



The Golden Compass: An epic story about the systemic abuse of children

By Mike March, Justice Reporter

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For those who have been adversely affected by the child protection system in Canada either as a child or parent, the new epic movie, the Golden Compass, is a must see.

The movie is based on the first story of author Philip Pullman's Dark Materials trilogy. It is an exciting fantasy adventure, set in an alternative, yet parallel world to our very own.

In the movie's alternate fantasy world, people's souls are visible as animals called daemons and there are armoured talking bears who fight wars and groups of beings called Gyptians and witches which co-exist.

A powerful and secret organization called the Magisterium imposes its power and control over the people of that world and uses another covert organization called the Gobblers to steal children and convert them into faithful followers of the Magisterium.

While to most, the movie may seem like a simple fantasy designed only to entertain children with its special effects, to those with more insight into the real workings of the child protection industry in Canada, the movie is clearly an allegory with a connection to our own world.

The author is astonishingly brilliant at hiding what he's really saying.

The movie's symbolism of the child protection industry, the lawyers and the powerful institutions which support the abuse of children and families is clearly revealed.

At the center of the story is a 12-year-old girl named Lyra (played by newcomer Dakota Blue Richards) who starts out to rescue a friend who has been kidnapped by the mysterious and powerful organization known as the Gobblers.

What starts as an attempt to rescue her friend turns into an epic quest to save not only her friend

from the Gobblers but her world and ours as well.

In the other world, both the Gobblers and the Magisterium strike fear in the hearts and minds of parents and children alike just as do child protection agencies and some branches of the government in our own world today.

Using the Gobblers, the Magisterium steals children from their homes and families while they're young and impressionable and takes them away to be indoctrinated and never seen by their parents again.

The goal of the Gobblers and the Magisterium is to turn children into mindless puppets of the Magisterium so that they will do what they are told by the Magisterium without question.

To keep Lyra from falling to the same fate as her friend, Lyra is given a special instrument called an alethiometer by her uncle, who himself is an academic scientist/explorer who understands the Magisterium and the danger it represents.

The alethiometer protects Lyra during her quest by allowing her to see the truth through the lies and deceptions being told to her by the adults who work with or support the Gobblers and the Magisterium.

All the alethiometers have been destroyed by the Magisterium except for the last remaining one that Lyra's uncle has kept safely hidden away.

The Gobblers kidnap children and take them to a secret medical facility where their souls and their wills to think as free and independent beings are taken from them by forced medical procedures.

The Gobblers, of course, are the equivalent to our own world's children's aid societies and their social workers.

Mrs. Coulter (played by Nicole Kidman) is a devious agent of the Magisterium who easily could fit the role of a social worker or children's lawyer in

our own world.

Just like the Gobblers, children's aid agencies have been known to separate children from their parents by force and put them into facilities where they are forced to undergo unwanted medical procedures and to take drugs.

The Magisterium symbolizes authority, with some viewers interpreting it as the Government while others viewing it as the church.

The church interpretation is taken by a number of religious followers because according to Catholic doctrine, the Magisterium is specifically identified by name as the authority within the Catholic Church to teach or interpret the truths of the Faith.

In our world, the Government and the Church claim authority over the people and both institutions have abused children in the past as well as the present using agencies just like the Gobblers.

A number of Catholic school boards have recently banned both the book and the movie, but this is not to be unexpected.

It is understandable why influential forces within the church do not want the public to be reminded again about the institutional abuse of children as churches themselves have been involved in this practice, not to mention the fact that that this problems still exists today.

The movie is not anti-Christian or anti-God as those who support a publication ban contend, but it does promote freedom of thought and encourages individuals to question what religious and government leaders are feeding them.

What's so fascinating about the controversy surrounding the movie by the Catholic school boards is that the book version of the movie (published as *Northern Lights* in Britain but renamed *The Golden Compass* here in North America) has been on school library shelves since about 1995.

With the release of the movie, some institutions are getting rid of the book and banning it outright because they are now afraid that children who see the movie may actually want to read the book!

Based on the recent actions by authorities to ban the book, it seems that it is apparently O.K. to have a book on the shelves as long as it isn't generating much interest.

The controversy says something about the power of the film media and if anything will likely to make more inquisitive minds want to read the book just because of the attention the ban by some

government funded institutions has generated.

On the positive side, the movie promotes some of the very basic human values which we all know are important – truth and freedom and the importance of fighting for these values.

In the story is an armoured ice bear called Iorek Byrnison who comes to help the girl in her quest to save the children from the evil system.

Equated to our own world, Iorek can be seen as a fearless lawyer, while scorned by his fellow lawyers, is not afraid to break ranks and fight the system and its evil forces in spite of the overwhelming odds against him and those whom he is helping.

At one point in the story, Iorek engages in a battle to the death against another unscrupulous and corrupted ice bear who had in the past stolen the leadership of the ice bear kingdom from Iorek. (Backstabbing and corruption certainly can be found in today's legal profession.)

Another group of ragtag beings in the movie are called the Gyptians, who also come to the aid of Lyra in her quest to free the children being held by the Gobblers.

The Gyptians represent the common ordinary folk and many of the parents and families who have had their loved ones snatched in the past by the Gobblers.

In the final battle to rescue the children from the fortress of the Gobblers, flying fickle witches join in the battle to free the children from the Gobblers and its army of soldiers.

The story is based on the timeless teachings about good versus evil.

It is about how the rich and powerful, with armed forces to support them, attempt to conceal the truth in order to maintain their power and control over the people with the process beginning by controlling the minds of the young and impressionable.

For those of us in the real world, the movie is a startling reminder of a child protection and family court system gone terribly bad, yet at the same time a startling reminder that all those who believe in truth, justice and freedom must fight to preserve these values and that in the end, good will triumph over evil.

Entertaining for kids and with an engrossing hidden meaning for the more informed, it is a brilliant movie well worth seeing.