



Special Topics in Calamity Physics

By Marisha Pessl



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The mesmerizing *New York Times* bestseller by the author of *Night Film*

Marisha Pessl's dazzling debut sparked raves from critics and heralded the arrival of a vibrant new voice in American fiction. At the center of *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* is clever, deadpan Blue van Meer, who has a head full of literary, philosophical, scientific, and cinematic knowledge. But she could use some friends. Upon entering the elite St. Gallway School, she finds some—a clique of eccentrics known as the Bluebloods. One drowning and one hanging later, Blue finds herself puzzling out a byzantine murder mystery. Nabokov meets Donna Tartt (then invites the rest of the Western Canon to the party) in this novel—with visual aids drawn by the author—that has won over readers of all ages.

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Special Topics in Calamity Physics By Marisha Pessl Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Pessl's stunning debut is an elaborate construction modeled after the syllabus of a college literature course—36 chapters are named after everything from *Othello* to *Paradise Lost* to *The Big Sleep*—that culminates with a final exam. It comes as no surprise, then, that teen narrator Blue Van Meer, the daughter of an itinerant academic, has an impressive vocabulary and a knack for esoteric citation that makes Salinger's Seymour Glass look like a dunce. Following the mysterious death of her butterfly-obsessed mother, Blue and her father, Gareth, embark, in another nod to Nabokov, on a tour of picturesque college towns, never staying anywhere longer than a semester. This doesn't bode well for Blue's social life, but when the Van Meers settle in Stockton, N.C., for the entirety of Blue's senior year, she befriends—sort of—a group of eccentric geniuses (referred to by their classmates as the Bluebloods) and their ringleader, film studies teacher Hannah Schneider. As Blue becomes enmeshed with Hannah and the Bluebloods, the novel becomes a murder mystery so intricately plotted that, after absorbing the late-chapter revelations, readers will be tempted to start again at the beginning in order to watch the tiny clues fall into place. Like its intriguing main characters, this novel is many things at once—it's a campy, knowing take on the themes that made *The Secret History* and *Prep* such massive bestsellers, a wry sendup of most of the Western canon and, most importantly, a sincere and uniquely twisted look at love, coming of age and identity. (Aug.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

With a murder that occurs in the opening pages and a narrator who joins an elite clique of students, *Special Topics* bears resemblance to Donna Tartt's 1992 classic, *The Secret History*—as the novel's publisher is more than happy to remind us. Critics call this comparison a publicity coup, as the two novels differ greatly in narration, orchestration, and tone. Organized as a "Great Books" course, the novel requires careful attention (and literary knowledge) from its readers, especially when Blue spouts esoteric tidbits. Although most critics were utterly compelled by Marisha Pessl's debut novel, a few thought it mean-spirited and too smart for its own good. "A 500-page headache is as possible as a bracing joyride," notes the *New York Times*.

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From [Booklist](#)

After 10 years of traveling with her father, a perennial (and pedantic) visiting lecturer at various, obscure institutions of higher learning, Blue Van Meer finally settles in as a senior at the St. Gallway School in Stockton, North Carolina. There she is bemused to find herself part of a charmed circle of popular kids called the Bluebloods and the protege of the mysterious film-studies teacher, Hannah Schneider. When a friend of Hannah's dies at a party the kids have crashed, this extravagantly arch and self-conscious coming-of-age novel turns into a murder mystery that—although never as Hitchcockian as its publisher claims—is, nevertheless, *almost* compelling enough to warrant its excessive length. Intriguingly structured as a syllabus for a Great Works of Literature class, Pessl's first novel is filled with references to invented books—and to some real ones, too, including several by Nabokov. Overkill? You bet. But, as a result, the novel is generating a great deal of buzz that will excite the curiosity of readers who enjoy postmodern excesses and indulgences of this sort. *Michael Cart*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Iris Robertson:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book entitled Special Topics in Calamity Physics? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have some other opinion?

Rodney Hussey:

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