



The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials

Mary Gribbin , John Gribbin

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Drawing on string theory and space-time, quantum physics and chaos theory, award-winning science authors Mary and John Gribbin reveal how Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy is rooted in scientific truth.

The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials Details

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William Herschel says

I like children's nonfiction books a lot. The facts are straight-forward and to the point and if you're still interested in the subject you can delve into heavier books later.

Anyway, this book is clearly for a younger audience yet covers topics like quantum physics. The book uses examples from Pullman's series, His Dark Materials, and shows how elements of the book you might have considered "magic" actually relate to science.

The book contains a glossary, index, and suggestions for further reading with an introduction from Pullman himself.

Verdi says

According to this book, scientists have a theory (a theory because we don't have the stuff to prove it yet) that whenever you make a decision it creates a completely new world. For example, if you decide to go eat a cookie instead of continuing watching TV then there would be a new world in which you kept on watching TV. Right now I've just come to the part of the book where it explains how in *The Subtle Knife* you can cut actually cut into the nucleus of atoms and release whatever is inside, the stuff a scientist called Werner Heisenberg called potentia.

Ann says

This is a fun and very readable introduction to such topics as quantum physics, the Northern lights, magnetism, hidden dimensions, wheels, and other scientific subjects behind Philip Pullman's wonderful *His Dark Materials* series. The authors are well-established writers of science books for young readers, as well as fans of Pullman's novels.

Liv says

Very basic introductions to concepts introduced by *His Dark Materials*. Unfortunately the oversimplifications and analogies were frustrating (and sometimes misleading) for those interested in an in depth analysis.

Jennifer says

This book does a really good job of balancing science and story. It explains in order to lend weight to the

world of the book, but doesn't get bogged down in a lot of equations, formulas, or diagrams. The author does a really good job blending the story of the book, scientific quotes, and explanations of the related scientific equations.

Reading through the explanations of how real science corresponds to the world made me want to read the series again, especially the second and third books.

Chris Whybrow says

It's a relatively simple introduction to some of the interesting scientific concepts behind Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy. While it's quite interesting, it's not the be-all-and-end-all work on these concepts, for a more in depth study you will have to look elsewhere.

I've also noticed a bit of Pullman's religious agenda seems to have sneaked into this book as well, which is only to be expected. The book also ignores some of the logical inconsistencies and plot holes in Pullman's work. I noticed in the section on string theory and spectres it used the spectre explanation from 'The Subtle Knife'*¹, with no reference to the explanation in 'The Amber Spyglass'. And as Pullman's magic system is very loose and vague (much of it actually based on rituals scorned by this book) the explanation provided for it is somewhat limited.

But if this book gets Pullman's fans into science, then it does deserve praise.

*Can't blame them really. The 'scientific' explanation for spectres in 'The Subtle Knife' is much cooler and more interesting. Actually, so is the entire book in comparison to 'The Amber Spyglass'.

ayanami says

A very basic introduction to quantum mechanics, theoretical physics, evolution, and other concepts from Philip Pullman's trilogy written at a late elementary/early middle school level. I didn't realize this book was meant for children when I picked it up so I was disappointed by the lack of depth, especially since I was already familiar with most of the science explained. The book really only skims the surface of each concept. Still, it's a worthwhile read for fans of His Dark Materials who have little to no knowledge about these topics and want to understand the series in (slightly) more depth.

Dhaivyd Hilgendorf says

Enjoyed it.

Marissa says

This was an interesting book that explains in layman's terms the various scientific theories and ideas that Pullman utilized in his trilogy. They discuss more difficult issues such as quantum physics, quantum

mechanics, chaos, quantum entanglement, Schrodinger's cat and Multiple Worlds, string theory, and simpler concepts like magnetism and atoms. This is a good accompaniment to the trilogy.

Nick Stibbs says

I was utterly bored by science at school, by and large, being much more of a humanities person at that point in time, and I've managed to wing my way through life understanding very little about science, apart from that mentioned in evolution of consciousness books. Recently I've decided it's about time to get my quarks sorted from my cells, my Lamarck from my Darwin, and my anthropic principle from my cosmological constant.

So a good way in (apart from the several books on environmental science that I've been reading), was this kids' guide to the science of Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy, His Dark Materials. Now, perversely, I haven't read any of those books, though I have seen the film for Northern Lights and have read several articles about or by Pullman, so am familiar with his thinking. He's a pretty....groovy isn't the word....deep guy and I have time for his imaginative humanism, enjoying the way his plays with religious assumptions and subverts them into a more exciting sense of reality.

I walked away from this book, a bit wiser about a few scientific principles, though somewhat confused as to how much I could draw parallels with some of Pullman's concepts like Dust and scientific theories about dark matter and such like. This is not a strictly science book in the narrow sense of the term, since to explain some of Pullman's ideas, the author looks at Jungian ideas of synchronicity, which are certainly outside the box of non-psychic scientific thinking but full marks for drawing kids attention to this important and to my mind commonplace phenomenon in life, that defies everyday scientific theories.

I would have liked to have seen more discussion of Pullman's use of the Daemon in the trilogy but that would be wading further into the territory of psychology and religion, betraying my own interests and probably wouldn't weather inclusion in a book supposedly about that terribly safe and dependable field that we call science. What is a Daemon? The author alludes to Jung's own Daemon, Philemon and Socrates was supposed to have one. Blake used the term, Poetic Genius; Whitman the term, Eidelon; others would speak of guardian angels, spirit guides, shadows, doubles. A daemon may simply be a metaphor for our subconscious, which to a keen eye, is visible, if unintegrated, as a hovering sidekick and potential usurper of our conscious persona.

The book is easy to read, may be quite boring for those up to date with science, but a useful and fun way to learn a few things if you're coming from a point of relative ignorance like me.

Charles Noyes says

This book gave me something I wanted but wasn't executed well. It was a book that explained the science behind the series His Dark Materials. The series has a lot of science and dimensional travel so a book explaining it was very helpful to me. The only problem was that there was a few examples in this book that annoyed me. Like the incoherent storyline they chose to explain and the bad explanations for a few things. All in all, this book is only for hardcore fans of the series and shouldn't be taken too seriously. After all, it is only two author's interpretations of someone else's work.

Irene Lazlo says

He visto que mucha gente ha criticado este libro por no ser lo suficientemente profundo, pero la verdad es que si buscas un libro profundo de física cuántica igual no es la mejor idea acudir a un libro para niños de 11 años. No creo que esa fuera la idea de los autores.

Yo creo que es encomiable ya solo el hecho de que hayan querido introducir a los niños conceptos muy complicados de cuántica, astrofísica, magnetismo... además, viene con una bibliografía donde los lectores pueden buscar más información si quieren saber más.

A mí este libro me hizo enamorarme de la física desde pequeña y alimentó mi inquietud, que al fin y al cabo es de lo que se trata.

Susan says

If you've read the trilogy you will really enjoy this, I didn't notice half of the science because the story of Lyra and Will is so amazing so I appreciate this analysis all the more. Dust, String Theory, Chaos Theory, Parallel Worlds, Our Donut Universe and gravity, Serendipity, Synchronicity, Schrodinger's Cat, Evolution and Natural Selection, Gaia and light...they're all there and clearly explained. The Gribbin's tone is a bit juvenile but not patronizing. Their audience is middle schoolers perhaps but they present complex issues, including an excellent definition of science, in a bright, breezy way worthy of a second read after picking up "His Dark Materials" again to catch all I missed the first time around.

Graham Oliver says

This would be a fantastic book to give a child who has just read the trilogy and is excited off the energy from that. It teaches a wide variety of scientific concepts and ties them to events/items in the books. However, this connection is often tenuous and doesn't really teach you more about the books, so if you're familiar with the science already it doesn't add much.

Megan O'Laughlin says

Well, the three books that comprise 'His Dark Materials' series are quite imaginative, with interesting and likable main characters (well, some not quite so likable) and that good old battle between good and evil. In this series, we are introduced to the idea that we exist within layers of worlds and there are some ways to travel in between them. While I neglected engagements to race through the first one and read the second one at a more leisurely pace, I read the third book at a slow and plodding place. So, I felt the first book is incredible but it does lose its momentum and feels like it gets caught in a battle of morals as the story goes on. While Rowling's Harry Potter books began to refer quite wonderfully to human rights issues, Pullman's kid/ adolescent story is more about science v. religion, which is interesting but I truthfully found a bit tiresome.

