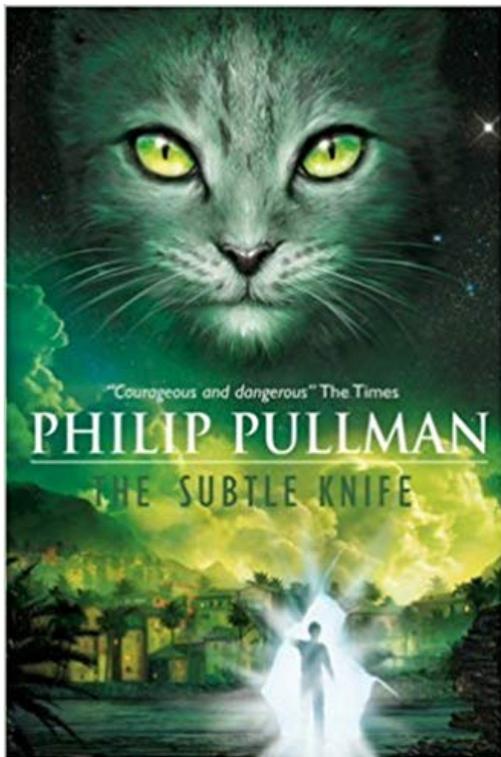


THE SUBTLE KNIFE : (His Dark Materials Trilogy #2) by Philip Pullman



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Reviews of the THE SUBTLE KNIFE : (His Dark Materials Trilogy #2) by Philip Pullman

Daizil

One of the most famous and beloved fantasy book trilogies you can think of. One that has been tried to adapt into a movie, but it failed, as some things (okay, most things!) are probably best left in book form. It's so epic, I can only compare it to Harry Potter. If you haven't read it yet, let me see if I can remedy that!

□□□□ Endless number of stars

His Dark Materials is a sweeping epic that tells of a story bigger than you can imagine, but it's also a story told through the smallest characters - a story of a world, the fate of which lies in the hands of children. In a way, it's all about the fight between good and evil, wisdom and darkness, but not in your usual fantasy sense. This is more philosophical than you might have expected it to be, but it's also so imaginative, so full of adventure and unbelievable details, that you'll never get bogged down with any of the philosophy. It's a series that you can eat through a week - no matter how long the books actually are. You won't sleep, if you have to.

Reason #1.

Don't You Just Wish Your Cat Was Your Daemon??

Daemons are talking animals that are... curiously, they're part of you. They're kind of your spirit animal, which also makes up part of your soul. It's incredibly interesting, cute, and it goes so well with the story! You can talk to it, it will help you and defend you, and even if you're utterly and completely alone, it will be your companion. It's likely that by the end of the series, you will find yourself trying to figure out what your daemon would look like. Or maybe even does look like. (more on why I say that - in the actual book!)

Reason #2.

There Are Wonders And Mysteries

Obviously, it wouldn't be cool if I just gave it away to you, now would it. But let me just tell you that there are worlds to explore. That there are reasons the entire world is falling, and you need to find them out. And the reasons are all pretty grand as well. It's not your typical overused YA tropes either, for example - oh, this or that super power has just decided to thwart the main character and their family, and you need a special snowflake to fix it. No, it's far better than that! That said, the main character (who is a little girl) IS special, and she's IS key to the saving of the world, but she's no special snowflake. We're getting to that in the next point.

Reason #3.

The Characters Have Flaws, They're Not Perfect

Having imperfect characters is great! Especially so, because it prevents the aforementioned 'special snowflake' syndrome. The main female character, Lyra, is as flawed as can be - she lies, she's not loyal, she's subject to other people's manipulation. She is also ridiculously dramatic, and it's maintained throughout the entire series in the way she talks (I specifically loved that!). The main male character Will is also a great character. He's strong willed and he's trustable, but he can also be ruthless, hard and cold. Both of them symbolize many things, but typical special snowflakes they are not. As for symbolizing? We get to point 4...

Reason #4.

The Symbolism

This story has layers upon layers of symbolism, mostly to do with mythologies, or namely - Christian mythologies, exposing them quite ruthlessly at times. This is magical and super interesting, merging religious symbolism with scientific fantasy (is that.. a thing, scientific fantasy..?), and weaving together a magical build of the world, of the universe. I will not tell you what the main characters (and many others) symbolize, because that would take away from your pleasure of discovering it yourself. However, if you are religious (not only Christian, basically, any religion that is based on a single deity) - be warned, as this book might seem controversial to you. It's not kind to organized religion. You need an open mind to read it. If you are religious, and still really want to read it (which you should!), I suggest remembering that this is just fiction and it's an invented world.

Reason #5.

The Feels

This series ends with a bad case of the feels. As bad as it gets. But it's also the kind of feels you want in a book! Basically, the kind of feels we all read books for. But please, prepare napkins.

Rrinel

Pullman's trilogy is not to be missed for science fiction and philosophy lovers, in my opinion. It is a coming of age story, in more than just the usual sense. In the alternate England where this story is set, souls exist outside the bodies as animals referred to as "daemons," and their shape is set at adolescence, when the child becomes an adult. Before that time, the daemon can change into whatever animal form it would like. In this compelling take on the "soul," the "soul" has indisputable agency and voice, and each person finds him or herself in a relationship with is or her own soul, as opposed to seeing the soul as the self. Lyra, the protagonist, sets out to discover why children off the streets of Oxford are going missing. This journey brings her to confront large ideas about politics and religion and power, the academy and the public, institutions and individuals. The trilogy - unfortunately - becomes less and less subtle as it goes on, but nonetheless I recommend the trilogy as a whole, because I do not think those readers who love *The Golden Compass* will do anything else besides read the sequels.

The Golden Compass, the first book in the series, is deserving of five stars and is one of my favorite novels ever. I am an avid reader and a librarian, and I particularly love this first novel because it features a strong, believable female lead, a well paced plot that focuses on ideas and politics and power play, and incredible world building. It also was the first time I read a comparison of university and street (or public) life that made me nod and say "yes, that's right." Unlike a lot of readers, I do not think this first novel or the trilogy as a whole is anti-organized religion on principle - I believe it does object to certain elements of organized religion which may well be deserving of criticism. One of the core strengths of the first book is its ability to communicate arguments about larger concepts in society while telling a genuinely good story -- it doesn't come off as preachy, or pushy, and it is eye opening, especially for the young adult target demographic, but these days, often as well for American adults.

The second book, *The Subtle Knife*, is a four star book in my opinion, because while it is an excellent novel, it does *The Golden Compass* a disservice by weakening the main character (Lyra) with a second protagonist who is male (Will). Will is an excellently written character, but his very presence makes Lyra's character weaker. If we had been introduced to Lyra in *The Subtle Knife*, I am certain it would be a five star book, but because *The Subtle Knife* is part of a series, I review it both as a novel in its own right and as a novel that exists in a series. Lyra's fierce independence is essentially in many ways stripped by a "love interest." Few authors have been able to produce a believable romantic relationship that involves a rebellious, independent woman, and Pullman is not one of them. This is not to say that he doesn't appreciate Lyra, rather, it is evident to me in reading the *Subtle Knife* that he struggled to produce the Lyra we knew who could also ally with something who was, in many ways, more powerful than she was -- that was something her character did not know how to do, and thus the only solution was to diminish her. It's a flaw that only lost the book one star in my own eyes because in every other way, the book lives up to expectation: it is excellently paced, it has a lot of Lee Scoresby (who is simply a phenomenal character), it continues to ask tough questions, it's hard to put down, and all of the new characters as well as some of the older ones get significant and interesting development.

The final book in the series, *The Amber Spyglass*, is one that I want to love. But the fact of the matter is, it has a significant flaw that I cannot overlook: it's all too clear, reading the third novel, what Pullman is trying to push. The story is sacrificed for the philosophy, the sentimentality in

places is overbearing, and this makes the fact that the ideas are still compelling even more frustrating. The final book is probably a two star book, but if I was reviewing it by itself, I would probably give it three stars, out of loyalty to the series. Indeed, the redeeming elements of this book are all to do with its tying up of plot points, redemption of certain characters that is gratifying, its own seemingly self aware points about the power of story, and the core, strong arguments about society that are the backbone of the series as a whole. I can't honestly say that by itself, it is a good book, but I do think that as part of a series, it still worth the reader's time.

Those of you who are also readers will recognize this sentiment: if you are just now coming to His Dark Materials, I am envious. There are few things in the history of my consumption of genre fiction (and even literary fiction) that come close to the experience of my discovery and subsequent reading of this series. I rarely say "such and such changed my life," but this series certainly changed mine, and I would love to have that experience in reading more often, it is so affirming.

Steep

I imagine anyone purchasing this would have already read the books. I hadn't, and though this was almost a thousand pages I tore through the story in a matter of days. His Dark Materials have become some of my new favorite books and even though I just finished reading them I want to read them again. The characters are wonderfully complex, the world building is divine, and the plot is ultra solid. I love these!

Heraly

I love this series and am so happy to have a single book containing all three stories! The dust jacket is made of pretty thick paper with a beautiful design. Underneath, the book is bound in a rich, red textile. I would like to mention that the font is very small and the pages are thin, I'm sure to keep the at book a portable size. Definitely would recommend.

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