



Measuring the World: A Novel

By Daniel Kehlmann

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Measuring the World: A Novel By Daniel Kehlmann

Measuring the World marks the debut of a glorious new talent on the international scene. Young Austrian writer Daniel Kehlmann's brilliant comic novel revolves around the meeting of two colossal geniuses of the Enlightenment.

Late in the eighteenth century, two young Germans set out to measure the world. One of them, the aristocratic naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, negotiates jungles, voyages down the Orinoco River, tastes poisons, climbs the highest mountain known to man, counts head lice, and explores and measures every cave and hill he comes across. The other, the reclusive and barely socialized mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss, can prove that space is curved without leaving his home. Terrifyingly famous and wildly eccentric, these two polar opposites finally meet in Berlin in 1828, and are immediately embroiled in the turmoil of the post-Napoleonic world.



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Measuring the World: A Novel By Daniel Kehlmann Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #220488 in Books
- Brand: Kehlmann, Daniel/ Janeway, Carol Brown (TRN)
- Published on: 2007-10-09
- Released on: 2007-10-09
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.99" h x .57" w x 5.19" l, .45 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Loosely based on the lives of 19th-century explorer Alexander von Humboldt and a contemporary, mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss, Kehlmann's novel, a German bestseller widely heralded as an exemplar of "new" German fiction, injects musty history with shots of whimsy and irony. Humboldt voyages to South America to map the Orinoco River, climb the Chimborazo peak in Ecuador and measure "every river, every mountain and every lake in his path." Gauss is the hedgehog to Humboldt's fox, leaping out of bed on his wedding night to jot down a formula and rarely leaving his hometown of Göttingen. The two meet at a scientific congress in 1828, when Germany is in turmoil after the fall of Napoleon. Other luminaries appear throughout the novel, including a senile Immanuel Kant, Louis Daguerre and Thomas Jefferson. The narrative is notable for its brisk pacing, lively prose and wry humor (curmudgeonly Gauss laments, for instance, how "every idiot would be able to... invent the most complete nonsense" about him 200 years hence), which keenly complements Kehlmann's intelligent, if not especially deep, treatment of science, mathematics and reason at the end of the Enlightenment. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In 1828, scientist-explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) summons the great mathematician Carl Gauss (1777-1855) to join his party to Berlin, where he is to be feted before embarking on an expedition across Russia to the Urals. The perpetually testy Gauss, whose great trial in life is that everyone else thinks so slowly, which makes virtually any kind of human interaction infuriatingly boring for him (though he does fancy a fine young figure), would go back to sleep, but his wife, Minna, whom he barely tolerates, rouses him out and gets him on the road with youngest son Eugen. They no sooner arrive at Humboldt's mansion than Kehlmann diverges to recap his two principals' lives and careers in chapters alternately concerned with globe-trotting aristocrat Humboldt and genius-from-the-gutter Gauss, who willingly leaves home only to earn a living and escape Minna. The uncomfortable humor of being, in Gauss' case, too brilliant (he frequently bemoans having to live before the innovations he foresees can be constructed or even understood); in Humboldt's, too focused (he scrupulously abjures whole theaters of human experience to concentrate on measuring), suffuses Kehlmann's heady historical novel, which may especially delight science-fiction connoisseurs. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"A masterfully realized, wonderfully entertaining and deeply satisfying novel. . . . Addictively readable and genuinely and deeply funny."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"Kehlmann's lightly surreal style [is] a mixture of comedy, romance and the macabre, with flashes of magical realism that read like Borges in the Black Forest."

—*The Washington Post Book World*

"Elegant and measured in design and expression. . . . What distinguishes Kehlmann are quickness of pace and lightness of touch."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Debbie Brown:

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