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Opening extract from

The World of The Golden Compass

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Introduction

Welcome to the amazing world of *The Golden Compass*, a place where magic, mystery, beauty and danger are never far away. It is a world that exists in a parallel universe, and although it is similar to the Earth we know, it also contains the most extraordinary people, places and creatures. Throughout this world adults and children live their lives guided and helped by their dæmons – a part of a person's soul in the form of an animal, which lives outside of their body.

The continents are familiar, but there are many different lands and kingdoms. Majestic airships ferry passengers between the ancient cities of Oxford and London in the country of Brytain, while ships voyage east across the great, churning sea to the rocky shores of Norroway. The port town of Trollesund in Norroway is the gateway to the North, a region of hostile, snow-covered wastes, giant forests and spectacular ice kingdoms. Occupied by Tartar warriors and Samoyed fur traders, it is also home to ferocious, intelligent armoured Ice Bears. Beautiful, ageless witches fly through the Northern skies, and at the very top of the world, where the gap between the universes is thin, the translucent aura of the Northern Lights illuminates a mysterious city in the sky.

The world of *The Golden Compass* is home to peoples and creatures of great bravery and ingenuity, but there are also dark forces at work. A great conflict is brewing, and the fate of all the worlds in every universe may depend on the actions of a young girl named Lyra Belacqua...

The Alethiometer

Many years ago, Lord Asriel left a rare magical device with the Master of Jordan College. When Lyra prepares to leave Oxford for a new life in London, the Master decides that the precious instrument should be given to her for safe-keeping, but insists that she promises to keep it a secret. This special device is called an alethiometer. Most alethiometers were destroyed in the past, and Lyra is now in charge of the only known remaining example.

The alethiometer looks like a beautifully carved golden compass or pocket watch. Its intricately inscribed cover opens to reveal a dial, at the centre of which are three hands and a needle. Around the dial's edge are 36 signs and symbols. Some of the symbols are animals, including a bull, a bee, a chameleon and a dolphin. Others show people like a lady, a baby, or objects such as an hourglass, a crucible, an anchor or a bolt of lightning.





Moving the hands of the alethiometer is easy, but knowing how to form a question and understand the answers is much more difficult. Each of the symbols can mean many things. The secrets of how to read and understand the device were guarded jealously in the past and modern scholars have found it impossible to learn. The wise and knowledgeable Gyptian elder Farder Coram doubts there is anyone alive who has the skill.

There are three short hands and one long needle on the alethiometer's dial. To ask the device a question, the hands are turned by small knobs so that each points to a different symbol. The needle then moves round, pointing at different symbols to give the alethiometer's answer.



The alethiometer gets its name from the Greek word, aletheia, meaning truth. When the Master gives Lyra the device, he tells her that it is a truth-telling machine.



Lyra finds that she has a unique ability to use the alethiometer. She learns that she can ask it a question, focus her mind and instinctively learn the truth. Lyra first uses the device to learn the fate of three Gyptian spies. Later, she uses it to find Iorek Byrnison's armour and to trick Ragnar, the King of Svalbard, into fighting Iorek in single combat.

To learn the fate of Jacob Huismans and the other Gyptian spies, Lyra selected the serpent, crucible and bee symbols on the alethiometer. The alethiometer's answer showed that they had suffered harm.





