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Opening extract from

The Golden Compass: The Official Illustrated Movie Companion

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Furs, Tweeds and a Touch of Glamour

Creating the Costumes for Lyra's World

"It goes without saying," says Ruth Myers, the designer of the dazzling costumes created for *The Golden Compass*, "I LOVE my job!"

In fact, the passion with which the Emmy award-winning, multiple Oscar-nominated, designer talks about her work on *The Golden Compass* leaves the listener in no doubt about how she feels about her chosen career. When describing the business of designing and making the film's costumes, Ruth is hugely enthusiastic, and she talks about her "glorious", "amazing" and "absolutely delicious" fabrics as if they were alive – which, in a way, they become once the actors put them on and the cameras start rolling.

Ruth feels that her forty-year-long career in costume design – *LA Confidential*, *Emma*, *The Addams Family*, *Restoration* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* being just a few of her many films – has equipped her with the necessary expertise for the daunting task of creating the spectacular, varied range of costume styles that the project required.

"Working on *The Golden Compass* has been fascinating to do," she says, "but I couldn't have done it ten years ago. Everything I've done in my life has enabled me to arrive at the point where I can do this with some confidence."

The diverse range of Ruth's career has meant that she has never been pigeonholed as a designer specialising in a particular period or style. This, as she explains, meant that she felt a natural attraction for the material: "I understood what Philip Pullman meant when he said that the world of *The Golden Compass* is this world, but it's also a different world. So, that was my approach: some of my designs are almost-but-not-quite Edwardian or 1930s England; the Gyptians are almost-gypsies and the staff at the Magisterium wear uniforms that are not quite uniforms. When Ruth had her first meeting with director Chris Weitz and production designer Dennis Gassner, she found that they shared a common vision for the film. "In fact," says Ruth, "within two or three weeks it became obvious that we didn't have to talk to each other because we found we were so much on the same wavelength."

Ruth began – where Philip Pullman's book begins – with Lyra Belacqua, the wilful heroine of the film. "It's Lyra's story," she says, "Lyra's journey. The question was where to start with her; I knew if we could get that right we could go anywhere. Lyra's appearance is a good example of the film's 'period-no period' design. I didn't want her to look too *Alice in Wonderland*, I wanted to keep a sense that she could almost be a modern child."

Lyra starts out in what Ruth calls a rather run-down "smocky dress" that could have been worn in the past but which wouldn't look bizarre if a child wore it today. Then, as she explains, she added the twist: "Rather than period shoes, I gave Lyra a pair of modern work boots. This was hugely important as it's a way of entwining the worlds together."

Choosing a range of colours for a character – the "colour palette" – is a vital part of the design process. Lyra's colour palette starts off in Oxford with a series of cool shades of blue and red, which get colder during her time in London with Mrs Coulter. Then, after Lyra leaves the city and joins the Gyptians, Ma Costa puts her in a multi-coloured, knitted coat. "In order to get an unusual texture and patterning," Ruth explains, "we experimented by knitting with all sorts of materials and, in addition to wool, Lyra's coat contains ribbons and pieces of velvet and net creating a look that is otherworldly."



The woollen coat given to Lyra by Ma Costa has a warm, textured feel that complements Lyra's character.



Lyra's modern boots and old-fashioned smock contrast with Lord Asriel's smart, Edwardian-style tweed suit.