

BOOK TWO ❖ The Books of Beginning



THE FIRE CHRONICLE

READING GROUP GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK



Kate, Emma, and Michael who have returned to a Baltimore orphanage after their exploits in *The Emerald Atlas*, are thrust into new adventures when Kate uses the magical book to disappear into an earlier era at the same time that Michael and Emma are rescued by the mysterious Dr. Pym. While Kate struggles to keep herself alive in the New York winter of 1899, her two younger siblings embark on a quest with Dr. Pym to learn more about their parents' disappearance and to search for the second of the Books of Beginning, the Fire Chronicle, a volume that it is Michael's fate to master. The sinister Dire Magnus, along with his henchman Rourke, continues to hunt all three siblings with a relentless fury as their connection to the fabled books is revealed.

Grades 3-7

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

In the first volume of this trilogy, *The Emerald Atlas*, Kate learns to access the magic in the first of the Books of Beginning, the magic of Time. Compare this magical time travel to scientific theories of time: science.howstuffworks.com/science-vs-myth/everyday-myths/time-travel.htm

Look up information about the ancient city of Rhakotis where the Books of Beginning were first created. What evidence has been found to suggest this place actually existed?



POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- Draw a map of the world indicating the place where the children start their respective journeys. Identify the place where Kate lands in the past as well as the places where Dr. Pym takes Michael and Emma. Show the journey that Michael and Emma take with Gabriel to retrieve the Fire Chronicle.
- Look up information about dragons, elves, and dwarves in a folklore encyclopedia. What, if any, factual basis can you find for the existence of these magical creatures in the real world?
- Compare *The Fire Chronicle* to other books that contain magical creatures and travel in time, such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance* quartet, and Michael Scott's six-volume series, *The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*. In all of these stories, seemingly ordinary young people are called upon to perform extraordinary deeds. How do Kate, Michael, and Emma compare to other protagonists you have encountered in literature?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author photo © 2010 by Elena Seibert



John Stephens spent 10 years in television, and was executive producer of *Gossip Girl* and a writer for *Gilmore Girls* and *The O.C.* He holds an MFA from the University of Virginia.

Stephens is also the author of **THE EMERALD ATLAS**, the first installment in the **Books of Beginning** trilogy.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why did Dr. Pym send the children back to Baltimore? Why did he erase all traces of the home in Cambridge Falls? How does Kate know the Screechers are coming for them?
- Why does Kate use the Atlas to leave without Michael and Emma? What prevents her from returning to them?
- Why is it important for Michael and Emma to meet Hugo Algernon? What is his connection to the children's parents? Why does Michael feel "a strange, powerful sympathy" for Hugo? (p. 46)
- What is the importance of the year 1899? How does Kate know that the Magic World is getting ready to separate from rest of society? Why is the Separation necessary?
- How does Michael feel when he receives the marble necklace from Dr. Pym that is addressed to "The Eldest Wibberly"? Why does Emma reach for the necklace first? Describe the differences in the personalities of the two youngest siblings. How does their relationship change when Kate is no longer with them?
- Why does Michael not consult Dr. Pym about the riddle in the chamber under the grave? How does he solve the puzzle, and why is it important for Michael to do it by himself? What does Dr. Pym mean when he says to Michael: "I know what you're afraid of. Trust Emma. Trust yourself. You have a good heart. Let it guide you"? (p. 106)
- Compare Kate's experience of growing up in orphanages to what she observes in the School of Magic in the Bowery. How does she know she is in a good place? How does she feel about Henrietta Burke when she meets her?
- What does the fortune-teller mean when she tells Rafe: "The girl is the key. Through her, you will understand your destiny"? (p. 127) Why is Rafe so disturbed by the dream he had of Kate? Why does Kate refuse the money Rafe gives her to leave the city?
- Gabriel tells Michael that the Guardian's memory was in the drink that Michael swallowed in the grave cavern. Why does Michael only see the places they need to go "in pieces"? Why does Gabriel trust Michael's instincts even though the pilot tells them there is no cavern?
- Why are Emma and Michael drawn to the music of the elves? Why is it important for them to observe the ceremony of the elves, even though it puts them in great danger? How does Michael feel when the dragon carries off his sister?
- Why is Michael reluctant to acknowledge that he is the Keeper of the Fire Chronicle? Compare Michael's journey into the volcano to his experience in the cave under the graveyard in Malpesa. How do these experiences change him?
- What does Gabriel mean when he says: "Each day, by our actions, we decide who we are." (p. 199) Why does Michael like the quote from the *Dwarf Omnibus*: "A great leader lives not in his heart, but in his head"? (p. 201) How does that quote compare to the way Gabriel has lived his life?
- What is Kate's reaction on seeing the Dire Magnus in the wheelchair? What does he mean when he says, "One must not be misled by appearances. Power is power. While an outward appearance . . . is quickly changed." (pp. 225–226)

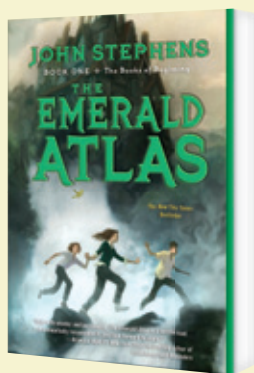


- What do we learn about the character of the Dire Magnus in this volume? What would happen if he gains possession of the Books of Beginning? Why does he not agree with the plan for the Separation? Why do others feel the Separation is a good solution to the problems between humans and the magic community?
- When Michael uses the Book of Life to bring Emma back from her frozen state, what does he learn about his sister? What does the Guardian mean when he tells Michael that he is “doing everything to run away from pain. But there’s no running away from the Book.” (p. 242)
- What is the importance of the character Wilamena? Why does she insist that there is a connection between her and Michael? Why does she agree to resume the dragon form?
- How does Michael know that the person the hostage Rourke shows them is not really Michael’s father? What does this tell us about Michael’s relationship to his father, even though he hasn’t seen him for 10 years?
- Why does Rafe take Kate to see his old apartment? What is the importance of Rafe’s family history? What does Henrietta Burke mean when she tells Kate, “You are the only hope he has. You must love him.” (p. 287)
- What does the Guardian Xanbertis mean when he tells Michael, “Beware. The Book will change you. Remember who you are.” (p. 307) Why is the concept of “duty” so important to Michael? How does Michael’s character change from his experience with the Fire Chronicle?
- How does Kate save Rafe’s life in the burning church? If the magic is in her, why has she not used it to return to her brother and sister? What is Rafe’s sacrifice to save Kate’s life . . . and what does he ask of Dire Magnus? What makes Emma become friends with Dena after they start out fighting?
- What is the difference between the powers of Dr. Pym and the powers of the Dire Magnus? Why does the image of Michael’s father warn Michael not to let Pym bring all three books together? Should the children trust Dr. Pym?
- Discuss Michael’s father’s feeling about the quote from King Killick. What does he mean when he tells Michael, “the point of life isn’t to avoid pain. The point of life is to be alive! To feel things . . . Don’t let the fear control you. Choose life, son.” (pp. 356–357) How does Michael act on that advice?
- Compare Michael’s decision to use the Chronicle to revive the Dire Magnus to Kate’s decision to save Rafe’s life. How does Michael resist the darkness in the lives of the Dire Magnus when he uses the Chronicle to bring him back?
- Why do you think Emma has been taken hostage at the end of this volume?





PRAISE FOR THE EMERALD ATLAS:



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"[A] great story is all in the telling, and in *THE EMERALD ATLAS* the telling is superb."

—THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

★ "Unfolding magic and secrets deepen the story and build excitement as it reaches its complex and time-bending climax. . . . Echoes of other popular fantasy series, from "Harry Potter" to the "Narnia" books, are easily found, but debut author Stephens has created a new and appealing read that will leave readers looking forward to the next volumes in this projected trilogy."

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, Starred

"Fast-paced and engaging, with plenty of action, humor, and secrets propelling the plot. . . . Themes of family and responsibility . . . will easily resonate with young readers."—BOOKLIST

"Each character has such a likable voice that the elaborate story doesn't feel overcomplicated. . . . The only gripe readers might initially have is with its length, but by the end, they'll immediately wish it was longer."—KIRKUS REVIEWS

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