



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

The Calculating Stars by Mary Robinette Kowal

1. The author says, “Science fiction and fantasy takes the real world and tips it over to the side so you can see all the gaps in between.” What are the ways you see this being true in this story?
2. When the environmental crisis isn’t nearly as imminent as the public initially thinks, funding for the space exploration and settlement could be in danger. How is this mirrored in our world today?
3. Elma is a character of two extremes. She has crippling anxiety and panic attacks, but she is also fearless enough to excel as a pilot and push against boundaries to be an astronaut. How can these two polar opposites exist so easily in one character? Do these differences make her a more human character?
4. Elma wants more than anything to have the chance to go into space. She makes many sacrifices to achieve her dreams. What does she sacrifice? Are the sacrifices worth it?
5. Nathaniel and Elma have a strong and equal marriage partnership. How does Nathaniel’s support and belief in his wife help enable her to pursue her dreams? Does it feel realistic to you?
6. Discuss Elma’s contentious relationship with Parker. Is she right to compromise with him despite his horrible misogyny?
7. When Elma finally agrees to take Miltown, she keeps it a secret because she knows it could jeopardize her position in the space program. How have attitudes towards medications of this type and the conditions they treat changed over the years? Or have they stayed the same?
8. At the end of the book, Elma discovers that her grandmother and great aunt had in fact survived the impact. Should she have searched harder for those she loved, or was her lack of curiosity understandable given the widespread devastation? How does the idea of family play a part in the novel?

The above questions were taken from <http://booknaround.blogspot.com/2019/03/review-and-book-club-questions.html> your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Mary Robinette Kowal is an award-winning author and professional puppeteer. Though puppetry was her focus for the first ten years of her career, she began to write professionally when her brother moved his family to China as a way to keep in touch with her niece and nephew. In addition to writing and puppeteering, she also works as a voice actor primarily for audiobooks.

<http://maryrobinettekowal.com/about/>

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