Clarion Review

General

Do the Math: A Novel of the Inevitable
Philip B Persinger
iUniverse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Philip Persinger takes on the vagaries of chance and love in *Do the Math* which answers the question "What would you do if you had the opportunity to reunite with the love of your life?" Theoretical mathematician William Teale is presented with such a possibility but he is already married to romance novelist Faye Warner.

William finds himself in a ticklish situation. His personality—dry intellectual and sardonic—diverges from his wife Faye's more emotional sensitive and impulsive character. Although William insists that he loves Faye their marriage rests on obligation and inertia rather than passion. Small wonder then that William whose mathematical theories glorify the life-changing results of random encounters pines for Claire a woman he loved when they were college students decades ago.

The story is told from the viewpoint of William's graduate assistant Roger. As Roger watches William and Faye's toleration of each other is tested when Faye's ghostwriter has a nervous breakdown. Her replacement an analytical efficient woman is the Claire of William's past. As William and Claire develop a mathematical formula for the quick completion of Faye's romance novels they rekindle their own romance. Faye's anxiety mounts compelling William to make a choice between the women.

In *Do the Math* Persinger who also has another novel to his credit takes a break from his decades-long career writing software to return to his love of narrative and conflict. From his experience as a playwright comes his gift for moving the story along with snappy dialogue.

The strengths of *Do the Math* include its prose style and abundant wit. Persinger quickly characterizes each personage through their speech. He engages readers with a tone of sarcastic amusement that invites them to laugh at the easily sketched foibles of the entire cast. The book's many observations on the formulaic but also unpredictable nature of love make it a joy to read.

Unfortunately *Do the Math* does struggle to present a believable love triangle. William and Claire are both well-rounded but not Faye. The other characters treat her as a fatuous stereotype of feminine sentimentality. Perhaps this contempt comes across so strongly because Roger who tells the story clearly sympathizes with William. Still Persinger gives Faye no redeeming traits; as a whiny harridan she gives William little incentive to stay with her thus robbing the story of tension.

In spite of this difficulty *Do the Math* is an original well-written fusion of mathematical and romantic concepts. This hybrid novel may interest readers of romance novels and general fiction.

Elizabeth Allen