyra Belacqua and her dæmon, Pantalaimon, who have also wandered into Cittàgazze from yet another world while searching for the answers behind Dust. Aside from Will and his new companions, this city is eerie, empty and silent. The people have fled to the hills to escape the Specters, phantom-like beings that feed on the consciousness of grown-ups, leaving them zombie-like and void forever after. Only the children, who are safe from the Specters, venture out to scavenge for food.

Although safe in Cittàgazze, the two pass through the window to Will's Oxford knowing that answers to their questions lie therein. Will inquires about his father's expedition to the North and learns that it included a study of atmospheric particles. And meanwhile, Lyra seeks out a scholar who can tell her more about Dust. The scholar Lyra finds is a certain scientist named Dr. Mary Malone, a member of the Dark Matter Research Unit, who has discovered the existence of Shadows, the very same mysterious entity as the Dust of Lyra's world. But even more startling is that Mary Malone has found that in these Shadows, or Dark Matter, or Dust, there is consciousness. These particles are conscious, and their awareness is what powers Lyra's alethiometer, and what surrounds all human thought and matter. Mary Malone's next task is to find a way to communicate with these particles, for they will tell her about the vital role she plays in the fate of the universe.

When Lyra and Will return to Cittàgazze, Will reads the letters his father wrote during his final expedition in the North, and he learns that his father knew about the windows between worlds. His father planned to travel through a window to explore another world - just as Will had done himself. For Will, this was finally something both father and son could share, but more importantly, it meant that his father could be alive. Had he ventured through that window, John Parry could be worlds away, but somewhere he was alive. And Will resolves to find him.

Lyra, meanwhile, pays a second visit to Dr. Mary Malone, and this time there are authorities waiting to question Lyra about her interest in Shadow particles and Dark Matter. She inadvertently reveals her involvement with Will, immediately flees the lab, and runs straight into Sir Charles Latrom, a deceiving man who has seen Lyra work the alethiometer and realizes its value. Flustered by her escape from the lab, Lyra discovers too late that Sir Charles has stolen her alethiometer. When Will and Lyra try to get it back, they learn its ransom: a certain knife located in the high tower of Cittàgazze.

The two young friends enter the tower together and climb to the very top, where Will faces a ferocious fight for the knife. Will ultimately triumphs, making him the rightful bearer of the knife. This is the Subtle Knife, and it is an object of extraordinary and devastating power. There is nothing sharper or more deadly, and its bearer is capable of cutting entries into countless other worlds. Armed with the subtle knife, Will and Lyra retrieve her alethiometer by outsmarting Sir Charles, who they discover has been conspiring with Lyra's own mother, Mrs. Coulter. With knife and alethiometer in hand, Will and Lyra return to Cittàgazze to resume the search for Will's father.

In the meantime, Lyra's old friend, Lee Scoresby, the Texan aeronaut, has located a certain explorer, Stanislaus Grumman, a man with a legendary following. Grumman was a renowned explorer from the far North immersed in investigating Dust. He is rumored to have the most unusual osprey daemon, and it was said that he once rejected the love of a witch. Now a shaman, his tribal Tartar name is Jopari, a.k.a. John Parry. He is Will's very own father. While on his last expedition, John Parry stumbled through a window into another world. He found himself in the world of Specters, witnessed their horror, and fled into yet another world. Unable to find his way back to the window that led to home, he adopted the persona of Stanislaus Grumman and endeavored to learn everything he could about this Dust and its impact on the universe. Most importantly, Grumman learned of the subtle knife and the critical role its bearer plays in the fate of the entire universe. Grumman's task, with the help of Lee Scoresby, is to find the bearer of the subtle knife and inform him of the road that lies ahead.

What neither Will nor Grumman realizes is that this ultimate meeting is not between knife bearer and shaman, but rather between father and son. High on a mountaintop in the total blackness of the night, Will encounters Grumman who tells Will that he, with his knife, stands in the balance between the forces of Good and Evil and that his destiny lies in finding Lord Asriel. Curious to see this knife bearer's face, Grumman lights a match and the moment of light is enough for each to realize whom he is facing. In the next instant, Will's father is killed by the scorned witch, intent on revenge, and once again, Will loses the father he's never known.

Will climbs down from the mountain to return to Lyra, but instead finds two angels awaiting him. Lyra is gone; her alethiometer remains behind. Clearly, she has been taken away against her will. Friendless, fatherless and confused, Will has yet another journey ahead of him, a journey that will finally fulfill his destiny and reveal the secret of Dust.

READER'S GUIDE

QUESTIONS · SUGGESTED READING

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The questions, discussion topics, and author information that follow are intended to enhance your group's reading of **The Subtle Knife**. **The Subtle Knife** is Book Two of Philip Pullman's trilogy "His Dark Materials". In Book One, **The Golden Compass**, young Lyra Belacqua journeys through "a universe like ours but different in many ways." The most striking difference between Lyra's world and ours is the existence of daemons. These spirit-creatures, physical manifestations of the human soul, can change shape until their human companions reach adolescence. Then each daemon settles into the animal form that best reflects the inner nature of its human counterpart.

In **The Golden Compass**, Lyra discovers that her mother, Mrs. Coulter, is conducting experiments in which children are severed from their daemons, turning them into emotionless, almost inhuman beings. Mrs. Coulter and her colleagues are doing this to learn more about a substance called "Dust," which seems to accumulate on humans when they reach maturity. While many fear Dust, both Mrs. Coulter and Lyra's father, Lord Asriel, see it as the source of great power. **The Golden Compass** concludes with Lord Asriel harnessing the power of Dust to create an opening in the atmosphere of his world, forging a bridge to another universe. This he fearlessly crosses, leaving Mrs. Coulter behind. Lyra perceives that Dust is good and vows to discover its secrets with the help of her "golden compass", or alethiometer, a truth-seeking device. And so Lyra and her daemon, Pantalaimon, follow Lord Asriel into the other world.

The Subtle Knife begins in our own world, where Will Parry, driven by curiosity about his mysterious, missing father and concern for his vulnerable, disturbed mother, accidentally kills an intruder. While fleeing, he finds a "window" into a sunlit otherworld. What could be a better refuge than a hidden universe? But this universe is a strange, empty place: a city that seems to have been abandoned in such haste that food is left rotting on plates at a sidewalk cafe. The inhabitants of the city, Cittágazze, have fled from the invading Specters, ghostlike creatures that devour the souls of adults. But Specters are harmless and invisible to children, and soon Will meets another fugitive child in Cittágazze: Lyra. Although he does not know it, their lives are soon to become forever intertwined when Lyra's alethiometer gives her one simple command: Help Will find his father.

The richly imagined world of Book One seems almost quiet and simple when compared to the turmoil of Book Two. Here "Dust" is called "dark matter" and has been joined by a myriad of other complex phenomena, including the Specters and bene elim (angels). One protagonist has been replaced by two, Lyra and Will. Most significant of all, Lyra's truth-giving compass seems to pale in comparison to the power of Will's new acquisition, the subtle knife, the Æsahættr, the knife that will cut ANYTHING. What can it mean to be the bearer of such an instrument?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE SUBTLE KNIFE

1. What is wrong with Will's mother? Are her concerns real, imagined, or both? Why and how does Will protect her?
2. What does it mean when Lyra assumes Will's daemon is "inside"? Do the people in Will's world, our world, have daemons at all?
3. Why does Will's being a murderer enable Lyra to trust him? What characters do Serafina Pekkala and Lee Scoresby decide to trust, and is their trust warranted? In what other ways does trust play an important role in this novel?
4. How has Will learned to make himself unnoticed by others? Relate this to the witches' ability to make themselves invisible.
5. How do the Shadows that communicate with Lyra through the computer relate to dark matter and/or Dust? If Lyra can understand the Shadows as she understands the alethiometer, then is the computer also acting as a truth-giving device? What is the real origin of the Shadows' messages?
6. On page 188, Giacomo Paradisi tells Will the rules for bearing the subtle knife. Why do you think Will must "never open without closing"? What did Paradisi mean by "a base purpose"? Compare these formal guidelines to the instinctive rules Lyra obeys when using the alethiometer.
7. Why is it significant that the possessors of the alethiometer and the subtle knife are children? What is the difference between innocence and experience? What has happened to Mrs. Coulter's soldiers who have undergone intercision?
8. Lord Asriel is mentioned several times throughout the story, yet we never directly see him. He is planning a war that he cannot win without an object that he does not know exists. What does Lord Asriel symbolize in **The Subtle Knife**?
9. What did the "Cave" mean when it told Dr. Malone that she must be "the serpent"? Where do you think she is at the end of the story? Where is Lyra?
10. In what way can a knife that divides pathways between worlds and can sever bone, rock, and steel be called "subtle"?

DISCUSSION TOPICS IF YOU HAVE READ THE GOLDEN COMPASS AND THE SUBTLE KNIFE

1. In Book One, Lyra is clearly a leader. In Book Two, she seems to have become a follower, a servant to Will's cause. Who is more powerful, Will or Lyra? Whose cause is more important? Is it the same cause?
2. Is the "psychic death" caused by severing the same as that caused by the Specters? Compare Tony Makarios and the servants at Bolvangar (Book One) to Tullio's actions after Will takes the subtle knife and the final thoughts of Lena Feldt (Book Two). Relate these to the "natural" deaths suffered by Lee Scoresby and John Parry.
3. Armored bears, witches, severed children and adults, cliff-ghasts, Spectres, and angels are beings with spiritual qualities different from humans. Why does the author introduce so many creatures with alternative soul-states?
4. By the end of **The Subtle Knife**, we have learned that both Will's father, John Parry/Stanislaus Grumman, and Lyra's father, Lord Asriel, are powerful men who have traveled between worlds. Yet one is called a shaman while the other is preparing to be a general. What is the relationship between these two men? Compare it to the relationship between Will and Lyra.

5. **The Golden Compass** takes place in a "closed" world where Lyra finds guidance through her newly-found alethiometer. In **The Subtle Knife**, boundaries between worlds have been broken, Lyra loses her alethiometer, and Will becomes the reluctant bearer of the knife. Explore the many parallels and opposites established between **The Golden Compass** and **The Subtle Knife**. How is the dualistic imagery of Lyra's and Will's worlds counterpointed by Cittaágazze?
6. Citing a passage from John Milton's **Paradise Lost**, Philip Pullman has named his trilogy "His Dark Materials." How might this citation, and the novels' emerging themes, relate to the following quote:

"The prince of darkness is a gentleman." - William Shakespeare (King Lear)



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The Prydain Chronicles by Lloyd Alexander

The Foundation Trilogy by Isaac Asimov

The Wonderful World of Oz by L. Frank Baum

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

The Sword of Shannara by Terry Brooks

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll

2001: A Space Odyssey by Arthur C. Clarke

A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking

A Swiftly Tilting Planet and **A Wind in the Door** by Madeleine L'Engle

The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis

The Giver by Lois Lowry

Song of the Lioness and **The Immortals** by Tamora Pierce

The Dark Is Rising series by Susan Cooper

Paradise Lost and **Paradise Regained** by John Milton

The Hobbit and **The Lord of the Rings** by J. R. R. Tolkien

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Teachers can use this guide to discuss the His Dark Materials trilogy with their students. Here are several themes, topics, and other connections appropriate for class work and discussion. For use with grades 7-12.

About these Books

Philip Pullman's intriguing and haunting trilogy sends fantasy lovers on an incredible journey through other worlds where they meet mysterious creatures and a brave and extraordinary 12-year-old girl, Lyra Belacqua, who has the power to seek truth.



The Golden Compass, young Lyra Belacqua journeys to the far North to save her best friend and other kidnapped children from terrible experiments by evil scientists.



The Subtle Knife takes Lyra to Cittàgazze, where she meets Will Parry, a fugitive boy from our own universe who becomes her ally and friend. On their journey from world to world, Lyra and Will's lives become forever intertwined as they uncover a deadly secret.



And finally, in The Amber Spyglass, Lyra and Will, with the help of two tiny Gallivespian spies and Iorek Byrnison, the armored bear, set out to a world where no other living soul has ever gone, to make their most haunting discovery yet.

In the Classroom

The Amber Spyglass is the crowning conclusion to the intrigue begun in The Golden Compass and The Subtle Knife. Each of the novels in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy offers an exciting adventure that takes readers, young and old, on a journey through different dimensions to unknown worlds. The electrifying plots and unusual and mysterious characters make these novels excellent choices for reading aloud.

Themes of good vs. evil, betrayal, courage, fear, trust, and love raise important questions, offering students a wonderful opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue. This guide offers questions for discussion and includes activities that connect the language arts, social studies, science, music, and art curriculum.

Pre-Reading Activity

Religion plays an important part in many works of fantasy, which often include themes of good versus evil and characters searching to understand the basic foundations of their faiths. Ask students to use the Bible, a storybook, or an encyclopedia to read about the Garden of Eden and the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3). Have students discuss original sin, why God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and how Adam and Eve's lives changed once they gained knowledge.

Thematic Connections

Betrayal - Ask the class to look up the various meanings of the word betrayal. How does Lyra betray Roger in *The Golden Compass*? Discuss whether she was aware that she was betraying him. How does she try to rectify this betrayal? What is Lyra's great betrayal in *The Amber Spyglass*? How do Lyra's mother and father betray her--and then protect her? Discuss how Lyra deals with these betrayals.

In *The Subtle Knife*, Will's mother is in a serious emotional state. He takes her to stay with his piano teacher while he sets out to recover important papers that belong to his father. Discuss whether Will is betraying his mother or helping her in her time of need.

What other characters in His Dark Materials trilogy are guilty of betrayal? Ask the class to draw a parallel between the betrayal in Pullman's novels to that found in the story of Adam and Eve. How is the betrayal in the novels important to the basic conflict in the stories? Ask students to discuss whether reading His Dark Materials has altered their understanding of the act of betrayal.

Good vs. Evil - The trilogy challenges our assumptions about good and evil: some witches are good, while some members of the church are evil. What are other examples of unexpected forms of good and evil in the trilogy? At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, what do Will and Lyra learn about good and evil, about actions versus labels? How will this affect the way they will live the rest of their lives?

What does Lyra mean when she tells Will in *The Subtle Knife* that his dæmon is "inside"? Discuss whether people in Will's world--our world--have dæmons at all. What animal form do you think Lyra's dæmon will take when she becomes an adult? Explain.

In *The Subtle Knife*, the soldiers in the land of Bolvangar are cutting childrens' dæmons away. Why does Dr. Lanselius consider this evil work? How does Lord Asriel's mission reflect evil?

Courage - Have students trace Lyra's courage as she travels from one dimension to another. At what point does she almost lose her courage? How does Will show courage in *The Subtle Knife*? Discuss how Lyra and Will help one another sustain their courage throughout their quests in *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*.

Engage the class in a discussion about whether having possession of the alethiometer and the subtle knife either gives Lyra and Will courage or threatens it. How does it take courage to leave one another and return to their own worlds at the end of the trilogy?

Fear - At the end of *The Golden Compass*, Lyra is afraid of her father, yet admires him. Why does he evoke fear in her? How can she be afraid and admire him at the same time? How is fear the basis of Will's mother's illness? Discuss how fear is related to courage. Engage the class in a discussion about how Lyra and Will's fears contribute to their courage as they face the evil forces.

Trust- In *The Subtle Knife*, Will accidentally kills an intruder who wants his father's personal documents and then labels himself a murderer. Why does this enable Lyra to trust him? Which characters do Serafina Pekkala and Lee Scoresby decide to trust? Is their trust warranted? Who are the characters that Lyra once trusted, but in the end finds that she cannot? In what other way does trust play an important role in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy?

Love - In *The Amber Spyglass*, Will says to Serafina, "Thank you, Serafina Pekkala, for rescuing us at the belvedere and for everything else. Please be kind to Lyra for as long as she lives. I love her more than anyone has ever been loved." (p. 509) Trace the development of Will and Lyra's love for one another from the time they first meet in *The Subtle Knife* until they part in *The Amber Spyglass*. How does their love affect the fate of the living--and the dead? How does Lyra's adventure help her to discover a new meaning of love?

In *The Subtle Knife*, Will "loved her [his mother] so much he would have died to protect her." (p. 9) How is his search for his father related to his love for his mother? Why can't the subtle knife cut Will's love for his mother?

Interdisciplinary Connections

Language Arts - *The Golden Compass* has been described as a heroic novel. Ask students to identify the qualities of a hero. Who are the heroes in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy? Have students select a hero from one of the novels and write a poem about that hero. Encourage students to share their poems in class.

It is quite common for writers of fantasy to create their own vocabularies. Vocabulary, including the names of characters, is often symbolic of the underlying themes and messages of the story. Make a glossary for Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy that represents the unique vocabulary he created.

Philip Pullman is very successful at creating terror in all three novels of his trilogy. Ask students to review the novels and select a scene or episode that is especially terrifying to them. Then ask them to rewrite the passage as a horror story. Their stories should have a beginning, middle, and an end. Some students may wish to illustrate their stories.

Social Studies - At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, Will and Mary return to their world and Will accompanies Mary to her flat. Mary explains to Serafina that she can't just give Will a permanent home because in her world you must follow rules and regulations regarding keeping children. Find out today's rules regarding foster care. What is the purpose of foster care? Discuss whether Will would qualify for foster care. Would Mary qualify as a foster mother?

Art - Masks have been used through the ages to represent animals, monsters, supernatural spirits, dream creatures, etc. Ask students to think about which animal would most likely be their dæmon and create a mask to represent that animal. Allow students time to share their masks and to explain why they chose that particular animal as their dæmon.

Health - Mary says that Will's mother sounds like a "classic manic-depressive." Ask students to research the symptoms and characteristics of manic-depression or bipolar disorder. How is it different from other types of depression? From anxiety? Research the treatments for various types of depression. What type of treatment is Will's mother likely to need?

Science - In Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, Lyra has the alethiometer, Will has the knife, and Dr. Malone has the spyglass to aid them in their quests. Though these items are fictitious, scientists have always used tools and instruments to conduct investigations. Have students research the type of instruments used through the ages and construct a time line that reveals their development. What instruments do scientists use today?

Music - Music plays an important role in modern fantasy and science fiction films. Play music from films such as Star Wars and ask students to analyze the music as it applies to plot development. How is music an important link in communicating story? Divide students into three groups and assign each a novel in the trilogy. Instruct them to locate music that would be appropriate for a film of their assigned novel. Allow time to share the selections.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

There maybe unfamiliar words throughout Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy. Ask students to jot down words that are new to them and try to define the words taking clues from the context of the novels. Such words may include:

In *The Golden Compass*: languid (p. 13), renegade (p.30), malodorous (p. 44), inveigled (p. 46), sanctimonious (p. 60), desultorily (p. 63), soporific (p. 111), and stanchion (p. 274).

In *The Subtle Knife*: despotic (p. 43), malevolent (p. 44), putrefaction (p. 79), parapet (p. 175), and academicians (p. 281).

In *The Amber Spyglass*: lee (p. 8), perpetual (p. 16), vortex (p. 18), decoction (p. 20), propitiate (p. 23), serpentine (p. 29), impregnable (p. 42), hexagram (p. 65), adamant (p. 120), ruthless (p. 128), and fiercest (p. 387).

Teaching ideas prepared by Pat Scales, Director of Library Services, the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Greenville, South Carolina.

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Reviews and Awards

Reviews for *The Golden Compass*

*"This first fantastic installment propels readers along with horror and high adventure...a shattering tale that begins with a promise and delivers an entire universe." --Starred, *Kirkus Reviews*

*"A totally involving, intricately plotted fantasy that will leave readers clamoring for the sequels." --Starred, *Booklist*

*"As always, Pullman is a master at combining impeccable characterizations and seamless plotting, maintaining a crackling pace to create scene upon scene of almost unbearable tension." --Starred, *Publishers Weekly*

Awards for *The Golden Compass*

[An ALA Notable Book](#)
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Reviews for *The Subtle Knife*

*"Presented in a rush of sensuous detail that moves and entrances...gorgeous imagery, pulse-pounding action, and the baiting of readers' affections." --Starred, *Kirkus Reviews*

*"Stunningly ambitious, original, and fascinating...Pullman offered an exceptional romantic fantasy in *The Golden Compass*, but *The Subtle Knife* is adding a mythic dimension that inevitably demands even greater things from the finale." --Starred, *The Horn Book*

*"The character development as well as the relentless pace...make this a resounding successful sequel." --Starred, *Booklist*

Awards for *The Subtle Knife*

[An ALA Best Book for Young Adults](#)

[A Booklist Editors' Choice](#)

A Book Links Best Book

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

[A Horn Book Fanfare Honor Book](#)

Review for *The Amber Spyglass*

*"The longed-for third volume in this trilogy satisfies deeply: full of grand set pieces, resplendent language, and glorious storytelling...Across this brilliant and vivid canvas, the largest of themes play out: life and death, goodness and evil, self and other, the redemptive power of love. Readers will be chastened -- and warmed -- and sorry to see the last page." - Starred, *Kirkus Reviews*

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Mrs. Cooper: an elderly woman whom Will entrusts to care for his mentally fragile mother until he can return home again.

Stanislaus Grumman: a renowned explorer immersed in investigating Dust. He is rumored to be a shaman whose tribal Tartar name is **Jopari** the English translation of which is **John Parry**. It is his duty to find the bearer of the Subtle Knife and inform him of his critical role in the fate of the universe.

Sir Charles Latrom: a deceiving man who has seen Lyra work the alethiometer and realizes its value. Known as Lord Boreal in Lyra's world, he has ties with Mrs. Coulter, Lyra's mother.

Dr. Mary Malone: a member of the Dark Matter Research Unit, who has discovered the existence of shadows.

Giacomo Paradisi: previous bearer of the Subtle Knife, he teaches Will the differences between and uses for the blade's edges.

John Parry: Will's father who vanished long ago before Will was able to remember him.

Ruta Skadi: Queen of the Latvian witches.

GLOSSARY

The Authority: The Church's name for God in Lyra's world.

Angels: also known as Watchers or bene elim are large winged creatures, human-like in form but whose bodies are made of light not flesh. Angels are ancient beings whose true form is composed of intelligence and feeling. They are able to see and pass through the invisible windows between the worlds.

Bloodmoss: medicinal herb used to control bleeding and heal open wounds.

The Cave: nickname for the computer at the Dark Matter Research Unit. From Plato, "Shadows on the Walls of the Cave."

Cittàgaze: A haunted city in the world where Will and Lyra first meet. Cittàgaze means, "city of magpies" named for birds that steal their food, just as the city's occupants have been stealing from other worlds for centuries.

I Ching: an ancient Chinese form of divination that Dr. Mary Malone uses to help her "read" and understand Dust particles.

Shadows: The same mysterious entity as the Dust of Lyra's world. Also known as Dark Matter this material is conscious matter.

Specters: Phantom-like beings that feed on the consciousness of grown-ups leaving them zombie-like and void forever after. Children are unable to see these hideous creatures.

The Subtle Knife: also known as teleutaia makhaira, the last knife of all, or Æsahætr an object of extraordinary and devastating power with the ability to cut invisible "windows" that can be used as gateways between the worlds. There is nothing sharper - or more deadly.

Torre degli Angeli: The "Tower of Angels" in Cittàgaze. Houses the Philosophers Guild, the keepers of the Subtle Knife.

THE LIBER ANGELORUM

This book contained all the knowledge the philosophers of the Torre degli Angeli had managed to acquire about the beings after whom their Tower was named. Angels had been a prominent subject of study for hundreds of years, and everything the Guild knew about them had been classified systematically in the Book of Angels.

However, in the confusion and fear that followed the arrival of the Specters, the old philosophical disciplines fell into decay. Superstition began to twine like ivy around the structures of knowledge that had once been solid; cracks developed in the edifices of certainty; and the single copy of the Liber Angelorum, neglected for centuries, attacked by damp, time, and insects, was left on a dusty shelf to crumble away.

Much later, a member of the Guild tried to restore it, but the framework of understanding that would have helped him make sense of the fragments had long since fallen apart. He had no way of telling what was truth, what was speculation, or even what was stark heresy, set down only in order to be refuted. Accordingly, he arranged the scraps in alphabetical order, adding conjectures and speculations of his own, and refraining from editorial comment.

The confused and self-contradictory result was bound into a single volume once again; but a century before the time of Lyra and Lord Asriel, a fire broke out in the Torre degli Angeli, and the book nearly perished a second time. These scraps are all that remains.

April The angel of April is named Asmodel.

Creation God did not create the angels. He found them already existing and enslaved them.

Death Angels are immortal.

Devils Devils are a low kind of angel, the lackeys and lickspittles of God. However, some maintain that devils are the highest and freest of all angels, and that their suffering is inseparable from their greatness.

Envy The angels envy us our solidity. Death, they think, would be a price worth paying for the power and brilliance of our senses. If an angel were to see with our eyes, or hear with our ears, he would be dazzled and stunned by the force with which we perceive the physical world. With gifts like this, he would think, why do these creatures not spend their lives in exploration of the physical universe that they are so well equipped to understand? Why are they not consumed with intellectual bliss? This is a mystery to angels.

Guardians Some people claim that they have a guardian angel, who accompanies them throughout life either invisibly or in the form of an animal. Others deny this, and regard such claims as evidence of delusion or witchcraft.

Humanity It was not God who created human beings, but the angels.

Jacob The angel who wrestled with Jacob in the darkness at Peniel is named Metatron. However, some dispute this.

Luminosity Sometimes they shine at night. Angels may be distinguished from meteors or falling stars by the gentleness of their light, which is less brilliant than the fervid glare of purely material phenomena.

Mercy The angel of mercy is named Zadkiel. It was he who held back the arm of the patriarch Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Moon The angel of the moon is named Gabriel.

Natural Philosophy The arts and the sciences are alike to angels, both being means of apprehending the glory of creation.

Orders Angels are ordered and classified by the tasks they perform. Such tasks include carrying messages, giving warnings, bearing consolations, guiding or indicating the way, and spying. Thus there are at least five kinds of angels.

Passions Angels have no passions or affections, except one, which is curiosity, or intellectual passion. This is for them the highest of all things. However, others maintain that although they have few feelings for fellow angels, they are capable of love for creatures of other kinds. Some say that the Watchers fell in love with the daughters of men and had offspring by them. That was so long ago, and so many generations have mingled since, that we can all claim to be the descendants of angels.

Rebellion A thousand generations ago, some angels rebelled against God. This rebellion was an attempt to regain the freedom and independence they had enjoyed before their enslavement. In order to help their struggle, they infused some of the angelic principles into the minds of brute creatures formed like humans, and made them half like angels. It has been the aim of churches ever since to make human beings feel guilty for this, and to curb or destroy whatever angelic qualities we have. N.B. This knowledge is forbidden

Sex Angels may be male or female.

Song The angel of song is variously named: some say he is Radueriel, others Israfel, others Shemiel.

Specters Specters are corrupted angels.

Tuesday The angel of Tuesday is named Camael.

Watchers Angels who came to earth to instruct men and women in the arts and sciences. They include the angel Azazel, who taught the art of making knives, for which reason the Guild of the Torre degli Angeli is under his special protection; Ezekeel, who taught the knowledge of clouds; Penemuel, who taught the knowledge of writing with ink and paper, and who is one of the curers of stupidity, and who is therefore condemned by God.

Wings They have wings, with which they fly at great heights, passing through this world on their way to others. In order to enter or leave this world they pass through windows in the upper airs, similar to those cut by the Subtle Knife at the surface of the earth. No-one knows how these celestial windows were formed; it may be that the rays of the sun fray the air as they fray the fabric of curtains; or that the swift passage of meteors, comets, or asteroids tears them open. The natives of the north claim that the lights in the sky seen on winter nights come not from this world but another; if that is true, then they are probably shining through the windows used by angels.